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Theses of doctoral dissertation

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The Uses of Paratextuality and Dialogicity in Early  
Modern English Utopias

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## 1. The subject of the dissertation

The dissertation ‘*The Uses of Paratextuality and Dialogicity in Early Modern English Utopias*’ sets out to perform an inquiry into a part of the corpus labelled as early modern utopias. The corpus spans from Thomas More *Utopia*, first published in 1516 to Joseph Hall’s *Mundus alter et idem*, first published in 1605, and briefly refers to some later texts of same corpus.

Several considerations were taken into account during the selection of the corpus. One of them was the observation that while in the case of “grand” utopia writers (Thomas More, Francis Bacon), a plethora of critical literature is available, the less canonical, but numerous utopia writers of the second rank attract little to no attention in the monographs and reference works on the topic. It is enough to take a quick look at the thematic bibliographies to realise the scope of what is missing from such works: in the bibliographies, about a hundred English utopias are catalogued until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The present dissertation, of course, cannot promise to alleviate the distorted proportions within secondary literature. However, it tries at least to perform first a detailed analysis of the work (More’s *Utopia*, ch. 2.) determining the history of the genre according to specific aspects, to be followed by a discussion of texts which get almost no (ch. 3.) or only minimal (ch. 4.) critical attention in utopian studies.

Because of the selected time span and other considerations, the other basic work of the genre, Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* is not discussed in the dissertation, although the concluding chapter offers a brief look at Bacon’s text, and two later utopias, too. These serve, on one hand, as control examples proving the relevance and the applicability of the approach deployed by the dissertation, while on the other hand, they try to propose possible new areas for research.

The corpus discussed is predominantly bilingual. Although the title refers to “English” utopias, a significant portion of the texts discussed were first written in Latin. Nonetheless, the use of the phrase “English utopias” is justified for several reasons. Even when the dissertation discusses Latin texts, it performs the inquiry from the direction of their incorporation into English literary history, and pays particular attention to the translations which came out later (*Utopia*), or almost parallel with the original (*Mundus alter et idem*).

## 2. The methods applied in the dissertation

The selection of the methods to be followed in the dissertation was based on the initial observation that although secondary literature on utopia is characterised by abundance and disciplinal multiplicity, pursuing a literary approach seems to be atypical and rare. Evidently, utopian studies are mostly interested in the politico-historical, philosophico-historical, sociological (or similar) implications of the social models exposed in the works. Such inquiries tend to ignore the construed nature of these texts, as well as the literary conventions informing them. Sometimes even the existence of a utopian textual tradition is doubted, and a number of critics question the legitimacy of a literary approach to utopian texts.

Therefore, the point of departure for the present dissertation is the obviously less dominant group of critical opinions which represent an exception to this rule. The selection of the more general literary approach was followed by the selection of a more specific methodology for the work. This was based on a thorough study of the structure of *Utopia*, and inspired by certain claims from the immense related critical literature regarding the formal aspect of the work. Based on these, the dissertation decided to pursue an investigation with two focal points:

1. the use of the dialogue form
2. the use of the paratexts

The two points are linked, however, in the way the works are addressing their very fictitious nature. The way the texts make use of the dialogue form in itself tells a lot about the relationship of the texts to the subject of fiction, since in their use of the form, they inevitably choose to join one or more from among the several, interrelated but in important respects different lines of available traditions. Besides the classic Platonic form, the Lucianic dialogue is also an important influence, but the formulating vernacular culture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century imposes such significant changes in the use of the classic forms that a new, independent genre seems to evolve. The selected corpus reflects several branches of the manifold traditions, and in terms of self-reflexivity, a wealth of remarkable information can be extracted if we look at how important a certain text finds it to use this form, what changes it introduces in that use, how it alters it, and to what extent does it follow its patterns in these regards.

The other investigated aspect is the use of the paratexts. Gerard Genette's monograph on the subject, *Seuils* provided a large-scale overview about those, often typographically

separated units which do not belong to the main text, and which are, in his opinion, significant territories of liminality. In his evaluation, such units are used by the “author and his allies” with the aim of determining or at least influencing the direction of reception. Although more recent scholarship tends to question a number of Genette’s claims, the dissertation finds the function attributed to the paratext acceptable, and agrees with Genette that it has a profound impact on the interpretation of the work.

