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Reasonable Creatures? Politics of Imagination in Novels from the Library of Samuel von Brukenthal (1721-1803)

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Abstract

This paper is the result of the analysis of six fictional writings from the 17th and 18th centuries from the library of Samuel von Brukenthal (1721-1803), the governor of the Principality of Transylvania between 1777 and 1787. The research was conducted in order to search and extract aspects concerning the political imaginary of the time. These writings are fantasy and science-fiction novels and they comprise *Description de l'Isle des Hermaphrodites* by Thomas Artus, Andrew Michael Ramsay's *Voyages de Cyrus*, *L'Espion Turc à Francfort*, Ludvig Holberg's *Voyage de Nicolas Klimius dans le Monde Souterraine*, *Lettres d'une peruvienne* by Françoise de Graffigny and *L'An 2440* by Louis-Sébastien Mercier. The first literary duet, *Isle des Hermaphrodites* and *Voyages de Cyrus,* illustrates, among other things, the concept of anti-utopia, the need for social and political change that was increasingly appearing in the writings of the time, the ideas of kingship and enlightened despotism. The second literary pair, *L'Espion Turc* and *Voyage de Nicolas Klimius,* brings forward another political *desideratum* of fantasy writers of the time, namely the establishment of an internal and international equitable jurisprudence, but also the birth of a new, non-Eurocentric, perspective on the world. The third duet, *Lettres d'une peruvienne* and *L'An 2440,* emphasized what in the Modern Age would be radical political ideas, such as women's emancipation, but also exemplifies the idea of a perfect society, envisioned by the Enlightenment-Age author Louis-Sébastien Mercier far in the future, in 2440. The analysis of these novels reveals both some similarities between the writings, but also specificities and emphases on different political, social and cultural issues that the authors saw as problematic in real life.

Keywords: political imaginary, fantasy, science-fiction, utopia, Enlightenment

Introduction

The 17th and especially the 18th centuries witness a diversification of fiction literature, as part of the great class of Belles Lettres (De Bure, 1765). Science-fiction literature of the Modern Age, although a distinct literary sub-genre, was in some respects more similar to what the contemporary 21st century reader and critic would call fantasy. It also had much in common with travel literature. Whether we are talking about the Island of the Hermaphrodites in the eponymous novel by Thomas Artus, the Underworld imagined by

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Ludvig Holberg or the Turkish spy on a pilgrimage through Europe, fantasy literature from those times, like travelogues, often has at its heart one or multiple journeys, fictional and/or imaginary.

Just like travel literature, the fantasy and science-fiction, utopian and anti-utopian writings of the time encompassed a deeply educational, formative side. Even in the preface to an edition of the popular novel *The Turkish Spy*, the editor asked himself rhetorically: "What does it matter whether it is fiction or fact? As long as common sense prevails in the literary work in question, what more is necessary to make it praise-worthy." (*L'Espion I,* 1715, [1]-[2]).

The phrase "reasonable creatures" (read also *rational*)2 appears in 18th-century literature, in *Niels Klim Travels in the Underworld*. It was used by a fantastic population, the Potuans of Keba, to describe the species of an unusual visitor:

> "By virtue of the orders we have received from your Serenity, we send back to you the Animal called Man, who came here some time ago from the other world; we have trained him with great care in our College. Having examined with all possible attention the range of his genius, and spied his morals, we have found him docile enough, and of a very promising conception, but of such doubtful judgment, that, considering the rashness of his mind, we scarcely dare to number him among reasonable Creatures [...]" (Holberg, 1753, 50).

Who were these Potuans? They were the talking trees who formed a civilized society named Potu, on the planet Nazar in the Underworld, invented by the maverick Danish nobleman Ludvig von Holberg (1684-1754) in his novel *Nicolas Klimius' Journey to the Underworld*. They were a people characterized by: "such gravity and restraint, that you would take them all for senators rather than citizens." (Holberg, 1753, 37). Already, we can see how, in the eyes of authors such as Holberg, reasonableness and rationality were not so specific to human species. In the words of one of his contemporaries, Bernard de Fontenelle: "How dreadfully slow do men arrive at something reasonable, however simple that something may be!" (Hazard, 2007, 58). The same word, reasonable/rational, but with a slightly different meaning than Holberg used it, appears in the preface to the *Lettres d'une peruvienne* (*The Letters of a Peruvian woman*) by the French writer Françoise de Graffigny (1695-1758) when she describes the Incas making the leap from barbarism to "reasonable people", thanks to the laws and the knowledge of agriculture they received from two envoys of the Sun God (Graffigny I, 1759, 14-15).

Reason, reasonableness, civility, prudence were individual qualities regarded with great admiration in Modern Europe. They often appeared in the literature of the time as the pillars of a European social, political and cultural architecture that was emerging in the 17th and 18th centuries. Holberg, like Graffigny and others, seem to have stood somewhere between admiration for humanity's potential and the flaws, the abuses that held people back, hardly putting them among the reasonable creatures.

Parallel to the so-called *revolution of the saints* that Michael Walzer wrote about (Walzer, 2013, 5, 11-13), a scientific revolution took place in the Modern Age. In contrast to the one described by Walzer, the latter one was less associated with a change in morals. This happened in spite of the fact that the geographical and scientific discoveries played a major

2 In the French *Encyclopédie*, *reasonable/rational* (*raisonnable*, adj.) is defined as follows: "It is said of persons and things. A rational man, in whom his conduct is in accordance with reason; a rational action, whose motive is in accordance with reason. This word has a slightly different meaning, when applied to a woman; a rational woman is one who is not at all carried away by the strong spirit of gallantry. Rational is sometimes synonymous with just; and hence reason in conduct, or philosophy, or justice, is the same. [...] Reasonable is sometimes understood as modest." (*Encyclopédie* XIII, 1765, 776).

role in the emergence and sharpening of the crisis of conscience among the European thinkers (Hazard, 2007, 317-331). Wiser leaders, better laws, (self-)criticism and (self-)irony referring to the way in which European societies were organized, and even the emancipation of women were some of the main elements that a part of the Republic of Letters began to convey more and more often in the literary creations during the 17th and 18th centuries.

