THREE MODERN SENSIBILITIES: MACHIAVELLI, SHAKESPEARE, AND MORE

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SUMMARY. The article is an attempt to map modern sensibilities and their emergence in early modernity. In doing so, the focus is on the great writers and thinkers of Renaissance and Baroque Europe: François Villon, Niccolò Machiavelli, Sir Thomas More, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and William Shakespeare, whose thoughts and works best reveal modern cultural categories and moral concepts we live by. Since literature often exposes politics both as an art of government and as a mechanics of power better than any sort of political theory or political science based analysis, we always benefit immensely from an interpretive framework within which we can interpret modern predicaments not as something uniquely novel, but, instead, as something that emerged along with the great works of philosophy and literature. Hence, this is another focus on European little stories and grand narratives as constituent parts of modern politics.

KEYWORDS: dystopia, modernity, literature, politics, power, sensibility, utopia.

EUROPEAN STORIES

To have a plausible political-historical narrative nowadays means to have viable politics, rather than policies masquerading as politics. Politics becomes impossible without a good story in the form of a convincing plot or an inspiring vision. The same applies to good literature. When we fail a method in our scholarship, or when a method fails us, we switch to a story – this sounds much in tune with Umberto Eco. Where scholarly language fails, fiction comes as a way out of the predicament with an interpretation of the world around us.

The funny thing is that politics does not work without our stories. This is to say that modern politics needs the humanities much more than politicians suspect.

1 The editors of this journal, Darbai ir dienos, received this essay in mid-September. This is most likely Leonidas Donskis’s last written work, in which he collected some fragments of texts published previously on the following websites: <ukrainianweek.com>; <http://new.civil.ge/clarion/news>; <www.homoeconomicus.org>; <www.civil.ge>.
Without travel accounts, humor, laughter, warning and moralizing, political concepts tend to become empty. With sound reason, therefore, Karl Marx once wittily noted that he learned much more about the nineteenth century’s political and economic life from Honoré de Balzac’s novels than from all economists of that time put together.

This is the reason why Shakespeare was far and away the most profound political thinker of Renaissance Europe. Niccolò Machiavelli’s works *Florentine Stories* and *Discourses on Livy* tell us much about his literary vocation and also about the talent of a storyteller – no less than do the exuberant comedies penned by Machiavelli, such as *The Mandragola*.

Do we tell each other European stories nowadays to enhance our powers of interpretation and association, and to reveal one another’s experiences, traumas, dreams, visions, and fears? We do not, alas. Instead, we have confined the entire European project merely to its economic and technical aspects. Stories laid the foundation for Giovanni Boccaccio’s masterpiece *Decameron*; nothing other than stories about human suffering, whatever their blood and creed, made Voltaire’s philosophical tales, such as *Candide, ou l’Optimisme* (Candide, or Optimism), truly European stories.

This reference as well as the human reality behind it crossed my mind almost immediately when I started teaching a course on politics and literature at the University of Bologna. The reason was quite simple: I had the entire fabric of Europe in my class, as the course was given within the East European studies program with the participation of students from Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, including such non-EU countries as Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

We easily surpassed and crossed the boundaries of academic performances and discussions, for what we had were human exchanges on newly discovered and shocking instances of moral blindness in classmates or neighbors, human dramas of high treason, moral treachery, disappointment, cowardice, cruelty, and loss of sensitivity. How can we miss the point talking past, or present to, each other, or listening to someone else’s drama, that it was Dante who coined the phrase “the cult of cruelty” and the English writer Rex Warner who forged the phrase “the cult of power” – political idioms that we use constantly without being aware of the fact that they are not straight out of the vocabulary of today.

Suffice it to recall that the real founding fathers of Europe, the Renaissance humanists Thomas More and Erasmus of Rotterdam became friends in Paris conjointly translating Lucian from Greek into Latin, and also connecting their friend, the German painter Hans Holbein the Younger, to the royal court of the king of England Henry VIII. All this while the great Flemish painter Quentin Matsys
saved for history the face of their friend in Antwerp, Peter Giles, whereas Hans Holbein the Younger immortalized the faces of his benefactor Thomas More and of Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Yet the bad news is that politics colonized culture nowadays, and this went unnoticed, albeit under our noses. This is not to say that culture is politically exploited and vulgarized for long-or short-term political ends and objectives. In a democratic political setting, culture is separate from politics. An instrumentalist approach to culture immediately betrays either technocratic disdain for the world of arts and letters or poorly concealed hostility to human worth and liberty. However, in our brave new world, the problem lies elsewhere.