### **3. The structure of the dissertation, results**

The dissertation commences with a chapter (1.) describing the criteria for selecting the corpus, drafting the above-mentioned trends in criticism, and the approach to be followed. The chapter calls attention to the duality of connotations associated with the notion ‘utopia’, and proposes that the division within secondary literature is rooted in a deeper duality which can be observed in the period under investigation (for example, in Milton’s two differing opinions on utopia), and that it is already present in the earliest contemporary judgments about Thomas More’s work.

Based on these considerations, chapter 2 discusses Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Chapter 2.1 provides an overview of the first editions of the text, emphasising the differences between the different versions, and to the copious set of paratexts which is present in all the editions.

Chapter 2.2 is divided into two subchapters corresponding to the primary aspects of the dissertation. The first subchapter explores the relationship between Utopia and the Renaissance dialogue genre. Thus it compares the structure of the work with some relevant considerations from the dialogue theories which were drafted by Italian humanists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The comparison concludes with the result that Thomas More’s book can be read as a work written in the dialogue form fitting the model described by the theorists, which follows the dual structure of *praeparatio* and *contentio*. In connection with this, the dissertation points out several passages in Book I where a certain extent of terminological overlap can be observed between the theories and More’s text (in using words like *sermo*, *colloquium*, *decorum*). This suggests that even if only in an implicit way, More transmits a view on the relationship of his work to the dialogue genre. The dissertation proves this through the analysis of several emphatic places, mostly from the end of Book I, but also by reading the totality of the work as a dialogue.

The next subchapter studies the use of the paratexts in *Utopia*, and highlights two important features in this regard. First, the letters preceding and following the main work are often contribute to the ambiguous and contradictory (or using a term from secondary literature: self-negating) nature of the work which is already reflected in the invention of the very word “utopia”. While the humanist correspondents often preserve the illusion that the work is the description of a real place, they are always ready to undermine the same illusion, sometimes by puns, sometimes by explicitly questioning the verisimilitude (but not the truthfulness!) of the text. Another important result is the realisation that the paratexts which were composed in verse form contain particularly important poetical reflections. Both the letters and the prefatory poems refer frequently to Plato’s *Republic*, as a pattern to be not only followed, but also surpassed by More. And he does not simply want to, he is also able to surpass the pattern, because in opposition with philosophy, capable only of verbally delineating the ideal state, *Utopia* can also exhibit it, can also make it live. Here the dissertation draws a parallel between the poetical reflections in the verses, and one of the first important English poetics, Sir Philip Sidney’s *A Defense of Poesie*. Sidney explicitly refers to *Utopia*, and does it in a similar train of thought.

After exploring the original model according to these two aspects, chapter 2.3 examines how the paratextual setting changes with later editions and certain vernacular translations. Of course, special significance is attributed to the English translation, since it must be this version that could exert a direct influence on the environment from which the first followers of *Utopia* come.

Chapter 3 discusses the first English followers, with special emphasis on Thomas Nicholls’s *A pleasant dialogue*. Chapter 3.1 calls attention, in a wider context, to the influence of the “displaced land” tradition, and above all, of *Utopia* on 16<sup>th</sup> century English literature. Precisely because of this variagated influence, the dissertation found it crucial to provide in chapter 3.2 an overview about the non-utopian textual context of Nicholls’s and similar works, as well the critical opinions on the same. This genre is the vernacular dialogue which was exceedingly popular in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and especially in the Elizabethan times. Only in this context can the unique mixture (described in chapter 3.2) which Nicholls’s work reflects both in its use of paratexts and the dialogue form properly be understood. The dissertation shows that the basic structure of the work (a more “dialogic” first book + a more “narrative” second book + paratexts before and after the text) closely resembles the structure

of More's work, and even contains a limited extent of its "self-negation", but these are complemented by certain rather obtrusive sections which try to make the message anything but ambiguous. These parts, which try to control the direction of reading, form the basis of the analysis, since these make it absolutely clear that even if *Utopia* is an important precedent of the text, it is fuelled by other traditions, to be sought into the context of Puritan polemical literature. As a conclusion, chapter 3.4 claims, based on certain critical opinions, that Nicholls's text can be productively read as the member of a so-called "cluster of dialogues", together with two works published more or less into the same time, and which show haunting similarities with it (these are Thomas Lupton's and Philipp Stubbes's dialogues). Due to length constraints, these method of reading is only proposed by the dissertation.