Both "revolutions" or paradigm shifts developed rather gradually (Kuhn, 2012, xi, xviii-xxii, xxvii), than in a revolutionary way. This shift took place in the period which began roughly with the publication of three works programmatic for Western European political culture, education and civility: Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Institutio principis christiani* (1516) and *De civilitate morum puerilum* (1530), and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). It ended with the political revolutions in England (1688), North America (1776) and France (1789), events that can be seen as attempts to apply some political ideas of many of the values and worldviews accumulated over the centuries.

The first revolution, the revolution of the saints, was promoted by the new religious trends such as Protestantism, from its incipient branches to Puritanism, Pietism, etc., and had to be started from childhood, in the intimacy of every Christian family. Besides the parents, the parishes (Jacob, 2007, 236, 240), or the tutors, depending on financial possibilities, often taught their children to observe the catechism and the Bible in holiness, to be moderate, prudent and civil in their interactions with others. In the more radical environments, spouses encouraged each other to consider renouncing the "outside"/secular world, dedicating themselves body and soul to Jesus and God, and living a life in full accord with Christian morality (*The Christian Education of Children,* 1678). Christian religion and morality were thus at the heart of the revolution of the saints that some Protestant cults attempted to accomplish in Western Europe.

On the other hand, the so-called Scientific Revolution and, additionally, the philosophical revolution, manifested in particular through deism, natural religion and the more ancient natural law, which entered the scene of European thought at that time to some extent as outsiders, especially in terms of morality. Over time, however, through natural religion, sciences such as natural history and astronomy started to acquire moralizing, "corrective" and character-forming values. How else can we explain the fact that in his chapter on the theology of the Potuans, Klim compares their theology and religion with natural religion? One explanation could be that the author of *Klimius's Journey*, Ludwig Holberg, was himself a follower of the natural religion and tried to promote or, at least, to bring this concept to the attention of the readers.

In the context of what Hazard called *universal critique* (Hazard, 2007, 10-19), the Enlightenment, even if it did not remove religious thought from society (nor did it set out to do so except perhaps in its most radical forms) nevertheless put an end to the hegemony of religion over philosophy. Through this gradual de-theologization of thought (Funkenstein, 1998, 11, 304), the Enlightenment, especially through Voltaire and Rousseau, sought to promote and train "the earthly saints" by means of secular and just jurisprudence. The aim was to form *the citizen*, a reasonable, rational individual, tributary to the laws of nature, the only ones which – since Thomas Morus – could be reliable, objective, untainted by the almost intrinsic sin of human intervention and invention (Morus, 1958, 141; McManus, 2005, 41-42; Hazard, 2007, 283-285).

In this paper I offer a brief analysis of six fictional, fantasy and science-fiction writings from the 17th and 18th centuries that Samuel von Brukenthal (1721-1803), the former

governor of the Principality of Transylvania, had in his library. My scientific attempt is to extract some aspects of the political imaginary of the time in the novels: *Description de l'Isle des Hermaphrodites* (*Description of the Island of the Hermaphrodites*) by Thomas Artus, which is mirrored with Andrew Michael Ramsay's *Voyages of Cyrus*; *L´Espion Turc à Francfort* (*The Turkish Spy in Frankfurt*) analyzed together with Ludvig Holberg's *Voyage de Nicolas Klimius dans le Monde Souterraine* (*Voyage of Nicolas Klimius in the Underworld*), and Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne* (*Letters of a Peruvian woman*) contrasted with Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *L´an 2440* (*The Year 2440*).

Without denying the religious valences of many (pre-)Enlightenment thinkers and the eschatological character of fiction, these writings on the borderline between fantasy, science fiction and reality had a very realistic and immediate goal: earthly happiness through major political, social and cultural changes. The Utopians, Cyrus, the societies of the Underworld, the Peruvian maiden abducted and brought to 18th century´s France, and the city of Paris in the year 2440, found followers and sympathizers among Europeans, as suggested by the presence of these works and many others in the bookstores and libraries of the time, from Denmark to Transylvania (*Catalogue general de livres françois de Rodolphe Græffer,* 1768, 82; *Bibliotheca selecta* […]*,* 1774, 93; *Catalogus librorum* […]*,* 1774, 41; *Catalogus Bibliothecae Wittwerianae* III, 1794, 246).

All the Pleasures One Can Imagine. A Major Issue?

The image of the princely, royal or imperial courts of Early Modern Europe, or of societies as a whole being hedonistic and lazy, is not something that comes easily to mind as being specific to that period. However, criticisms of the aristocracy's leaning towards a life of pleasure, laziness and irresponsibility towards social problems did appear from time to time in literature and they only multiplied in the context of universal criticism.

Even long before the 18th century, Thomas More wrote of the idleness of the nobility, that they would gladly rather feed the lazy than the sick, of widespread waste, of dishonest games, of filthy inns and so on (Morus, 1958, 53-54, 57). As far as the 18th century was concerned, the cases of literary and other types of discontent seemed to be widespread, and political elites, royalty, etc. were among the culprits (Mercier II, 1782, 50-52; Mercier V, 1783, 297-298). Louis Sébastien Mercier, for example, published his famous *Tableau de Paris* (*Panorama of Paris*) in Neuchâtel (1781) and then in Amsterdam, because it had been banned in France. A glance at some of the passages in this work shows why: his criticism of the French aristocracy in particular, and of certain habits promoted by it and followed by other socio-professional categories, such as luxury, pomp, superficiality, etc., reappears regularly in his writings (Mercier I, 1782, iii, 49-50, 111; Mercier IV, 1782, 87-88).

