

Aporias of a Portuguese literary utopia. Ângelo Jorge's *Irmânia*

One of the intriguing facets of Portuguese literary culture still to be investigated and demonstrated is the apparent absence of explicit textual formulae, of clear narrative options that can be categorised in the literary sub-genre of Utopia. There must be multiple reasons that the Utopian narrative genre has not been cultivated in Portugal which have to do with different parameters of historical, sociological, cultural and literary explanations that range from the indexing of More's *Utopia* in the catalogue of books forbidden by the Inquisition in the 16th and 17th centuries (ideological-cultural reason) to purely and simply a lack of interest on the part of our most representative writers for a literary genre that is aesthetically controversial and limited regarding its narrative potential (aesthetic-cultural reason). We must also take into account that such a small nation has undergone a diaspora to other places of such cultural diversity, i.e., has been transported (using the words of the Portuguese essayist António Sérgio) – with a greater or lesser sense of ideological tolerance towards other ethno-cultural peoples –, in this process putting into practice one of the fictitious generative rules of the narrative syntax of Utopia, i.e., actually making journeys to the unknown other place

(historical-cultural reason). We have, therefore, to mention this first aporia: the history of the country/nation Portugal that, through the pioneering of its maritime discoveries, provided cultural inspiration for the genesis of a literary form oriented to the fictional representation of a social ideal, the national history which gave rise to the invention of a narrative syntax in which the main narrator assigned to describe the working of a good society (one must remember that the fictional character of the Portuguese sailor Raphael Hithloday, invented by Thomas More, was to become the first visitor in the history of world literature to set foot “in terram utopicum”). He did this in an involuntarily way, supported by the genius of the English humanist, in the universal language of Latin, but rarely encouraged the practice, with deliberate sociological reasons and qualified aesthetic intentions, of this written literary form in its vernacular language.

A curious exception, found among some other texts in an on-going stage of inventory-research in Portuguese archives and libraries, is a short narrative, *Irmânia*, published in 1912 by the polygrapher Ângelo Jorge (1888-1922). As Ângelo Jorge was not an author of renown and *Irmânia* did not become a best seller ignored by the Portuguese literary world, it is legitimate to question the opportunity and the sense in divulging his work. In order to justify such questionable grounds, it is therefore convenient to make an appeal to a certain area of studies carried out in comparative literature. The wide-ranging and dynamic conformation of the objective of

this academic discipline has contemplated the study of “minor” or “minimi” authors since its beginnings. Not exactly with the aim of compiling a hierarchic and encyclopaedic inventory of the bibliography of universal literature, according to the ideal concept of Goethe’s *Weltliteratur*, but to assess the relative importance of the *locus* and function that such “minor” or “minimi” authors and works play in terms of both the international circulation of literary forms and aesthetic doctrines, and in the re-definition of the literary canon. It is precisely within a transnational study of literary Utopia revealing particularities and original aspects of authors and works that fall outside the consecrated repertory, but susceptible to being amplified and restructured, that the re-edition of Ângelo Jorge’s *Irmânia* is justified. A second aporia must therefore be noted: in the transnational history of Utopia of the early 20th century it was a minor Portuguese author with no national canonical recognition that involuntarily placed Portuguese literature on the European map of utopian literary tradition.

Irmânia, however, does not fall outside the ambit of the author’s diversified oeuvre. Before we delve into this, and in order to better understand its genesis, we must scroll through Ângelo Jorge’s bibliography. Although not vast, it is sufficiently diverse in the genres he cultivated, which range from the lyrical to the narrative and encompasses essays and translation. A fervent moralist and compromised with his

political, ideological and spiritual options that he followed throughout his life, the motivation for Ângelo Jorge's writings seems to be rooted in both a romantic urge to express his existential unrest and in a doctrinal vocation of a militant proselytism. While the books of poems he published, *Penumbras* (Shadows) (1903), *Dor Humana* (Human Suffering, 1908), *Libertas!* (1908), *Espírito Sereno* (Calm Spirit, 1912), *Visão da Eternidade* (Vision of Eternity) (1914) indicate the dominant worldview that shapes the discreet and dramatic phrases that dot his path as an author of verses measured by the *pathos* of the circumstances of his hyper-sensibility, his prose texts, whether fictional – *Irmânia* (1912a) – *Almas de Luz* (Souls of Light, 1918) – or epistolary – *Beatrice* (1909) – or essayistic – *Olhando a Vida. Apontamentos de Crítica Social* (Looking at Life. Notes of Social Criticism, 1910) – *A Questão Social e A Nova Ciência de Curar* (The Social Matter and the New Science of Curing, 1912b) – or of a didactic nature – *Ginástica Mental das Crianças* (Children's Mental Gymnastics, 1902), or the translations that he did – *As Teorias Anarquistas* (Anarchistic Theories, 1909) – *A Utopia Socialista* (The Socialist Utopia, 1913) – *O Tesouro das Almas do Amor Divino* (The Treasure of the Souls of Divine Love, 1915), are testimony to his binding dedication to the various causes he took up.

