

THE INSIDE AND THE OUTSIDE UTOPIA: ABOUT THE CITY

Bogdan Balița, Roxana Rogobete

PhD Student, West University of Timișoara, Junior Researcher, West University of Timișoara

Abstract: This paper focuses on several manners of constructing a utopian city, or, in extenso, a utopian urban mentality. The ground on which our pursuit is leaning on is the literary world, in which this idea of construction is represented, initially developed in Thomas More's writings. From the multiple depictions of modern utopia, we shall analyse two examples of using the utopic discourse in relation with identity-building process. On one hand, Claudio Magris' Trieste can be considered a literary utopic construct of a city, pushed in the past and, of course, an inside utopia, that wants to capture the fragrance from the multicultural melting pot of the beginning of the 20th century and using it to give an identity to the present Trieste. On the other hand, the German-written migrant literature tries to describe the construction by the migrants of an outside utopia, pushed in the future, therefore choosing not to build one at home. Eventually, as all utopias are born to fail, we will see how fictionalising the city can save, in literature, the struggle to find an identity.

Keywords: utopia, city, identity, Trieste, migration

This paper focuses on several manners of constructing a utopian city, or, *in extenso*, a utopian urban mentality. The ground on which our pursuit is leaning on is the literary world. The perfect organization of a city or citadel (the small representation of the model of universe, centered on the human being – if we consider anthropocentrism; or on God – if we consider theocentrism) could have started with Plato's dialogue *The Republic*, making significant “pit stops” in its diachronic way. First, under the Augustinian shape of *Civitas Dei* (attempting to bond anthropocentrism and theocentrism); then, it illuminates itself under the imagination of Tomasso Campanella in *La città del sole* and finds its „godfather” in Thomas More's *Utopia*. More is in fact the one who develops the concept, with an obvious Greek origin, from the mixture of *ou-topos* and *eu-topos*: that „nowhere”, but also the good/beautiful/ real place.

Unfortunately, the idea of utopia will “strike again” in the 20th century, with totalitarian systems as fascism and communism. But why is utopia revived? Because what is the good or use of utopia, if, despite evidences of impracticality, does not find its instruments (in shape of prophets) to become reality?

Hermann Hesse, for instance, builds his own utopia (and citadel) – Castalia – in the novel *The Glass Bead Game (Das Glasperlenspiel)*, but, contextually, it is settled just in the middle of fascism, so Castalia will serve as a counterexample. Writing its work in a world shattered by two world wars within 30 years, Hesse seeks an escape from everyday routine, hostile to his philosophical personality (in a letter addressed to Hugo Ball, Hesse writes: “ich [...] in unserer Zeit ein hoffnungsloser Outsider sei”¹). Josephus Knecht's “reality” begins only with the utopian Castalia. As Knecht is artificially structured by the educational system of the citadel, Castalia itself is a construct of a vicious world – the *Age of the Feuilleton*. Knecht is thus paradigmatic for this laboratory of intelligence and supremacy, which operates

¹ Volker Michel (Hrsg.), *Materialien zu Hermann Hesses ›Der Steppenwolf‹*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 41: „I would be an Outsider without hope in this world”.

on the social utopia's principles. And Castalia is consanguineous to previous utopias, from Plato to the Third Reich.

However, we need to identify a few characteristics of utopias. First of all, any project of an ideal city will have, eventually, an ideological value² and tends to standardize, besides its insularity and besides of rejecting the present. Utopia is revolutionary when it projects itself through the future, but conservative when it claims for the past³.

We can describe several categories of utopias, based on different aspects or features of their narrative. If we consider the spatial dimension, we can identify utopias of a real space, but also of imaginary places. In the first case, the territory in which the action is located is recognizable, valid and can be found geographically in the world. In the second case, we are dealing with an imaginary topography, exterior to the world or lost/hidden in it. For example, Arcadia, or Vergilius' Tuscany, or this Danube-Carpathian space (for certain kind of extravagant Romanian visions) can be included in a real space, where the narration of utopia places itself. If we go back to Plato's well-known utopia, Atlantis, the territory is an imaginary one, as well as most part of the science-fiction literature places its action in such areas.