If More and Mercier criticized in a general way the excesses to which many Europeans and the French, especially from the upper social strata, indulged, Thomas Artus, a late 16th-century writer (like Mercier) – at first anonymously – projected his irony and criticism onto a specific case, the court of King Henry III (1551-1589), the last king of the House of Valois. Although other individuals at the time paid with their lives for illegally publishing books against royal authority (Rushworth II, 1680, 222-223, 232-233), Thomas Artus, the author of *Description de l'Isle des Hermaphrodites,* was not punished for the ironies and blasphemies he had included in his fictional writing; this despite the fact that king Henry IV, the successor of the man to whom the novel was addressed, knew of the existence of this writing (Artus, 1724, f. 5r-v). The fact that the *Description de l'Isle des Hermaphrodites* did not appear in the time of Henry III, and because Henry IV was also of a different family,

Bourbon, and at one time of a different confession from Henry III, probably saved the author's life. In any case, in 1605, when this satire on King Henry III of France the likes of which had never been seen before was published, Europe was constantly beset by major political dissensions, massacres and religious wars. No wonder writers sometimes escaped from the turbulent world into fiction and fantasy, ridiculing some crowned heads while dreaming of monarchies and institutions capable of wise government (Jalobeanu ed., 2011, 65 et seq.).

Although a radical example of an "ingenious satire", as P. Bayle described it (Artus, 1724, f. 5r), and, at the same time, of the excesses of some royal courts, the *Description de l'Isle des Hermaphrodites* is a landmark in European literature, which illustrates how far political attacks, satire, criticism and, last but not least, anti-utopia as a literary genre could go back then. If Thomas More's *Utopia*, as the subtitle of the book suggests, offered early 16th-century Europeans a description of what the best state organization might look like (*de optimo reipublicae statu*), an anti-utopia was the expression of a society in complete antithesis to the one mentioned above, with acknowledgment and support from the population. From this point of view, Artus's book would have been a complete shock to the reader with its totally opposite worldview on a variety of values and behaviors that were socially accepted at the time: sexual orientation, honesty, prudence, moderation, laws, etc. In other words, morality, which was supposed to be a cornerstone of politics, was turned upside down.

In the novel, the ocean voyage to the Island of Hermaphrodites begins around the time of the peace between France and Spain (probably 1598). After a powerful storm brings them to a bizarre island floating on water, the main character and a friend arrive at a palace where they are greeted by a king dressed in a white shirt, powdering his face in the morning. From the outset of the novel, the tapestries depicting Hadrian and Antonius offer images of homosexuality, a form of sexuality which disregarded Christian morality (Artus, 1724, 21). The motif of homosexuality and hedonism, exemplified here by the love affair between the Roman emperor Hadrian and Antonius, reappears periodically in the novel. These were in fact the main criticisms and rumors circulating in the real world about Henry III and his mignons (*favorites*, lovers), as well as his bisexual love affairs.

Besides these, another aspect that would have bewildered a 17th-18th century reader, both in theme and the minuteness in which it was described, would be the legislation on the Island of the Hermaphrodites. If in the *Utopia* of More or in *The Travels of Cyrus*, a wise and moral ruler was the supreme pride of a society, and the laws were the *sine qua non* vehicles of good coexistence, in the world of the Hermaphrodites, jurisprudence nurtured the opposite: immoral, obscene, sometimes even criminal behavior, legislated by the Senate (Artus, 1724, 31-32).

The radicalism of Artus' writing did not hold back even when referring to divinity and religion. In what is oxymoronically called in the book *The Articles of Belief of the Hermaphrodites*, the reader was once again confronted with a mentality opposed to what he knew of the real world. More specifically, they reveal precisely what was perhaps the least acceptable at the time, apart from sexuality not in conformity with the Christian religion: atheism, unbelief (Artus, 1724, 39-40); even later, around the year 1700, in Britain, which was in many respects viewed with admiration for its modernity, there were several publications which condemned atheism (Ellenzweig, 2008, 3, 21-22, 126, 130-131).

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First published in 1727, *Les Voyages de Cyrus* by Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686-1743) enjoyed publishing success in France and throughout Europe.3 The author of the novel was a Scottish intellectual, born to an Anglican mother and a Calvinist father, who later converted to Deism and then, under the influence of François Fénelon, Bishop of Cambrai, to Catholicism. Ramsay studied theology at the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and was a member of several societies and orders, including the Order of St. Lazarus and the London Freemasonry from 1730. If we only consider these biographical aspects, Andrew M. Ramsay can be seen as a personification of the multiple schools of thought that were contending for the minds of Europeans at that time.

As an idealist, Ramsay was preoccupied with the idea of education and especially with the idea of establishing a wise government that would bring and preserve happiness on earth. If on Hermaphrodite Island we had in many ways the reign of lawlessness and immorality, and in Morus' *Utopia* a powerful senate and a populace deeply involved in government, in *The Travels of Cyrus*, Ramsay proposed to the readers another variant of enlightened, moral government: the wise despot, knowledgeable about the people he ruled. To illustrate this ideal, inspired by the ancient Xenophon, the Scottish writer chose Cyrus, the emperor of ancient Persia.

Samuel von Brukenthal had in his library three editions of this writing: Edinburgh 1727, Amsterdam 1728 and London 1730 (*BBK* III, f. 66r). From the preface of the London edition, printed in French, one can already find out the novel's aim, which was to educate (Ramsay, 1730, vii). The novel is divided into eight books, recounting the imaginary and initiatory journeys undertaken by – at the time – the young Persian prince Cyrus, son of King Cambyses and Queen Mandana. He begins by traveling to Persia and Lydia, where he met Zoroaster and Cressus and learned, among other things, about the dangers of luxury. Then, at his father's request, he departed for Egypt, "the mother of science", then for Greece and Crete to study the laws of Solon and Minos. Thence to Babylon, to "bring back to your own country all the knowledge necessary to polish the minds of your subjects and to enable you to fulfil your high destiny", as his father told him (Ramsay, 1730, 82).