We do not need the humanities anymore as a primary driving force behind our political and moral sensibilities. Instead, politicians try to keep academia as unsafe, uncertain, and insecure as possible – by reshaping or “reforming” it into a branch of the corporate world. By and large, this idea of the necessity politically to rationalize, change, reshape, refurbish, and renovate the academia is a simulacrum, in Jean Baudrillard’s terms. It conceals the fact that the political class and our bad policies are exactly what desperately need to be changed and reformed. Yet power speaks: if I do not change you, you will come to change me.

We stopped telling moving stories to each other. Instead, we nourish ourselves and the world around us with conspiracy theories (which are always about the big and powerful, instead of the small and humane); sensationalist stuff; and crime or horror stories. In doing so, we are at the peril of stepping away from our inmost European sensibilities, one of which has always been and continues to be the legitimacy of opposing narratives, attitudes, and memories. Human beings are incomplete without one another.

This is more than true with regard to Lithuania and Ukraine, or Lithuania and Poland. This applies to the EU too. Without each other’s cultures and stories we will never achieve good politics.

IS EUROPEAN CULTURE A FANTASY?

Is European culture a fantasy? Is it more or less so than European politics? These are the questions that cross my mind over and over again when I try to think of how to reverse the ongoing tragedy of the EU – namely, its silent and slow demise, which is a fact of reality, to my dismay.

European culture sometimes is dismissed as a fantasy or fiction inasmuch as it is argued that there is no such a phenomenon as an all-embracing and all-encompassing
European culture. Is this assumption correct? No, it is profoundly wrong, misplaced, and misguided. Only those who are out of touch with the cultural history of Europe can claim Europe to have never been an entity deeply permeated by a unifying and controlling principle, be it the legacy of classical antiquity and Judeo-Christian spiritual trajectories, or be it the a value-and-idea system that revolves around liberty and equality, these two heralds and promises of modernity.

Pyotr Chaadayev’s *Philosophical Letters* appear as a profound intellectual testimony to this truth. The Russian philosopher wrote with pain that his country never experienced the great dramas of modernity; nor did it have an historic opportunity to be molded by the greatest historical-cultural epochs of Europe, such as the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, or the Enlightenment. As Chaadayev argued, Russia had none of these. Therefore, European history did not speak to Russia the language of its great cravings for liberty, emancipation of the human soul, and individual self-fulfillment.

For Europe is more than merely an economic and political reality, according to Chaadayev. It is an idea, a religion, a dream, and a trajectory of the soul. In fact, modernity and freedom appear to Russia as something alien, imposed, emulated, or otherwise adopted from without; yet in Europe they became part of the psychology and even physiology of human individuals. Europe is inconceivable without a certain modern faith, which has become a brother to liberty, instead of a tool of oppression.

Such were the ideas for which poor Pyotr Chaadayev was pronounced a madman and confined to house arrest. Today they are on the agenda of every mediocre mainstream politician, instead of shaping, as once they did, the dissenting theory of an intellectual naysayer.

That European culture is a fantasy can be claimed only by those who have never grasped the fact that the foundations for the art of portrait in England were laid by a Fleming, Sir Anthony van Dyck; that the Flemish Primitives greatly influenced their peers in Venice and elsewhere in Italy; that Caravaggio was behind not only Rembrandt but the group of Caravaggisti in Utrecht as well; that Baroque music was an interplay of Italian, German, and French genius (think about Bach vis-à-vis Vivaldi or Italian opera composers vis-à-vis Handel); that the greatest Elizabethan dramatists in England were under the spell of Spanish literature coming from a political foe, the country they hated as a political archrival. The dialectic of politics and culture is just as much about Europe as is the dialectic of war and peace.

For me, the very symbol of Europe is the great Flemish Primitive Hugo van der Goes’ work of genius, *The Triptych of Tommaso Portinari*, which hangs at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. The head of the Medici bank branch in Bruges,
Tommaso Portinari, was a patron of Hugo van der Goes; his family also supported a German-born genius of Bruges, Hans Memling. This economic, political, esthetical, mental, and existential knot of Italian, Dutch, Flemish, French, and German genius from the Middle Ages onward reveals what I would call the Soul of Europe.