On the other hand, if we consider the temporal dimension, we can distinguish utopias of the past (references to the past coin identity, as well as myths of the "golden ages") or utopias of the future (where traditionally also hope can be involved, or the idea of progress). Although there are voices who claim the necessity that the utopian discourse should be a uchronic one⁴, we cannot totally agree. Indeed, there is no utopia happening in the present, nor has an effect in the present (therefore having a uchronic character), but each of them is a narrative of the present, arises in the context of the present that proposes a utopia. And this context is often one that discontents or requires the translation in other spatial or temporal dimensions⁵.

When we are dealing with identity discourses and constructions, we are, for sure, considering utopias of the past, placed in a real space – place invested by different authors with historical and symbolic values. The Triestine literature represents such a discourse with identitary dimensions which creates the "Trieste utopia". Authors like Italo Svevo, Carlo Michelstaedter, Carlo and Gianni Stuparich, Scipio Slataper, Fulvio Tomizza, Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, Enzo Bettiza and, most of all, Claudio Magris, place their narratives almost exclusively in the Triestine area. It seems like there is an obsession of the "Triestine literature" to describe its own topography, to create a unique literary voice, a *triestinità* mentioned by Kattia Pizzi⁶.

Claudio Magris' Trieste can be considered a literary utopic construct of a city, pushed in the past and, of course, an inside utopia, that wants to capture the fragrance from the multicultural melting pot of the beginning of the 20th century and using it to give an identity to the present Trieste. This is because Trieste had the history of a frontier-city, placed between three great cultural areas: in the West – the Italian; in the North – the Habsburg Empire; and in the South-East – the Slavic cultures. Influenced by all of them, Trieste found it difficult to choose a straight-forward identity. Instead, it remained an enclaved, combining all three into a melting pot. This could mean, on one hand, a great diversity used to develop a

² See Fernando Ainsa, *La reconstrucción de la utopía*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Del Sol, 1999, but also Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986.

³ Idem, *ibidem*.

⁴ Jean Servier, *Storia dell'utopia. Il sogno dell'Occidente da Platone ad Aldous Huxley*, Edizione italiana a cura di Gianfranco de Turreis, Traduzione dal francese di Claudio De Nardi, Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma, 2002, p. 232: "Tutte le utopie sono uchronie." ("All utopias are uchronic").

⁵ We could even state that censorship provides a foundation for utopias.

⁶ See Kattia Pizzi, *The City in Search of an Author – The Literary Identity of Trieste*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 2001.

new and unique culture, but, on the other hand, it's a lack of insurance about the real roots, the real tradition. Therefore, after all the troubles and disasters of the first half of the 20th century, keeping inside the Italian state, an own mark was very difficult.

The field of literature was more than capable to create a new identity, a utopic one, with links very well aimed to the golden ages of the Habsburg Trieste. Lucky enough, the today's social culture is very much alike with *Austria felix*. The entire process described theoretically can be discovered put in act in the literary work of Claudio Magris: *Un altro mare*⁷. The novel talks about a real friendship between two Gorizian young men, Carlo Michelstaedter and Enrico Mreule, but also about an impossible bond between a generation of the modern times and the philosophic ideal of classical roots. In the evolution of Enrico's character, we deal with several manners of escapism. First, he flees to Argentina, an exile that can mean even running away from rules imposed by the tradition. It can be put under the wider pattern of the conflict between generations. This individual pursuit goes hand in hand with the typical exile of the communities from Central-Europe to America. As well as his personal crisis that makes him run, this social movement can be found in the reasons that affected him. Enrico, after many years and long after his friend Carlo died, returns to his home land only to find that he cannot settle anymore in the life of the province that underwent so many changes. Recreating, on the surface, a personal destiny (having a family, a profession, building a house) is useless. Enrico's attempt to escape follows his friend's (Carlo) philosophy, who committed suicide, unable to create a utopia. Enrico creates therefore the bond between Carlo's discourse and life (or performing the discourse), discovering that he was already exiled from his life into the story of the book.