Arriving in Egypt (Book III), Cyrus and his friend Araspe are met by Amenophis, a member of an ancient Egyptian family who had assisted the Pharaoh in his wars against the Sidonians and Cypriots. Travelling throughout the country, Cyrus discovers the antiquity of Egyptian civilization, its numerous, large and well-populated cities, its magnificent temples and palaces (Ramsay, 1730, 106). In Memphis and Theba, he learns about the history and laws of the Egyptian people and attends a religious ceremony in a temple dedicated to the goddess Isis, "a privilege that had never before been granted to any foreigner except after the most severe trials" (Ramsay, 1730, 112-118, 131). From Egypt, Cyrus travelled on to Greece, where he discovered the military genius of the Spartans and their revulsion against the excesses, such as greed, ambition and love. He saw how the Greeks were educated at an early age in the gymnasiums, and witnessed the Corinthian mourners at the death of the son of Periander, the King of Corinth, whose cremation brought tears to his eyes (Ramsay, 1730, 140-166). The visit to Greece culminated with the meeting between the young Persian and the famous lawgiver of Athens, Solon (d. 560 BCE). It is a defining episode in the formation of Cyrus and, probably, one of the main messages Ramsay was trying to convey to his readers through this literary creation: enlightened despotism, with the involvement of a senate, but without

3 https://blog.nls.uk/curators-favourites-the-travels-of-cyrus/ (Accessed: 6. September 2024)

too much populace interference in the affairs of the country, is the right political system to follow (Ramsay, 1730, 181).

Religion, spirituality, wisdom and the nature of divinity are other recurring themes in this novel. Here, Ramsay concludes in the third person, as a narrator detached from the main character, but not from his own opinion, that the foremost of the world's wisdoms, above the civilizational conquests of Egypt, above the laws and philosophy of the Greeks, better than any wisdom and philosophy about divinity, is the Jewish wisdom and, by extension, the Christian wisdom. This is the reason why the author calls the prophet Daniel a consummate Christian:

> "The Prince of Persia, shaken by the force of Daniel's speech, swayed within himself; he felt that all the lights of Zoroaster, of Hermes, of Orpheus, of Pythagoras were only imperfect traces. [...] He had found in Persia, in Egypt, in Greece and among other peoples, only obscure, uncertain and vague opinions; he found among the Jews Books, Prophets, Wonder whose authority could not be questioned." (Ramsay, 1730, 342)

Whereas in the Island of the Hermaphrodites, atheism was the letter of the law, preferred to any religious cults, *The Travels of Cyrus* can also be seen as a defense of the belief in divinity, of Christianity and, implicitly, as a refutation of *the various atheisms*, as some religions and philosophies, such as pantheism and deism, were called. As early as the preface, the reader could encounter signs of this refutation. In addition to learning about the specificities of the peoples among whom he had lived during his travels, Cyrus, after the encounter with the prophet Daniel, was finally able to calm his conscience, confused by the mixed truths and errors he had learnt from Zoroaster, Pythagoras and others (Ramsay, 1730, xi).

Apart from the fact that Daniel pointed out to Cyrus that the latter is mentioned by name in the Book of Isaiah, which proved the soundness of their prophets, Cyrus found in the "Religion of the Jews", as Ramsay calls it, the resolution to his own inner restlessness caused by his inability to grasp the nature of divinity. In the passage, the connection between this resolution and civil life is also noteworthy:

> "I do not understand how men can balance these two systems: one is dark to the mind, disturbing to the heart, destructive to society, the other is full of consoling ideas, produces noble feelings, strengthens us in all the duties of civil life. One of the two systems must be true: the Eternal Being is a blind nature, or an enlightened Intelligence: there is no middle; you have proved the first opinion false and absurd; it follows evidently that the other is true and sound. (...) The Prince found the solution of this difficulty only among the Jews;" (Ramsay, 1730, 245-246).

The Grand Mufti of Rome. A New Perspective

Paul Hazard wrote that the 17th century ended in disrespect and the 18th century began in irony (Hazard, 2007, 10). An example that supports the French historian's claim is one of the popular novels of the early Enlightenment, *The Turkish Spy* (*L'Espion* I, 1715, [4]. By reading it, the 18th-century European familiarized oneself with irony and self-irony, with criticism and self-criticism, but above all, with a new, non-Eurocentric, perspective on the world.

Samuel von Brukenthal had in his library two editions of this literary work, different in content, however (*BBK* I, f. 216r). The first is *L'Espion dans les Cours des Princes Chretiens* (Cologne, 1715), which centers on a spy sent to gather information from European courts, especially the French one at the end of the 17th century (*L'Espion* I, 1715, [2]). The other

edition, *L'Espion Turc a Francfort pendant la Diète & le Couronnement de l'Empereur, en 1741,* was printed in London in 1742. As the title suggests, the book describes the travels and observations of a Turkish spy in Europe, this time on the eve of the election of Charles VII, the Prince Elector of Bavaria, as the Holy Roman Emperor. The latter is also the edition we will focus on.

A work full of curiosities of all kinds, with adventures and anecdotes told in the plausible, commonplace context of everyday life, *The Turkish Spy* was bound to attract the attention of a large audience. Ironic imagery and criticism of Europeans are to be found throughout the book. The Spy calls the Pope and the Christian clergy *mufti*, and the major European kings *sultans*: the Sultan of France, the Sultan of Prussia and so on (*L'Espion,* 1742, 5, 19, 22-23, 32-34, 38, 43, 159). He describes the "Christian sects" in Europe, where he includes all the major religious denominations. In this light, *The Turkish Spy* was a good exercise in imagination for the 18th century European reader as it broke out with one's own cultural realities and comforts. At the same time, it provided incentive for self-criticism.