Europe starts where we fail to classify and categorize a human individual. Europe emerged repeatedly where Martin Buber, born in Vienna, who had his Austrian and German upbringing, and who spent much of his time in Lviv, adopted Eastern European sensibilities by committing himself to Hassidic tales and by converting spiritually to Ostjuden, that is, Eastern European Jews at whom German Jews used to look down as regrettable people. Europe emerges where we adopt a common destiny, and a silent and joint dedication to our history and political legacy.

Ironically, we fail to see that the only sphere where Europe as our common home became a fact of life, rather than a manifestation of wishful thinking, is education and culture. The future of Europe is unthinkable without the art of translation. It was with good reason that Milan Kundera made a joke about the role of the work of interpreters in the European Parliament: he clearly suggested that it was far more important for the future of the EU than the labor of members of the EP.

We will inexorably fail in our EU policies if we keep relegating literature, culture, and the art of translation to the margins of European life. If there is a chance that the EU can survive the twenty-first century as a club of democratic nations or even coalesce into a federal state able to blaze the trail for other nations seeking the rule of law and democracy, then this will occur only if we give justice to education and culture.

Most importantly, culture serves as an anticipation of a more equitable, fair, and coherent politics, achievable only by giving utopias, dystopias, social criticism in the form of humor and similar forms of dissent, moral imagination, and alternatives, which are pivotal for politics, their due. This is far from a detached and politically naïve wish; it is a matter of fact.

The EU failed where politics was unable to overcome national selfishness and disbelief in the European project. Yet the EU up to now was successful everywhere where it spoke the language of education, literature, and culture.

MACHIAVELLI AS A MODERN SENSIBILITY

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) seems to have been one of the most enigmatic and misunderstood thinkers and writers in Europe. Accepted or vilified, celebrated or rebuked by all, as François Villon would have had it, Machiavelli became a
litmus test case for nearly every epoch in European history. Much remains to be
done to reject numerous clichés and senseless accusations to fully understand and
appreciate his legacy as a humanist, historian, political thinker, and a prophet of
modern politics.

We have a good reason for that, as the year 2013 marked five hundred years
since Machiavelli wrote his controversial and grossly misinterpreted essay Il prin-
cipe (The Prince, 1513). This writing offers a full assortment of how to exercise
power: how to seize and consolidate it; how to get rid of your rivals; how to strike
the first pre-empting blow against high treason and conspiracy; and the like.
Although Machiavelli never and nowhere claimed to be an inventor of these strata-
gems, pointedly assuming the role of a humble historian and making references to
his predecessors and major influences, such as Cicero and Livy, and also describing
cruel and inhuman practices initiated by Philip II of Macedon or other Greek and
Spartan rulers, nothing helped.

Since Christopher Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta and William Shakespeare’s Henry
VI and Othello, where Machiavelli is depicted as an incarnation of the Devil (the
Devil called Machiavel in Marlowe, or sinister individuals such as Iago and Richard
III in Shakespeare), Machiavelli becomes just another name for evil. Sir Francis
Bacon admired him for showing us politics the way it is, instead of the way it ought
to be. Voltaire had mixed feelings about Machiavelli, an almost love-hate attitude,
admiring his anticlerical tirades yet scorning him for his overt cynicism and instru-
mentalism. Voltaire’s disciple in philosophy, Emperor Frederic II of Prussia, went
so far as to write the philosophical treatise Anti-Machiavelli.

German philosophy gave Machiavelli his second life, rehabilitating him as a
modern patriot and perceptive historian and writer: Herder and Hegel liked him,
while Marx thought of him as the father of modern politics. Count Vittorio Alfi-
eri, a confessed republican and freedom-loving Italian humanist, held him to be a
reference point and called him “Divino Machiavelli.” Every epoch and school of
thought was tempted to identity its own political and moral sensibilities through
extravagant praise or devastating criticism of Machiavelli.2

In fact, Machiavelli seems to have been one of the most frequently misunder-
stood thinkers. He was a republican. He detested monarchies. He admired the
Roman Republic and firmly believed that Cesar was its gravedigger. A passionate
opponent to ecclesiastical intrigues in politics, he was a uniquely incisive analyst
of his times who compared the power structure and authority in centralized and

2 For more on this issue, see Donskis L., Power and Imagination: Studies in Politics and Literature. New York:
Peter Lang, 2008.
strong monarchies, such as France and Spain, with a fragmented and weak Italy, an easy prey to French and Spanish domination.