From being a free-thinking anarchist, a proponent of a materialistic conception of the explanation of the world and of the phenomenology of

history to being an assumed supporter of a spiritual and esoteric interpretation of the meaning and the ultimate fulfilment of life, and then embracing vegetarianism and naturalism as redeeming measures for the general evils of mankind, Ângelo Jorge is the author of a thematically polarising, dichotomous, apparently contradictory oeuvre, but also influenced by an awareness that evolved into an ever-increasing solidarity and sympathy for the social and existential human condition. First making himself heard at a political level, he moved on to defending the rights and the freedom of the “working classes”. This phase lasted from about 1901 to 1910, the period that encompasses his activity as a publicist, engaged in divulging libertarian ideals in short-lived periodicals. The ideal of human justice that he espoused during this period follows the anarchist teleology that “the state is foredoomed to succumb for ever more” and that “in its place the Free-Accord will some day rule on earth” (1910: 7), or the “Ideal city for the Good-Agreement” will do so (1910: 45), as he wrote in another text.

Without losing his will to act, his social awareness later moved on to a philosophical plane, inspired by the doctrine that recognises the unity of nature and the universe as the ultimate principle of the prophylactic and curative action of medicine. The period between 1910 and 1913 is characterised by the publication of writings that show his adhesion to both

the principles of naturalist therapy, the application of which would assure the homeostasis and the regeneration of vital functions –

“There is only one curative principle in nature: nature itself” (1912b: X) – and the dietetic rules of a frugivorous and vegetarian regime. Maintaining the ethical and political orientation of his social conscience during this period, Ângelo Jorge, however, changes his explicative theory on the general disorder of the world. In accordance with his perspective inspired by a radical dietetic and therapeutic naturalist philosophy, it is not in the “class struggle that we find all the evil: it is in the human struggle”. “I”, said Ângelo Jorge, “do not see castes that fight for the best of the social banquet: I see excited, intoxicated, crazed, sick men, dying to crush themselves in a savage fury. The worker-slave is an alcoholic, a smoker, a carnivore the same as a capitalist-tyrant. And the philanthropic gripe of the former is most of the time nothing more than envy and resentment for the fact that he doesn’t belong to the group **of** those that give the orders” (1912b: 38).

Finally, it is on the spiritual level that Ângelo Jorge’s last works, published between 1914 and 1918, show, as a consequence of an inner conversion, a *metanoia* led by a will to dissolve in the consubstantial unity of life, the opening of his conscience to the sense of being all one and to the religious perception of the world: “Nothing is dumb in nature, nothing. / Everything talks to us: jungles, winds, seas. / Whoever understands this

occult, sacred voice, / Sometimes hears singular things // Everything possesses occult and mysterious life, / From the inert rock to the calyx of the rose. / And in everything, so obscure, this infinite voice / harmoniously speaks and throbs” (1914a: 37-8).

We would like therefore to point out this third aporia, now located in Ângelo Jorge’s writings or deduced from it through an analysis of his complete published literary work: author of prose texts inspired by the materialist philosophy of history, and poems imbued with a tone of subjective melancholy and a strong social invective, he also penned other texts of a pan-spiritualist inspiration in prose and in verse, permeated by a tone of mystic longing and of hymnal recognition of the transcendence of life itself.

In fact, Ângelo Jorge’s intellectual and literary case could be understood as showing the potentialities of heteronomy, of an intellectual construction of literary characters representative of antinomical and characterological sensibilities and traits, in our opinion, rooted in an unvarying Utopian representation of the world, motivated by different convictions, from the libertarian to the naturist, intertwined with discreet systems of thought, from the political to the spiritual. In its essential features, it is a Utopian representation that has its origin not only in a subjective reaction against the faults of the given world and the iterative injustices of the course of history, but in a sort of self-recognition of the

metaphysical nature of universal suffering. And this is the fourth aporia to point out, relative to the biographical path of Ângelo Jorge himself and which is reflected in the process of the construction of his literary work, the aporia of a Utopian who is luminously driven by the ideal of historical progress, by the realisation of the “ideal of the Great-day // Day of love, of good, of peace and of justice”(1908a: 52-3), but that is also, at least in the period of his life dominated by a disenchanted worldview, inclined to the gloomy and pessimistic representation of the world that he came to know through the experience he had of it: “I look at life through a dark prism. / With an air of boredom and an unfeeling expression / I look at everything on which my ungrateful sight alights. // Black visions of a fantasising madman? / But if there are so many impure hearts on earth, / If this life is a kind of dunghill, / Is there anyone who can resist Pessimism?” (1912c: 79).