Given the success of this writing, it seems that Western Europeans had not only learned self-criticism and self-irony by then but even embraced them. If, for example, all the inhabitants of Nazar, the fantastic planet in Klimius' travels, spoke the same dialect and there were kingdoms where, despite the variety of religious cults, lived together so well that it surprised Klim (Holberg, 1753, 208), in the real Europe of the 18th century, things were somewhat different. In the midst of negotiations to elect a new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire – which Klim portrayed as neither holy, nor an empire (Holberg, 1753, 310-311) –, the Turkish spy roamed around the settlements of Central and Western Europe, stopping in various places and leaving to posterity his observations as a non-European and non-Christian traveler on the morals and manners of his hosts. Throughout his journey, we see the Turkish spy giving descriptions of the national characters of the main nations participating in, or interested in, the election of the new emperor in Frankfurt. Whereas the Spaniards are presented as proud and passionate individuals, Germans are portrayed as good people, but cold, unpretentious, simple, sincere. On the other hand, he is most laudatory when talking about the French because they were lovers of delicacy, manners, etc. (*L'Espion,* 1742, 47, 55, 84-85).

The Spy devotes a significant part of his epistles to questions concerning the religion of Europeans, Christian sects, as he calls Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, etc. Their prophets, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin and the new religious movements, such as Quakerism and Pietism, also caught his interest. He even sketches a laudatory portrait of the Quakers, with a slight reservation caused by nothing other than what he called the laws of nature (*L'Espion,* 1742, 33, 165).

In terms of sketching the individuals – crowned heads and ambassadors – but also national and confessional portraits, the Turkish spy provides the reader with a picture of the interests of different European states in the larger context of the power struggles of the mid-18th century. He writes in his epistles about the Pragmatic Sanction by which the Habsburg Emperor Charles VI legislated the succession and how, despite the Sanction, the great powers of Europe pulled strings, each in its own interests, to elect a favorable emperor. Moreover, the novel's conclusion is satirizing the pomp, pageantry and the power games of the aristocracy participating in the election of the emperor. After devoting a significant part to describe the robes and the processions of the electors, particularly that of the Elector of Mainz surpassing all others, the Turkish spy concludes his entire account by writing that: "in less than eight minutes they had almost unanimously elected the Elector of Bavaria as Emperor of the Romans" (*L'Espion,* 1742, 198).

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Niels Klim's Journey to the Underworld (1741) by Ludvig Holberg is equally among the books that heralded some major changes in European attitudes and the world outlooks, focusing on the changes that took place in Western Europe, in one form or another, more than a century after Holberg, and like few other civilizations on the globe underwent. However unlikely it may seem at first sight that future changes in mentality with very real political, social and cultural implications could be found in a fictional, science fiction work written in the north of the European continent in the first half of the 18th century, this writing has such things: the desacralization of royalty, the equality of men and women, the taming and humanization of the judicial and punitive system, the rise of meritocracy and so on (Wooldridge, 2022, 117-119, 128-130, 137, 140, 148, 168 etc.). Last but not least, like the Turkish spy, Holberg writes in Klimius' adventures about self-criticism, both personal and collective.

The author of the work, Ludvig Holberg, was born in the winter of 1684 in Bergen, Norway, to a soldier father and a mother from an old Norwegian-Danish clergy family. Orphaned at an early age, Holberg left his hometown in 1702 and went to Copenhagen where he studied theology. Between 1709 and 1716, he made several stipendiary study trips to England, the Netherlands, France and Italy. A self-made nonconformist professor or "the great loner" as he is also known, Holberg completed several literary projects in the 1720s and 1730s, among them, the *History of Denmark* in three volumes, published in 1732-1735 (Haakonssen, Olden-Jørgensen, 2017, 3-9). In 1741, in addition to his theatrical plays and scientific works generally in the field of history, Ludvig Holberg published a satirical science fiction travel novel in Latin, which was quickly translated into German, Danish and other European languages, *Niels Klim's Travels in the Underworld*. Although it contains no descriptions of futuristic science or technology, Holberg's depiction of the Hollow Earth makes this particular novel as one of the few more science fiction-orientated ones. Samuel von Brukenthal had an edition of this literary work in his library, in French, published in Copenhagen and Leipzig in 1753 (*BBK* II, f. 43r).

The novel begins with a group of students, including Niels (Nicolas) Klim, traveling from Copenhagen to Bergen. Once there, he and his friends decide to inspect the area's main curiosity: a cave on Flöien mountain. Entering the cave, Klim finds himself descending into a fantastic underground world on a griffon vulture. Klim's first stop on the planet Nazar – at the center of the Earth – is the city of Keba, in the kingdom of the Potuans, where he is soon confronted with his own impulsiveness. He himself had to admit at one point that once he had learned the language of the inhabitants, he no longer judged them as harshly as he had done before (Holberg, 1753, 33). Incidentally, the Potuans, the talking trees mentioned at the beginning of this article and described by Klim as senators, after cohabiting with the visitor from heaven, concluded that they could hardly classify the latter as a reasonable, rational creature because of the haste and impulsiveness of his judgment. Moreover, Klim observes the same typical restraint in the Potuans – quite the opposite of the *charivari* in Europe – even in the presence of strangers (Holberg, 1753, 37).

The spirit of universal critique which animated many European thinkers of the time made them question everything, including royalty and the mentality that placed crowned heads on the divine level. Klim illustrates this very well. At one point, he arrives in the Potuan capital, Potu, at the princely court, where he witnesses an event that marks him, like many others in the novel: his kneeling before the Potuan king, which the latter rejects (Holberg, 1753, 62-63). The divine nature of kingship, present in the minds of Europeans for centuries, was being challenged by Holberg. Only the Supreme Being – which was

gradually replacing the classical Christian God – was deserving of such gestures. The fact that Holberg characterizes the Potuans as being "to the other peoples of Nazar as the Europeans are to the nations of our world, that is, they surpass all in prudence and wisdom" (Holberg, 1753, 80), becomes a quite evident suggestion to the European reader on how to relate to royalty, divinity and meritocracy, to the general social-political construct of Europe of the time (Holberg, 1753, 87).