_The Prince_ was a maneuver. Having served Piero Soderini, _il gonfaloniere_ of Florence, who was a rival and a foe of the almighty Medici family, Machiavelli became liable to suspicion of high treason after the Medicis recaptured power and made a victorious comeback to Florence. He was tried and tortured but escaped execution. Having witnessed the execution of Girolamo Savonarola in Piazza della Signoria, he knew quite well the options at hand.

It was only after his torture that Machiavelli extended a letter to the young ruler of Florence, Lorenzo Medici. It was not meant to be publicized, and was published in 1534, after Machiavelli's death. We know this letter as _The Prince_. Trying to show his competence and powers of counsel to the ruler, as if to say that it is always worth giving a chance to an historian who knows the best how power works and what we can expect from the human race, he departs from that kind of impartial historian that we see in _Discourses on Livy_ or _Florentine Stories_ or _The Art of War_.

Here comes Machiavelli as a prototype of an intellectual in politics. He knows that the city he loves can only get a chance if the ruler will apply civilized politics. However, the question arises as to how to remain faithful to the republican values and humanism if you are in a slaughterhouse where the only thing that matters is how to stay alive and not to be butchered. The duality of human situation becomes the thread of the story that permeates Machiavelli’s political existentialism: out of vulnerability, you have to rely solely on the beast who has a vision, a dream, a project, and who can defeat other beasts of prey that do not have anything save their hunger for power and cruelty.

When asked about the emergence of a character we would describe now as intellectual, we would be tempted to refer to the French Enlightenment, hardly a misleading move. Yet the birth of the intellectual in politics, an individual able to bridge the world of ideas and the world of public affairs, by no means points the finger to the genesis of liberalism. For our modern sensibilities, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Thomas More, and Machiavelli would be anything but liberals. They were humanists, men of letters, devout readers of classics and of Fathers of the Church. Machiavelli was less so, as his was a strikingly pagan perspective on public morality and politics.

_The Prince_ comes a piece of passionate patriotism and neglected, if not forgotten, ability to explain the present by evoking the past. Machiavelli appears as an early conservative intellectual with much disdain for the present with its corruption, greed, cynicism, and power games. At the beginning of the twenty-first
century, we are likely to live in the world where successful exercise of power, be it plausible violence or good economic performance, increasingly becomes a license to abandon individual freedom, civil liberties, and human rights. Alas, no social networking, mass education, or emerging global sensibilities, can alter this logic of things.

From the epoch of Niccolò Machiavelli onwards a quiet revolution has taken place in the process of becoming a personality. If the criterion and definition of truth given, among others, by Thomas Aquinas (the correspondence of a thing to the intellect: *adaequatio rei et intellectus*) was still operative in science and philosophy, it undoubtedly ceased to hold in practical life and politics where it was no longer believed that power derived from God and that politics is intrinsically an abode of virtue and a form of wisdom.

The modern revolution engineered by Machiavelli’s political thought is best embodied in his concept of *verità effettuale* (efficacious truth), whereby truth becomes practice – in fact, practical action. Truth in politics is reached by the person who generates action and achieves results, but not by the person who defines, articulates, and questions, in the light of virtue, or examines, in the context of the classical canon, that action and those results. This is to say that truth is success, and, conversely, success is truth.

The politician who creates an enduring practice, who transforms an idea into an action, and who institutionalizes that idea is the one who has truth on his side. How he does all that is of secondary importance. Not a goal that justifies means, but an actor who wedges his skeptics and critics from all periods and from a variety of cultures into the same form of politics and life comes to be considered right, historical, and immortal.

Truth is that which stays in memory, while failure is condemned to die and to be stigmatized as fiasco and shame. Survival at the cost of virtue and higher morality sounds forth as an early voice of the modern world; only later will that voice be caricatured by Social Darwinists and racists as the symbolic center of the struggle to survive.