This pattern of exterior and also interior exile enhances also migrants' identity. In Europe, the post-war period is filled with this type of stories. If traditionally only the migrant is the one searching for improving his condition, the case of West Germany trying to rebuild its cities is meaningful for another manner of constructing utopias. One of the instruments to do that is, of course, literature. The German-written migrant literature tries to describe the construction by the migrants of an outside utopia, pushed in the future, therefore choosing not to build one at home. Of course, there can be several reasons of migration, but fundamental for the spatial mutation is the need or hope for a better life, which is not fulfilled in their home countries. In the first instance, the so-called guest-workers are attracted by economic *pull factors*⁸; later, migrants will tend to choose large cities to settle there. Capitals such as Vienna or Berlin become a second home or, maybe, a step-home. Migrants try to publicly express themselves, to influence the perception of foreigners in Germany by writing in newspapers, writing short stories or novels. This led to a professional discourse in German, because the public who was addressed was the German-speaking one, which represented the core of society. This means that the spatial mutation (geographical migration) brings also a linguistic one (foregoing the mother tongue to write in the "adoptive" one); by choosing the German language, authors focus primarily on their host society, but maintain their affiliation to their home country, creating a cultural bond.

Migrants want the outside utopia to be exactly in the centre of a city, of the core culture – the German or German-speaking one. But they usually end up living on the periphery, being marginalized and having a fragmented urban experience. After being disappointed by the city, they try to re-enact their homes. Each time paradise seems to be

⁷ Claudio Magris, *Un altro mare*, Garzanti Editore, Milano, 2007.

⁸ There were certain recruitment agreements that the FRG signed in the 1960s with different states (for example, with Turkey in 1961, with Italy in 1955, with Morocco in 1963, Greece, Yugoslavia) in order to receive, by rotation, the manpower that it needed. Although at first it was planned as a seasonal, temporary migration, people began to settle.

exactly where they are not: at first, in a foreign country and city that can bring salvation; secondly, in the places they left.

One of the writers who seemed very interesting in terms of constructing or deconstructing outside utopias is Wladimir Kaminer. The Russian-born writer (having also Jewish origins) studied in Moscow, but emigrated to Berlin in 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, writing exclusively in German and becoming an interesting case of a kind of double identity, as he also claims: “Privat ein Russe beruflich ein deutscher Schriftsteller”⁹ (‘Privately a Russian, professionally a German writer’, because “identities are [...] both ascribed and constantly challenged”¹⁰). Kaminer is a very popular writer, but also a DJ, an aspect that is developed in *Russendisko* (2000), released in English as *Russian Disco* (2002). The bond created with the city of Berlin is explained (or not, on the contrary) in another work: “Vor fünfzehn Jahren kam ich nach Ostberlin, aus Gründen, die mir bis heute rätselhaft geblieben sind. Wahrscheinlich war es bloße Beugier auf die Welt und ungebremste Reiselust, die mich damals nach Berlin trieben. Die Reise erwies sich als fatale Entscheidung. Einmal hier galandet, kommt man kaum mehr weg. Berlin bindet”¹¹.

Berlin also as a good place for writing, because of its pubs or bars: „Es ist nicht die schöne Architektur, die all diese Literaten nach Berlin zieht – nein, es sind die Kneipen: eine ideale Brutstätte für jeden schöpferischen Menschen. Denn Berlin ist in Wirklichkeit eine einzige Kneipe. In dieser Stadt findet das Leben nicht hinter verschlossenen Wohnungstüren statt, sondern vor und hinter den Tresen. [...] Sollten Sie einen Schriftsteller suchen, gehen Sie in die Kneipe, dort wird er sitzen”¹². Despite his irony, Kaminer’s conclusion remains a love letter to the German city: „Berlin bleibt mein Lieblingswohnoort”¹³.

But how can a Russian find a new Heimat in Germany, considering the tumultuous relation between these two countries? Kaminer speaks about this in *Liebesgrüße aus Deutschland*: “Ich habe nur einmal eine Begegnung mit dieser deutschen «Vergangenheit» erlebt. Das war im Juli 1990 in Ostberlin. Damals war die Wiedervereinigung de facto bereits abgehakt, obwohl die DDR de jure noch existierte. Es fühlte sich an, als hätte der Lauf der Geschichte für einen Moment haltgemacht, um Luft zu holen”¹⁴.