As for the religion of the Potuans, I already pointed out that, from the very words of their king, they believed in a Supreme Being. Klim noted that their religion had a dogma, but it was relatively simple – they had no faculty of theology (Holberg, 1753, 124) – with few articles of faith and akin to that idea of divinity which was making a career in that age, natural religion (Nisbet, 1969, 130-140). To paraphrase from the novel, the religion of the Potuans "will seem to some to be a pure natural religion" (Holberg, 1753, 97-98). Moreover, Holberg's language recalls the subtitle of William Derham's popular work of scientific theology *Astro-theology, or a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, from a Survey of the Heavens* (1714). Reflecting on their religion, Klim went on to note that it had a mystical side, that the Potuans recognized the concept of revelation, and that their dogmas were to be found in a book sent from heaven centuries ago (Holberg, 1753, 93-94).

If in *The Turkish Spy*, the international law was bypassed by interested parties, in many societies in the Underworld, a sense of responsibility for a respected, efficient and fair system of customs and judiciary for an enlightened governance had to slowly take root in each individual. Through this empowerment of the population and by cultivating respect for the law, the judicial process was moving away from a fatality often dictated by divine will or great political figures. The laws of the Potuans were made in such a way as to lead to equity among citizens, and meritocracy dictated public policy (Holberg, 1753, 106). On the other hand, not surprisingly judging by Holberg's depiction of human versus underworld inhabitant, an exception to this type of jurisprudence was to be found among the Quamite population, the only one that was human. Spending time among them, Klim personally had to persuade the Quamite emperor not to kill the Tanakite prisoners caught in the war, because he detested the practice (Holberg, 1753, 301, 303).

I Am Seven Hundred Years Old. Other Ideas for Future Societies?

Once the source of individual and collective anxieties (Avramescu, 2009, 9), in the eyes of some Enlightenment intellectuals, nature and the savage man became either a deity worthy of adoration (the Supreme Being) or the subject of fascination, admiration and, last but not least, reflection on their own past mistakes. In her novel *Lettres d'une peruvienne*, Françoise de Graffigny (1695-1758) brought "the good savage" to the European public.

First published anonymously in 1747, Graffigny's *Letters of a Peruvian Woman* enjoyed great success with readers, as evidenced by the reviews of the time and by the many editions that appeared in the years that followed. In Raynal's words, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* is: "an ingenious novel, full of grace, delicacy and taste" (Kulesa, 1997, 11). The work also reached the eastern periphery of Catholic and Protestant Europe, in the library of Samuel von Brukenthal, who had a bilingual edition of the work, in French and Italian, published in Paris in 1759 (*BBK* I, f. 270r).

A novel full of grace, delicacy and taste, but beginning with a harsh episode, for which some European societies were taking upon themselves a *nostra culpa* in the 18th century (Raynal III, 1780, 1). The episode refers to the invasion and the destruction of an Inca

temple by the Spaniards and the kidnapping of the virgins worshipping the Sun God. One of those virgins, Zilia, is the main protagonist of this epistolary novel. From her journey to France to the end, the novel tells the story of what was considered in those days a "good savage". It portrays her personality and exposes her views on French society. Last but not least, it shows her inner struggles, which she overcomes, from the one brought on by exile and the loss of her lover, Aza, to her linguistic and emotional adaptation to the new reality in which she has found herself in France.

The dichotomy of "the good savage" and "the cruel European" is amplified throughout the novel by various observations that Zilia makes on different French realities. Zilia at one point becomes the object of admiration of a young nobleman, whom the author portrays as a morally weakened European. What did the young man appreciate in the Inca maiden abducted from faraway South America? Among other things, her simplicity, her naivety, her spiritual purity (Graffigny I, 1759, 382) aka a spiritual cleanliness that was educated early in her life. The 18th century had no shortage of educational books, which conveyed the main message that education must begin as early as possible for the healthy development of the young. From works on civility, whether Christian or more secular, to Locke and others, the education of the young was becoming a growing concern for the adults in early modern Europe (Ariès, 1962, 33-44). In this novel, Graffigny sketches an Inca society that took great care of the morality of its children, even if they did not possess the educational books that the Europeans had. So moral were the Peruvians depicted that "before the Spaniards came, it was common knowledge that a Peruvian never lied" (Graffigny I, 1759, 40). The same fairness can be seen in another passage in the book, which refers to the respect the Incas had for their kings (Graffigny I, 1759, 36): "The Amautas, the philosophers of this nation, taught the young men the discoveries made in the sciences. The nation was still in its infancy in this respect, but it was in the bloom of happiness." (Graffigny I, 40). With such a virtuous, apparently pacifist people, in touch with the divine and with nature – a classic image of the "good savage" –, the arrival of the Spaniards, as Guillaume Thomas Raynal wrote, could not have been more contrasting. Lastly, the language often used by Graffigny urged the European reader to empathize with the individual drama of the Peruvian maiden, but also with the collective drama of the entire Inca people (Graffigny I, 1759, 52).

Having disembarked from the "floating house", as she called the ship on which she arrived in Europe, Zilia was put up in the house of Deterville, the French nobleman who rescued her. In his house, she gets acquainted with the totally different specifics of a well-heeled European house. From seeing her own reflection in a mirror (she had never experienced anything like this before) to meeting the other maids, who were also non-European, Zilia began to see the reality of a cosmopolitan France, a reality that was generally proving to be much larger than she had realized before (Graffigny I, 1759, 192).

The culture shock is amplified by her visit to Paris. Apart from not knowing what to think of the genius and character of the locals, because the French, like Klim, "crossed extremes with great speed" (Graffigny I, 1759, 292), Zilia was speechless to realize the dimensions of the French capital. If for Mercier, Paris was of staggering immensity and cosmopolitanism (Mercier I, 1782, 8-9; Mercier II, 1782, 52), for the young Peruvian, the city was beyond her capacity to understand and comprehend: "It contains more people than two or three of our regions could muster." (Graffigny I, 1759, 236, 238). Even before arriving at Déterville's Parisian home, which was "almost as magnificent as that of the Sun", the Peruvian virgin could not help but be amazed at the sight of the city's buildings (Graffigny I, 1759, 238, 240).