The tyrant who has centralized the state and liquidated his opponents becomes father of his nation, but a despot who has tried to do the same but has lost out or has failed to reach all his goals earns universal scorn and is actively forgotten. Forces that have successfully executed a coup d’état or revolution become heroic insurrectionists against reactionary, morally bankrupt institutions, but if they are unsuccessful they become mere conspirators or rioters.

Shame and stigma attach not to a refusal of virtue, to an embrace of wickedness, or to an active choice of evil, but to a loss of power, to an inability to hold on to
it, or to suffering defeat. Power is honored, but utter powerlessness or even just weakness does not deserve a philosophical conception of its own or any kind of sympathy. In this paradigm, sympathy and compassion are due only to those who do not participate in the sphere of power. But if you are in it, it is either success that awaits you, or else death and disappearance. Death can be a simple forgetting: they are the same.

That is why in this paradigm of modern instrumentalist treachery is easily justified: if it ends in the retention or enlargement of power, it is easy to position it as a painful sacrifice in the name of the state or as a big and common purpose or ideal. But if the treachery ends in failure and the conspirators suffer a fiasco, then with help from symbolic authority and the state machinery it is securely placed in the exalted category of supreme disloyalty to the state – high treason.

If the conspiracy went well and the head of state or of the institution is liquidated or at least compromised, then the conspirators become patriots and statesmen; but if the old system prevails and sweeps up all those that organized the conspiracy, the latter are not only destroyed but left to history as traitors and persons incapable of loyalty, i.e., as weaklings all around.

Finally, there is also a metaphysics of treachery: it can be explained as disappointment with former friends, partners, companions-in-arms, and ideals, but that doesn't change the heart of the matter. A treachery interpreting itself this way sounds like a naive hostage to self-suggested disappointment and to the discovery of a new world, but its deep causes lie somewhere else.

In our days treachery has become the chance, the fortune, and the practice of the so-called situational man, a pragmatist and instrumentalist torn from his human essence and isolated from, and by, other people. As is well known, remorse and guilt today have become political commodities in games of public communication, just as carefully dosed-out hatred has. Perhaps infidelity has become not so much an article of trade as an element of instrumental reason and situational virtue. In a world of intermittent human ties and of inflated words and vows, faithlessness no longer shocks. When fidelity ceases to be at the center of our personality and a force that integrates all of a human being’s identity, then treachery becomes a situational “norm” and “virtue.”

What happens to politics? It becomes a haven for people of a situational – or a mobile, as Erich Fromm called it – truth. It easily lends itself to adventure-seekers, criminals, and crooks of various shades. The winner takes all, just as elsewhere in our increasingly competitive and instrumentalist world.
SHAKESPEARE AS A MODERN SENSIBILITY

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is likely to have become a modern sensibility. Like Niccolò Machiavelli or his own contemporary and significant other, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare seems to have been developed into a modern moral and political sensibility, a criterion of modernity, and even a symbolic design within which we perceive and interpret ourselves and the world around us.

We cannot bypass Shakespeare when we encounter the problem of evil, both in its classical forms and in its modern incarnations. The psychogenesis and sociogenesis of modern feelings and sentiments, namely, love, and friendship, as opposed to traditional forms of our grasp of the world and of human powers of association, is also inseparable from Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays. It is with sound reason, then, that such modern sensitivities as loyalty, intimacy, and privacy are tested and closely observed in the political world of Elizabethan dramatists.3

Shakespeare appears not only as a miracle of his time; he comes to us as a mystery and as a pivotal test of our sensitivities. Whether he existed and whether he wrote his plays and sonnets is a secondary issue in the face of the miracle of his profoundly modern perception of human reality whose embodiment and symbol he has become. The quarrel over the definite and final stroke of brushwork as to whether it was executed by Rubens or his entourage, Rembrandt or Ferdinand Bol or Aert de Gelder, is as senseless and meaningless as the ink spilled in the debates on whether William Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon wrote his immortal plays. The miracle of Shakespeare has little if any to do with who exactly Shakespeare was.

The way Shakespeare was perceived by Goethe and Schiller tells us something of critical importance about the clash of modern sensibilities in the epoch of Friedrich the Great and the Sturm und Drang movement when the principles of Bildung and Kultur prevail over that of Zivilisation in an epoch where social and moral sensibilities are shaped by the conflict of semi-feudal and modern approaches to the world.

