BOOK REVIEWS

CORIN BRAGA, *Pour une morphologie du genre utopique* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 732 pages.

Corin Braga's most recent volume represents a natural continuation of the author's preoccupations with the utopian genre and it follows the same line of research materialised so far in the following volumes: Du paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVI-XVIII siècles (2010) and Les antiutopies classiques (2012). However, if the first two volumes focused on the cultural heritage of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance and presented the utopia in the classical age, the last volume completes the historical approach of the genre with another, paradigmatic perspective and it strives to construct a morphology of the genre from the Renaissance to contemporary period. By configuring the main lines of force that, through its imaginary and imaginative potential, has not ceased to incite and fascinate people, through the three volumes, Corin Braga manages to offer an exhaustive historical overview of the genre, as well as, more importantly, a poetic revaluation of the genre in relation with other literary genres and he repositions it within a larger literary frame – a reposition in which the reader response and the expectations play an important role. In his previous volumes, the author focused on the history of the utopia from the Middle Ages to the classical period – a period that, from the viewpoint of the genre, is considered the age of awakening the consciousness and, through critical reflection, favouring the anti-utopias, but the present volume manages to disengage from the historical perspective and to offer a more supple view; the paradigmatic incision present in the introduction outlines a typology of the main subgenres of the utopia.

The volume is structured in five parts and it begins with a theoretical chapter in which Corin Braga notes and defines the concepts he uses, thus reconstructing and broadly establishing the history of the concepts; he notes the evolution of each concept, as well as, in relation with the others, the evolution and aesthetic character acquired in time. The five key concepts that cover all the types and forms of the utopia are eutopia, outopia, dystopia and anti-utopia. All of these specific forms are contained under the larger umbrella of the utopia and the differences between them are established starting from a monde zero or mundus, in relation with which, through selection, extrapolation, inversion or reductio ad absurdum (p. 117), different topias derive. Depending on this benchmark, the subgenres of the utopia, namely the eutopia, outopia, dystopia and anti-utopia become "virtualities", or "lateral possibilities", placed on different directions of each type of universe/world under scrutiny. This axis of coordinates contains, on the left side, the anti-utopias and the dystopias that,

depending on the moral axiological criteria, have a negative meaning, and the eutopias and outopias on the right side, understood as positive due to their rather benign nature that, in the case of some, could even be understood as optimistic. In relation with the world, the utopian universes are different depending on the text's literary reality or on the conventions that guarantee its literary nature, as well as on the author's intention, assumed by the author as an equally valid or pertinent possibility in the construction of the utopian universe in relation with its purposes – this intension is implicitly revealed through reading and by "recognising" the imagined type of universe. The principles on which the volume is based are present even in the chapter Concepts, in which the author mentions the semantic category of the terms to which he refers and he focuses on each of their characteristics. The way in which each concept functions within a diachronic structure is present in all of the examples discussed throughout the four chapters dedicated to the specific subgenres.

With great finesse, Corin Braga observes that the modern paradigm will modify and configure the utopias; he analyses and identifies several important elements that mark the major differences between the classical utopias and those of the modern world. Following the historical overview on the evolution of the genre, taking five centuries of evolution into account (1516-2015), the author makes an "incision paradigmatique" and, starting from the works of V.I. Propp on fairytales, he tries to reconstruct the morphology of the utopian genre, in the attempt to identify all of the rules of formation, and those by which the form of the genre changes in time. By observing the differences, the author nuances the typology of the already established main forms of the genre; by analysing an impressive corpus of texts, he identifies any deviation from the main characteristic and he adds new subcategories within each subgenre. Thus, the eutopias, as better worlds, as possible, even feasible worlds, have variations that sets them apart from each other – they are defined based on their level of potentiality and on the plausibility pact. Corin Braga identifies the eutopias of reason, the revolutionary, socialist or futuristic eutopias. Their ideological, realistic character, according to the author, is strongly emphasised even when it is fictionally camouflaged. By surpassing the laws of nature and of the human society, the outopias resort to the reading code of fantasy literature and, starting from the Utopia of Thomas Morus or Guillaume Budé, the main theme of the ideal citadel suffers, from the Renaissance to the contemporary times different variations, which, once the classical and Christian models are identified, the author addresses with a visible precision by reconstructing the transformation mechanisms of eutopias into outopias in a series of representative texts. Outopias differ from eutopias though their level of plausibility in relation with the given world and, in spite of their fascination, they remain in the form of projects for ideal societies or cities of which, when he is not trying to implement them, man can only dream. There is a series of examples of such outopias in modern literature, from the ones created according to the Christian model, to the ones that depict subterranean, feminist, astral cities, or cities of anticipation. An interesting case is that of the outopias of imaginary journeys or of upside-down worlds that have not been overlooked by the authors whose imaginative vision tries to offer a better alternative to the contemporary world.

On the other side of the axis of moral and axiological coordinates, towards the negative domain, in the area of evil, the chapter dedicated to dystopias focuses not only on an analysis of the traditional types of texts, but, by updating the bibliography of the genre, the author also mentions the more recent literary attempts, as well as sci-fi movies, such as Avatar. At the end of the classical period, when concepts such as history, evolution and progress lose their significance, the decline of space dystopias begins and they are gradually replaced by temporal dystopias, culminating with the dystopias of the 20th century whose target no longer is the possible theoretical models, but concrete examples that represent the forms of totalitarianism that marked the previous century. The interpretation of anti-outopias, that also represent an important category of utopias, differs from dystopias though the absence of the plausible and convincing nature; therefore, considering verisimilitude from the viewpoint of its effect, the reading code shifts towards fantasy and the supernatural. This is the reason why, according to the moral and axiological axis with which the author conceptually operates, the anti-utopias are the exact opposite of eutopias. In his theoretical endeavour, the author clearly and coherently also notes variations of these categories and the forms in which they somehow evolved, not through radical change, but with the characteristics of their time.

One of the remarkable characteristics of this volume is that the author did not write a history of the utopian genre and did not make an inventory of the most important utopian works of the European culture in a documentary, mechanistic manner, but he managed to show the genre in its organic structure, by depicting the inner logic of its development, both in relation with genre and in relation with the society and the sensitivity of the epoch in which it originated. Another noteworthy characteristic is the fact that the author does not see the genre from a single viewpoint of a certain national culture but by somehow surpassing the limiting principle of the national histories of the genre and manages to configure an almost exhaustive view on the genre, compiling works and authors from very diverse cultural spaces – as in the case, for example, of the anti-communist dystopias, the most representative texts of the authors from Eastern Europe. Moreover, although the utopian genre counts on persuasion and conceptual seduction, Corin Braga's reading pays attention to paradoxes and theoretical ambiguities, it a disciplined and objective reading; it lacks partis pris and it does not favour stances. The volume is thus part of a well established tradition of academic, erudite, complex and exemplary works.

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