Graffigny contrasts Peruvian naivety and purity not only with the material, external world. As Zilia gets to know the French better and better, she comes to say to herself, "Not without real regret, [...] I pass from admiration for the genius of the French to contempt for the way they use it. [...] I cannot deny the evidence of its faults." (Graffigny II, 1759, 84). Once again, the French ended up in the eyes of an external "judge" as being devoted to luxury and uselessness (Graffigny II, 1759, 86).

In addition to the advice on education that appears in the work, the Peruvian virgin's judgments on how women were viewed and positioned in 18th-century France are quite numerous, a feature already noted in the literature (Kulesa, 1997, 37). Zilia's remarks, some not without irony, on the double standard with which women were treated differently from men,4 abounds in the second volume of the *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. Her position is best summarized by the following statement: "I don't know the consequences of the education a father gives his son, I have not found out. But I do know that as soon as the girls begin to be capable of receiving instruction, they are locked up in a religious house to teach them how to live in the world." (Graffigny II, 1759, 156, 158, 164, 168).

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The establishment of happiness on earth could wait no longer when Louis-Sébastien Mercier published *L'An 2440* (1770/1771) and the *Tableau de Paris* (1781). At least that is the impression one can get from reading these two writings. By criticizing the society in which they lived, many Enlightenment writers became vehicles for spreading the need for change, and apostles of progress.

Before the French Revolution radiated its most tragic and puritan discourse through Maximilien Robespierre (Furet, 2012, 91), many of its ideals were already making themselves heard, including in fantasy and science fiction literature. Few novels from Samuel von Brukenthal's library better illustrate the French Enlightenment idealism and radicalism than *L'An 2440*. The former governor of Transylvania had in his library the London edition of this literary work, published in French in 1772 (*BBK* I, f. 15v).

From the very beginning of the novel, we see that "reasonableness" was a value, a benchmark human virtue, a *sine qua non* trait for social harmony and a perfect society: "The Sage knows that evil abounds on earth; but, at the same time, he always has in his mind that perfection so beautiful and touching, which can and must be the very work of a reasonable man." (Mercier, 1772, 1).

"I am seven hundred years old" (*J'ai sept cent ans*) were the words spoken by the main character from the novel *L'An 2440*, when he realized that the year MMIVCXL, engraved in marble with gilded letters in a central square, was neither in his imagination, nor an error made by the authorities (Mercier, 1772, 13-14). While Artus ironized the excesses of a French royal court in the 16th century, in many of Mercier's writings, ranging from *The Year 2440* to *The Portrait of Paris*, we find the same dissatisfaction and fierce criticism of the opulence of the French aristocracy, and their abuses: "as strange as they are numerous: you cannot conceive them, nor count them, and your mind is lost in them [...]." (Mercier, 1772, 3-4). As extreme as it may seem, the statement "I am seven hundred years old" is a metaphor that probably summarizes and interweaves Mercier's sense of expectation with his radicalism, visible as early as the dedicatory letter of the novel (Mercier, 1772, [2]).

4 In the *Encyclopédie*, under the term *raisonnable*, a distinction is made between what a *reasonable man* meant and what a *reasonable woman* meant. See note 3 of this article.

Mercier had obvious grievances with the political system in France, the elites of the state and, more specific to his occupation, the publishing policy in the kingdom. Some of these grievances were made known in the *Tableau de Paris* (Mercier VII, 1783, 17-25). Moreover, as if to shun even more the French, he consistently casts the English model in an extremely favorable light (Mercier V, 1783, 297-301; Mercier VII, 1783, 26, 44-45, 272-276). Whereas the Peruvians were prized for their purity of soul, as the Enlightenment idealists like Graffigny saw it, the British began to be the subject of increasing admiration as we moved into the 18th century. In addition to their cultural and scientific achievements, they were valued to the point of envy by some because of their political system. After all, they managed a glorious revolution (albeit after bloody civil wars) which put the merchant and bourgeoisie at the helm of the country alongside the monarchy; almost like those from More's *Utopia*, the Potuans of the Underworld or the inhabitants of 2440, as the French traveler would learn from a contemporary of the time: "This revolution," you say, "took place in the most peaceful and happy manner. [...] – It was the work of philosophy: it acts in tranquility, it acts like nature, with a force all the more sure because it is insensible." (Mercier, 1772, 114).

To his astonishment, many of the problems of 18th-century´s Paris were but sad memories in that same city of 2440: orderly, civilized, simple, without the opulence and violence that had characterized it in the past. The sense of security and of belonging that Klim felt as no Potuan looked at him negatively, even though he was a foreigner, reappears in Mercier's *The Year 2440*. Right from the opening parts of the novel, the main character, although dressed in 18th-century clothes, experiences the same lightness of spirit that was typical for the 25th-century society (Mercier, 1772, 22). People moved freely, easily and in an organized manner, and the king present in the daily lives of the citizens of 2440 was reminiscent of the ideal of the enlightened sovereign in Cyrus' travels (Mercier, 1772, 27-28). In the New Paris (chapter 8), urbanity was for and to the benefit of the inhabitants. The city was inviting, efficiently reorganized and functional, not messy and untidy as in the past. The sick were cared for, not, as in the past, "housed between a corpse and a dying man", the laws were obeyed, and the city's panorama was a delight to behold (Mercier, 1772, 40-41).

As a man of the press and letters, Mercier also wanted to imprint in his novel the image of a society tolerant of the press, especially because France had aroused many complaints in the Republic of Letters for the increased censorship towards the end of the Ancien Régime. He even writes in the novel that freedom of the press is the true measure of civil liberty (Mercier, 1772, 54). He was delighted to learn that the French *Encyclopédie* and that authors such as Corneille, Moliere, La Fontaine, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Buffon, Voltaire, Mirabeau had become common knowledge in that future society. All the more noteworthy is the fact that this realization of the main character is described in a chapter entitled *Les Nouveaux Testamens* (sic!) (*The New Testaments*) (Mercier, 1772, 60).