The way in which Shakespeare was interpreted by Leo Tolstoy tells us something of critical importance about the encounter of opposing modes of critical discourse or Eastern and Western European hermeneutics, especially in interpreting modernity. At the same time, the way in which Shakespeare was perceived by Sigmund

Freud tells us something disturbing and crucial about a problem that Shakespeare poses for a modern world, which no matter how egalitarian is tinged with some elitist interpretations.

Far exceeding the boundaries of Renaissance perceptions of reality, Shakespeare offers in *Hamlet* not only *la mente audace* ideal as key to the brave mind of a modern hero who thinks and acts simultaneously or who comes to bridge thought and action; Shakespeare also appears with a strikingly modern idea that the will to misunderstand the world around us lives side by side with the will to understand it; that religious and erotic feelings can roll into one; that there is something deeply erotic about power and powerful about intimacy; that we tend to speak the unspeakable and to think the unthinkable; that we choose to be deceived or to deceive ourselves, as the truth is unbearable for us. In this, Shakespeare precedes and anticipates Freud.

As in *Hamlet*, the emergence of the individual can signify the marriage of thought and action. This ideal of the brave mind put forward by Renaissance humanists is obvious in Hamlet’s ability to outsmart and get rid of his treacherous friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Yet the arrival of the modern individual may signify the reverse tendency, the divorce of thought and action, which is the case with Hamlet and which becomes the reason for his defeat – albeit political rather than moral – and death.

In many cases, Shakespeare sounds uniquely modern. He is a contemporary in terms of his powers of anticipation of human dramas, political and existential. Suffice it to recall, for instance, that *Othello* signified, among other things, a new kind of fear over success, in Italy and England, of some strikingly different individuals from remote countries and societies to realize how similar the worries and anxieties of Shakespeare’s epoch could have been to those of our time.

The fear of the Other capable of becoming one of us appears to have been with modernity from its inception, which powerfully reminds us of identity dramas in nineteenth century Europe. It paves the way for the bright individuals who treat their biographies like works of art inventing their personae and miraculously adapting to societies that had long been hostile to them. In Othello and Shylock, there is something that strikingly anticipates the emergence of such heroes of modernity as Benjamin Disraeli and Karl Marx, to recall Isaiah Berlin’s masterpiece essay on two modes of Jewish identity as best embodied by Disraeli and Marx.4

Shakespeare understood better than any other poet and playwright that the choice between a friend and an institution/established practice can be as dramatic

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as that between a lover and a clan. Albert Camus once noted that he respects justice, yet would be willing to protect his mother from it. Didn’t Shakespeare come up with that same painful dilemma portraying Prince of Verona Escalus as bound to choose between his kinsman Mercutio’s friend Romeo, who avenges the death of his cousin, and the law and order of Verona?

Aren’t we in these shoes each time when it comes to choose between incompetent state with its flawed judicial system and a courageous and virtuous individual who breaks the law?

MORE AS A MODERN SENSIBILITY

The aforementioned Niccolò Machiavelli, the quintcentenary of whose Discourses on Livy will be celebrated in 2017 as a great event in European history of political ideas (the treatise was written around 1517), is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern political thought, and rightly so. Yet the same could be said about one more colossal figure of the Renaissance, Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), whose Utopia was celebrated in 2016 for its quintcentenary – it was published in 1516.

As mentioned, Machiavellism has become a pejorative term adding quite a few undeserved semantic nuances to the adjective “Machiavellian” and allowing room for viewing Machiavelli as a sinister figure. Curiously, something similar happened to the concept of utopia and utopianism, which began signifying a modern form of evil with its dismissal of individual freedom and full embrace of global social engineering.

Utopia appears to have been one of the most mysterious and enigmatic works of literature and politics in modern history. A social satire and a political pamphlet disguised as a travel story, it emerged as a work of a conservative writer and thinker who was far from offering a revolution as a road to justice and wellbeing.

Yet the storyteller Raphael Hythloday did not see only bad things in England, such as ineffective royal counselors and selfish politicians on a war-footing with neighboring countries, but good things too. The most important good thing was his having seen a person of exceptional wisdom – the Archbishop John Morton. Therefore, More was able, through the lips of the fictitious Portuguese sailor, to immortalize his good friend and benefactor.