By selecting Christ as the “eternal symbol” or a model for Utopian vocation in another poem, Ângelo Jorge attributes a sacrificial, or even redeeming, vocation to the militant action of the Utopian visionary, the one who “in an overflowing desire for Truth and Justice” feels a “reckless sensation for having put to flight narrow-minded social conventions, petty prejudices of family and education and that, filled with the sacred fire of enthusiasm that the clear understanding of an ideal handed over to his followers, fights the battle on behalf of those that suffer, on behalf of the unprotected victims of slavery and iniquity, thus contributing, whether with

the pen or with the word, to social reform and the progressive evolution of Mankind” (1910: 7). In the wide arc of his doctrinal evolution we can see signs of an unusual, disarming sincerity of character restlessly searching for alternatives in human conduct and projects of social order conformed to the successive and different responses found in the abyssal appeal of his Utopian conscience. A conscience that, in his case, did not mean a distorted, unreal, inconsequent or even frivolous perception of the given reality.

Among the “arguments and demonstrations” that provided Ângelo Jorge with a principle of explanation of the “how and why of things” operate and which led him to move on to “new moral horizons”, isomorphic to “new doctrinal and ideological worlds”, we must emphasise those that he called “the law of association” and the “natural law”. Conformity with the “natural law” is a constantly recurring argument or a quasi-monistic formula for Ângelo Jorge to perceive the order that is desirable and ideally necessary for the course of life and its manifestation in the human sphere. This is how his libertarian concept of society corresponds to some kind of revival of the primeval state and completely free from the will of nature. His notion of social harmony conforms to a romantic, non-Darwinian model of the idea of a natural world in which self-determination and individual satisfaction know neither constraints nor cause conflicts. On the contrary, they express the fulfilment of collective

freedom. The erratic evolution of Ângelo Jorge's thinking, dominated by sociological/political interests to naturist/therapeutic concerns and then on to mystic/religious appeals, preserved a constant reference to the idea of nature, as if it were an idealised image of harmony of life in society – “With its eternal, universally immutable laws Nature will bring about social unity”.

Irmânia, Ângelo Jorge's literary Utopia, written in little more than a month, between 15 March and 26 April 1912, is a synthesis of the evolution of his thinking, as can be seen in the epigraph “God, Nature and Freedom – the Trinity”, attached to the title-page of the publication that corresponded to the XI Volume of the Vegetarian Library, published by the Vegetarian Society of Portugal. As can be deduced from the reference on the colophon to the place where it was written, “Monte das Antas (Porto)”, Ângelo Jorge probably wrote it in the “Institute of Vital Culture”, an establishment described as lying in a “hygienic place [...] surrounded by magnificent forests, at an excellent height, affording vast panoramas and a lot of pure air”.

It is therefore in the context of this project, of Utopian outline, of the social application of the naturist and dietetic therapeutic doctrine of vegetarianism that one must place and understand not only the publication of Ângelo Jorge's literary Utopia in 1912 but also of his book of a propagandistic character, the fourth volume of the already-mentioned

Vegetarian Library, *The Social Matter and the New Science of Curing*, for the furthering of the effects of the application of the principles of homeopathic medicine *vis naturare medicatrix*, which maintains that illness is a means by which nature tries to eradicate any disturbance or disorder that occurs in one's organism. Defined by Ângelo Jorge as a "naturalist novel", the thematic-compositional structure of *Irmânia* in fact outlines the model of a literary Utopia, or rather, of a Eutopia or positive Utopia – to strictly use the categories established by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent – i.e., of a representation of a society imagined by a author so as to be seen by a contemporary reader as being qualitatively better than the society in which they both find themselves historically (Claeys, Sargent, 1999: 1). The narrative scheme of the "positive Utopia" follows, as it happens, the classic model of the genre, made up of a triadic sequence of diegetic units: (i) the unexpected shipwreck of a certain character who may assume the role of narrator and has the function of being the representative of the known world; (ii) the providential rescue of the shipwrecked, who manages to reach an island and is taken in by the human community that lives there; (iii) as a visitor, the shipwrecked progressively gets to know the social system and philosophical principles that regulate a certain ideal of human sociability. As the third of these narrative units corresponds to the description and characterisation of a model of an ideal society, the particular way in which it is projected in *Irmânia* is determined by a

philosophy of a vegetarian and naturist diet, a form that may be subsumed in one of the structural paradigms of the spirit of Utopia, the Eutopian-pastoral. However, it must be emphasised, that though not benefiting from a dialogue with an explicit and intertextual tradition of the Utopian genre in Portuguese literature, Ângelo Jorge reproduced the classic scheme of the structural organisation of this literary form in his “petty work”. With a slight structural variation, however, in that the shipwrecked visitor, Manfredo, a kind of alter ego of Ângelo Jorge himself, is the one who carries out the main Utopian function, i.e., it is the discoverer of Utopia that plays the role of the ideologue of the new social order, as if his finding it had changed nothing, or very little, of the ideal design of the good society that he longed for. In other words, as if “the mysterious island” discovered was nothing more than a concrete projection of the ideal conscious will of the discoverer, or, inverting the subject-object relationship, as if the thing idealised had conformed to the standards of its idealiser.