Following the secular Enlightenment model of prioritizing jurisprudence, Mercier's hero discovered that one can live without theology, but not without jurisprudence (Mercier, 1772, 81). The author gives readers some examples of how the people of 2440 related to and followed the laws. First, they were no longer "Gothic and bizarre," as he writes, and written "in favor of the rich," but were just, inspired by the "sovereign lawgiver", nature (Mercier, 1772, 81, 85, 105). Here Mercier also makes an *apologia* of freedom, criticizing a detail of the prison system: the shackling of convicts. He spoke out against this practice because, he argued, justice had the right to condemn to the loss of life, but it did not have the right to brand the guilty with the mark of slavery (Mercier, 1772, 94). As with the

Potuans, making citizens accountable for their actions in the name of the law was seen as a great political, social and behavioral progress (Mercier, 1772, 92, 95-96).

The sacralization of the secular and the political religion of the Enlightenment are therefore specific to this novel (Mercier, 1772, 117-118; Voegelin, 2010, 62). In Mercier's view, the people of 2440 were followers of natural religion, of the Supreme Being. Society, at that time, had no saints (the author even uses this term) other than people who, by their own civic example, earned collective respect; they were those "earthly saints", the laymen, mentioned earlier in the study. On the other hand, Mercier also offers a description of a religious service in that distant future. After reading a poem placed at the entrance to the temple, which basically summarizes his goal of becoming one with nature, Mercier's character narrates:

> "As his voice pronounced the sacred hymns, the choir of assistants alternately raised theirs. Their soft and subdued singing portrayed the reverential feeling of their hearts; they seemed filled with the majesty of God. No statues, no allegorical figures, no pictures. [...] If you lifted your eyes to the top of the temple, you could see the heavens uncovered; for the dome was not enclosed by a stone vault, but by transparent skylights. Sometimes a clear sky announced the goodness of the Creator. [...] When the breath of spring brought down the pure air of life, like a balmy river, then was impressed this salutary and consoling truth, that those treasures of divine clemency are inexhaustible." (Mercier, 1772, 121-123)

Conclusion

Just as in the treatment of a disease, the first step, decisive for its success, is the identification of the main symptoms, followed by the diagnosis, so that the appropriate treatment can be applied. Similarly, fantasy and science fiction literature in the Modern Age Europe came to the readers with the identification and signaling of gradually more social, political and cultural issues. It then proposed alternative realities therein, with solutions through examples from the fantasy worlds visited by different fictional characters. It presented customs and habits, often different or opposed to those of real European societies, it highlighted the laws, the institutions and the beliefs that kept social harmony.

Samuel von Brukenthal had several books of this kind in his library. An anti-utopia novel, in which atheism and even homosexuality were the law. The more or less subtle association of hermaphrodites with hedonism, and atheism, with lack of morality, induced readers to make an easy link between aberrant sexuality and the ultimate deviation from faith, atheism, unbelief. At the same time, this association fed a political imaginary and the mentality that could partly explain the exclusion and marginalization of the two groups, which remained useful at the time only as potential political weapons and accusations. In all the analyzed novels one can find the belief in the afterlife, except for *Description de l'Isle des Hermaphrodites*.

At that time, enlightened despotism was a desirable political solution, capable to maintain social cohesion and to provide prosperity to modern European societies. Christianity, in a less pompous version, was equally seen as the basis for the wisdom of an enlightened despot. The passage in which Cyrus acknowledges his inability to decide on the definition of divinity, blind nature or enlightened intelligence, is illustrative of one of the main ideological and philosophical debates that grew in the 17th-18th centuries, a symptom of the crisis of conscience in European culture. In Ramsay's novel, Cyrus, this ancient hero, became the personification of the man and the wise leader of the 18th century who found

a way out of this crisis of the mind by appealing to Jewish wisdom and, by extension, to what some authors of the time called primitive Christianity.

On the other hand, the frequent appearances of natural religion in a positive light, of nature in general, understood as a new supreme, creative authority, show us – apart from the end of Christianity's monopoly on religious thought in Europe – precisely the considerable influence that religion still had on the continent. In other words, natural religion was itself an expression of the symbiotic relationship that still existed between philosophy and theology, between the natural sciences and religiosity. In the second half of the 18th century, the de-theologization of thought, especially atheism, was present only in the minds of some Enlightenment thinkers and still in the realm of fantasy when presented to the general public; they were hallmarks of an alternative reality. Not even More's utopians accepted disbelief or the belief that the soul dies along with the body. Nevertheless, by reading *Utopia*, *N. Klims' Travels in the Underworld* or *The Year 2440,* the European reader's mind may have opened even more to the possibility of a simple religion or a plurality of opinions, including religious ones.

Also in the 18th century, a few novels, such as *The Turkish Spy* and *Letters of a Peruvian Woman*, may have added counterpoints to the Eurocentrism in which Europeans lived. Klim, the Turkish spy and the Peruvian maiden showed the inhabitants of the Old Continent what they were really like, what their flaws were: they were sometimes superficial and pompous, cruel and ignorant of their own cultural biases. Fair, reasonable jurisprudence, inspired by the boundless, and therefore trans-national and trans-confessional wisdom of nature, but also by Judeo-Christian morality in varying degrees, were able to remedy these things and set people on a new virtuous, equitable and meritocratic path.

Surprisingly or not, what is certain is that some of the so-called fantasies and desires presented in the above-mentioned works came true in the centuries that followed. The self-criticism fostered by their writings has most probably contributed to the spread of these ideas and to the preparation of the new mentalities that built the new political, social and cultural architectures in the democracies of the world. A relative humanization of the judicial system was already felt in the late 18th century, with the slow abolition of torture and of witchcraft trials. Equality before the law and a generally fairer and more transparent jurisprudence than Holberg, Graffigny or Mercier had witnessed were also achieved. The rise of meritocracy, the exit of women from the private sphere and their political emancipation, the de-criminalization of atheism and homosexuality, likewise transformed from alternative realities of 18th century literature into the palpable reality of the 20th century, in the same democratic and open societies that produced these literary works.

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