The writer then describes the process of constructing or reconstructing a history and an identity: “Wir waren beide frisch aus der Sowjetunion geflüchtet. Unsere alte Heimat befand sich gerade in Auflösung, und beinahe jede Woche ging ihr ein Stück ihrer Identität verloren. Unsere neue Heimat war dagegen gerade im Aufbau”¹⁵.

⁹ See Wladimir Kaminer’s website: <http://www.wladimirkaminer.de/> [1.10.2019].

¹⁰ Cécile Coquet-Mokoko and Trevor Harris (editors), *Introduction*, in *Crafting Identities, Remapping Nationalities: The English-Speaking World in the Age of Globalization*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2002, p. vii.

¹¹ Wladimir Kaminer, *Ich bin kein Berliner. Ein Reiseführer für faule Touristen*, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, München, 2007, p. 9: “15 years ago I came to East Berlin for reasons that until now remain enigmatic to me. Apparently, it was simple curiosity for the world and an unstoppable appetite for travelling that brought me to Berlin. The trip turned out to be a fatal decision. Once you land here, you cannot go back. Berlin bonds” (our translation).

¹² Idem, *ibidem*, p. 67: “It’s not the beautiful architecture that brings all these literates to Berlin – no, it’s the pubs: an ideal hatchey for every creative person. Because Berlin is in reality a single pub. In this city life doesn’t happen behind the closed doors of a house, but in front and behind the counters. [...] If you want to look for a writer, go in a pub, there is the place you will find him” (our translation).

¹³ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 62: “Berlin remains my favourite place to live in” (our translation).

¹⁴ Idem, *Liebesgrüße aus Deutschland*, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, München, 2011, p. 12: “I experienced only once the German past. It was in July 1990 in East Berlin. At that time the reunion de facto already checked off, despite the DDR de jure still existed. It was such a feeling, as if the course of history had taken a moment to stop breathing” (our translation).

¹⁵ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 13: “We had freshly fled from the Sowiet Union. Our old home was dissolving and almost every week another part of its identity was gone. Our new home was, on the contrary, just being built” (our translation).

But Kaminer doesn't have an idyllic view of Germany or Berlin. Ironically referring to J.F.K.'s speech from June 26, 1963, held in West Berlin ("Ich bin ein Berliner"¹⁶), Wladimir Kaminer wrote *Ich bin kein Berliner. Ein Reiseführer für faule Touristen* (2007)¹⁷, a book filled with false tips for foreign travellers.

Another irony Kaminer's can be found on his blog, writing about Easter celebrations in Russia: "Meine Heimat hat gut gefeiert, Ostern am Tag der Solidarität der Arbeiterklasse mit den Panzern im Hintergrund, die zur Parade am 9. Mai trainieren. Jesus ist mit den Kommunisten zusammen auferstanden"¹⁸. The parade included orthodox priests, tanks in the background, portraits of Lenin, but Kaminer criticizes here more the dystopic Russian society: "Auch in sechs Milliarden Jahren, wenn die Sonne längst erloschen ist, wird Lenins Leiche am demselben Ort liegen und dem Himmel den Finger zeigen, als Symbol des permanenten Scheiterns, ein Paradies auf Erden zu errichten"¹⁹ ('Even in six billion years, when the sun will be by far consumed, Lenin's body will remain at the same place, pointing with his finger to the sky, as a symbol of the permanent fail to build a paradise on earth').

Furthermore, he is interested in a holistic vision of Germany. In *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* (*My German Jungle Book*) he explains in the *Vorwort* (Preface) that he travels a lot in order to get to know Germany, not only Berlin or the Russian community within Germany, where he lived. He visits small villages or random provinces, wanting to write about the German province ("Das Land war voller Geschichten. Mir wurde klar, es war an der Zeit, ein neues Buch zu schreiben. Nicht irgendeines, sondern ein Buch über die deutsche Provinz"²⁰) and he states: "Das deutsche Bild zerfiel in Tausende kleiner Puzzleteile. [...] jeden Tag ich in einem Dorf landete, verlor ich oft gänzlich den Sinn für Realität und fühlte mich wie ein Astronaut, der sein Raumschiff nicht mehr im Griff hat"²¹. After all, a country is not just the image of a capital city, but its puzzle consists of fragments from each region; the same mechanism reveals that an identity is not a monolith, but a patchwork of experiences, each of them influencing the individual. It is a subjective construct, a fiction, an abstract construction, which can be discovered or experienced first

¹⁶ Two thousand years ago, the proudest boast was *civis romanus sum* ["I am a Roman citizen"]. Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is "Ich bin ein Berliner!" [...] All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words "Ich bin ein Berliner!"