Washed up on the sands of an “unknown island” (1912a: 13) with a “mild, temperate climate”, Manfredo becomes aware that it is inhabited by a “free and happy people” (12), who do not know either the restraints to the freedom of natural conduct nor the bitterness caused by egoistic passions. There is no political authority, no “supreme chief”, no institutions to mould the spontaneously generous character of the inhabitants and no other rules except those dictated by moral authority, an “intertwined communism and

individualism [...] communism regarding the common possession of the soil, individualism as regards to the fruit of personal toil" (47). Speaking a neo-Latin dialect that derived from the contact between the islanders' native language and an amalgamated Latin idiom brought by a former, venerable old shipwrecked sailor from the "old civilised world" (18), the people of this "unknown country of health and happiness" (19) owed the wise foundation of the principles that regulated the fraternal society of Irmânia to that ancient mariner.

The character of the shipwrecked Manfredo, in his role of propounding the virtues and marvels of the place visited, therefore carries out the narrative function that is usually attributed, in literary Utopias, to the host who is given the task of introducing the visitor to the ideal society. Thus, Manfredo doesn't undergo any ontological transformation, neither ideological conversion, neither initiation into the regulating code of an unknown social order: he limits himself to approving and confirming what he had already prefigured mentally. The themes of vegetarianism, individualistic communism, feminine emancipation and spirituality that are sequentially announced throughout the narrative and which define the Utopian representation of the "Irmanian" ["brotherness"] society always find their apologetic articulation in Manfredo's discourse. Ângelo Jorge's Utopian thought is made up of all these themes. Their narrative sequence seems to reproduce, on a fictional level, the author's ideological evolution

and, accordingly, the construction of this Utopia is presented as a simulacrum or analogy of the articulation of the aporias that we have pointed out in relation to his thinking.

The last aporia that we should like to point out is inferred in the final part of *Irmânia*. Despite having been written as an image symmetrically opposite to Ângelo Jorge's historical and contemporary society, as an antithesis of the "country of science and evil" (21), and having been ideally characterised as the "exact and rigorous" fulfilment of a "fourth superior kingdom of Nature, the Human Kingdom, within the omniscient Law of Eternal Good" (69), the insular society of Irmânia had to learn with Manfredo, the representative of the "Old, Enfeebled Civilisation". He not only encouraged the generalised teaching of the French language, because it was "used almost universally" (93), but also launched a programme of economic development and the diffusion of scientific knowledge. The last aporia is, therefore, the one that derives from the structural discontinuity between the narrative of the history of *Irmânia* and its conclusion, i.e., between the logic of a diegesis that has as its singular aim the positive representation of a statically perfect model of a society based on a frugal regime of harmonious communion with nature – the apologetic description of the island of Irmânia – and the outcome of this narrative that contradicts this model by admitting its transformation through a welcome given to a

logic represented by Manfredo's civilising teaching and action, relative to the idea of progress and with a prevailing trust in the merits of science.

These are aporias of a work and a Utopian narrative that express the recognition of the ambiguities and metamorphoses associated to the ideological, doctrinal and spiritual path of Ângelo Jorge, who, through his alter ego Manfredo, writes almost at the end of *Irmânia*: "In every point of view, in each statement, there is a judgement, in part truth in part error; to know how to take advantage of this and reject that and construct the Supreme Synthesis with everything, this is the immense task to be carried out, and it can only be done by an enlightened being, a soothsayer, a saint, a genius" (94). A Supreme Synthesis, therefore, that outlines an exceptional ontological fulfilment, its aim being a meta-Utopia to which the meaning of the complete work of this Utopist converges, aware that truth is neither univocal nor conceptual or axiomatically polarizable. This is a characteristic trait that stands out in his quasi-pedagogical book *Ginástica Mental das Crianças* (Children's Mental Gymnastics) when, discoursing on the categories of good and evil and in relation to books, he argued that **any** student between five and ten years of age should learn the following lesson of gnostic content: "Books are useful as fruitful sources of instruction for both the spirit and the heart; they provide us with most of our knowledge and pleasant relaxation, in close acquaintance with the best minds. But books are harmful if they have been written by ignorant or perverse men,

for they can transmit false ideas and pervert the heart of those deprived of strength to fight and divert evil” (1902: 119).