Chapter 4. discusses a work published two decades later in Latin (Joseph Hall: *Mundus alter et idem*, 1605-6), and its contemporary English translation (John Healey: *Discovery of a New World*, 1609). Chapter 4.1 contains a textual introduction to the texts. Chapter 4.2 discusses the subject paratextuality and dialogicity in the two texts. The main conclusion here is that Hall, and in his wake, Healey, are much more aware of the model of *Utopia* than the Elizabethan dialogue writers. The dissertation proves that the paratexts contain an allegorical thread which represents reading as a journey, and the reader as a traveller. This thread is preserved and even expanded by the English version. All this is integrated into the paratexts with the open purpose of controlling reception: in Healey's preface to his translation, in a more direct exposition, he suggests taking the journey three times, that is, to read the book thrice. Yet, he also determines the objective of each reading: first we should read for the geography, then for the moral, and only lastly for the language. Besides the use of paratexts, More's influence seems to wane in terms of the weight of dialogue. Although the dominant travel narrative part of the book is preceded by a discussion among scholars, and that discussion is not dissimilar to Book I. of *Utopia*, neither in length, nor in complexity is this part able (neither it is probably willing) to match the model. The dialogue consisting half of *Utopia* starts to retreat into the paratextual space, and in this regards it is particularly important that this part of the book concludes with the protagonist boarding the ship called "Phantasia", and starts the journey, several times identified with reading, on this ship. For later text tend to appeal in their paratexts to fantasy or some synonym of it (fancy, imagination, fiction). Chapter 4.3 proves that although the work primarily follows the model of *Utopia*, an interesting connection can also be discovered with

the Elizabethan dialogues. A detailed analysis of the second book of Hall's work focuses on the social embeddedness of the discussed subjects, calling attention to certain places where even textual borrowing can be supposed on Hall's part.

Chapter 5. contains the conclusion of the dissertation. It claims that the paratexts form the dominant space of literary reflection in early modern English utopias. Besides the summary of the results reviewed above (5.1), the dissertation proposes (5.2) to investigate later texts according to the aspects applied here, and also performs the first basic steps of such an investigation in the case of three texts. Thus the concluding chapter also suggests possible directions for further research.

#### 4. Articles published in the subject of the dissertation

1. „Joseph Hall’s *Mundus Alter Et Idem* and Cross-Dressing in Early Modern England.” In *Gender Studies* 12 (2012), 94-117.
2. „‘Hiszen te tudással sáfarkodsz’. Információáramlás és utópikus hagyomány Gabriel Plattes *Macaria* c. művében”, in Tóth Zsófia Anna szerk. *A varázsgyűrűtől az interkonfesszionális kommunikációig. Információtudományi metszéspontok bölcsészeti megközelítésben* (Primaware – Szeged, 2011), elektronikus könyv (ISBN 978-963-306-108-4), 9-18. Elérhető: <http://otodikalprogram.huminf.u-szeged.hu/konyv>.
3. „A hely keresése: a kora modern angol utópia néhány kérdése”, in Dobozy N.E.-Kiss B.-Lovas B.-Szilágyi E. R. szerk.: *Epika 2010. Fiatal Kutatók Konferenciája. Tanulmánykötet*, Budapest, 2010, 89-97. (Arianna Könyvek 3.)
4. *Angol utópiák*. Research site. <http://utopikus.com>.

#### Articles in press/under review:

1. „Poetics in the paratextual poems of Thomas More’s *Utopia*”, in *The Roundtable. Partium Journal of English Studies*, vol. 4. 2014. In press.
2. „*Sermo, Colloquium, Decorum: The Dialogic Roots of Sir Thomas More’s Utopia*”, *ANQ. A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*. Accepted with revisions, revised version submitted.