¹⁷ Wladimir Kaminer, *Ich bin kein Berliner. Ein Reiseführer für faule Touristen*, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, München, 2007.

¹⁸ See <http://blog.wladimirkaminer.de/>, post from 1.05.2016 [1.10.2019]. The image can be found under URL: <http://blog.wladimirkaminer.de/image/143702904678> [1.10.2019]. Also, in a Facebook post from 2. May 2016: <https://www.facebook.com/wladimir.kaminer.7/?fref=ts> [1.10.2019]. In English: "My home country celebrated good, Easter on Labour Day, the day of workers' class' solidarity, with tanks in the background, which were practicing for the parade from 9th June. Jesus is resurrected, together with communists" (our translation).

¹⁹ Wladimir Kaminer, post from 23.04.2016, online under URL: <http://blog.wladimirkaminer.de/page/2>. The full post: "Beinahe habe ich es verpasst. Lenin hatte gestern Geburtstag. Er ist 146 Jahre alt geworden, sieht immer noch gut aus, hat alle Fäden in der Hand, liegt unter dem Panzerglas am Roten Platz und zeigt jedem der reinkommt, Stinkefinger. Ein in Russland verbreiteter Aberglaube besagt, solange Lenin nicht begraben ist, wird es mit dem Land nicht vorwärts gehen. Jeden Monat versuchen die Bürger ihn zu bewegen. Letztens haben junge naive Menschen Lenin im Mausoleum mit Weihwasser bespritzt und dabei gerufen: "Steh auf und geh!" Er ist natürlich nicht aufgestanden, was angeblich daran liegt, dass er mit wasserdichtem Panzerglas geschützt ist, das Weihwasser konnte also seine Wirkung nicht entfalten. Auch in sechs Milliarden Jahren, wenn die Sonne längst erloschen ist, wird Lenins Leiche am demselben Ort liegen und dem Himmel den Finger zeigen, als Symbol des permanenten Scheiterns, ein Paradies auf Erden zu errichten." [1.10.2019].

²⁰ Idem, *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch*, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, München, 2005, p. 9: "The countryside was full of stories. It became clear to me, that it was the time to write another book. Not just another book, but a book about the German province" (our translation).

²¹ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 10: "The German image collapsed in a thousand small puzzle pieces. [...] every day that I landed in another village, I often entirely lost the sense of reality and felt like an astronaut, who cannot reach his spaceship" (our translation).

through senses. Therefore, flying over the German territories opens the character's view and helps him recognize the way in which he identifies with a certain kind of Germanness.

This is certainly the opposite of what Kaminer refers to when talking about Russianness: "Die Russen haben nicht nur alle Kriege gewonnen und sind massenhaft ins All geflogen, alle wichtigsten Entdeckungen und Erfindungen auf der Welt haben sie gemacht. Sie haben das Auto erfunden, das ohne Sprit fährt. Sie haben besondere Fähigkeiten, sie können feiern bis keiner mehr kann"²².

Whether writers use irony, history, philosophy to engage in constructing a utopian city, whether it is an inside or an outside utopia, eventually, all utopias are born to fail. But we can see how fictionalising the city can save, in literature, the struggle to find an identity. The single utopia able to redeem someone is the literary or linguistic one, that can represent both evasion from reality or its reconstruction.

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²² Idem, post from 18.02.2016, online under URL: <http://blog.wladimirkaminer.de/page/4> [1.10.2019]. In English: "The Russians haven't just won all the wars and flown massively into space, they made all the important discoveries and inventions of the world. They have invented the car that drives without fuel. They have certain skills, that they can celebrate or party until no one else can".