The storyteller gradually exposes a complex character of what he takes as a perfect place. Hythloday describes a magnificent island he has visited which is as different from England and all other lands he has been to as night and day.
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Hythloday’s account does not trigger the fondest of memories for those readers who have had the occasion to live in a totalitarian state. However, when it comes to the island of Utopia, some excerpts from More’s Utopia may come to us as a shock or at least as something that disturbs our modern sensibilities. The book may therefore be grasped now either as a social satire or as a somber anticipation of totalitarian society.

One of the most shocking discoveries is that privacy is a dishonorable thing in Utopia. Only public life is encouraged to prevent anyone from hatching plots against the government. Dining takes place en masse. Travel abroad is only possible when accompanied by older clan and tribe bureaucrats known as Syphogrants, or members of higher categories known as Philarchs and Tranibors. Everyone is required to work, but the most onerous tasks are performed by slaves, who are dangerous foreigners and prisoners of war. Utopia is the complete opposite of thoroughly commercialized England. It is an ancient polis reminiscent of an agricultural community living in the premodern phase.

Dualities permeate Utopia. For example, we do not learn in the end if More’s utopia is “nowhere” (υ + τόπος), or “the best place” (ευ + τόπος). More uses a Latin equivalent of utopia, Nusquama (Nowhereland), but hints of the Greek superlative (ευ) also appear in the text. This form of modern ambivalence is a genial allusion by More to the dual nature of modern life.

We would never know whether some of the most surprising novelties were regarded by More as possible modern follies or as mental experiments whose idea was that anything is possible in the world if it abandons the canon, wisdom, and learning. Take the ordination of women who can serve as priestesses in a rather tolerant, diverse, and multi-religious Utopia, or the euthanasia described as an established and wise practice in Utopia. Are we to believe that a pious Roman Catholic, who refused to give the oath to Henry VIII as the Head of the Church of England, who remained faithful to the Pope and the Catholic Church, who was beheaded in 1535 with the final words said on the scaffold, “the King’s good servant, but God’s First,” and who was proclaimed by the Church, in 1935, Saint Thomas More, was endorsing the ordination of women and the practice of euthanasia?

Or was he sending a message that what appears as vice and folly to us will be regarded as virtue and wisdom in the future? Was it the smile of a great fan of Lucian, the laughter of a wise humanist, or was it his courage to admit that the human world and its politics were much too complex to judge them by Plato’s Republic? Yet in the twentieth century utopianism began signifying radical evil and global social engineering. Nikolai Berdyaev, whose words of warning were used as the motto in Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, wrote that we have to protect
humanity from continuing to turn utopias into reality, as utopias turned out to be no more and no less than realizable nightmares.

In fact, few things are more discredited than utopias and utopianism. Since Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and George Orwell’s *1984*, dystopia has become a form of wisdom dismissing utopia as an evil form of our detachment from reality and flesh-and-blood humanity. Paradoxically, we have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. By abandoning utopia, we have abandoned the idea of a good and just society. As Zygmunt Bauman suggests, utopia was privatized in modern society to become the individual’s success story.5

The question arises, What happened to social and political dreams? Are they abandoned as dangerous follies? And what happened to the entire critical enterprise? How do we maintain social criticism without at least some components of an alternative to which our dreams point and whose glimmer they contain? In the nineteenth century, people believed in Progress and History in the way we believe in free markets now. In the first half of the twentieth century, radical political views and ideological passions led quite a few thinkers and visionaries to believe in the historical inevitability of socialism (or communism). They firmly believed that there was no alternative.

It is a great irony of history that this phrase was coined by Margaret Thatcher as if to say that there is no alternative to neoliberalism – namely, that the free market, free trade, and capitalist globalization are more than the best of all possible worlds (to paraphrase Voltaire’s Dr. Pangloss); nay, TINA (there is no alternative) became the banner of the twenty-first century indicating that there is no reality outside the free market, individualization, deregulation, and dissemination.

And this is the real death of utopia.

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5 For more on this issue, see Bauman Z. and Donskis L. *Liquid Evil: Living with TINA*. Cambridge: Polity, 2016.
Leonidas Donskis

TRYS MODERNIEJI JAUTRUMAI: MACHIAVELLIS, SHAKESPEARE’AS IR MORE’AS

SANTRAUKA. Šis straipsnis yra mėginimas nubraižyti moderniųjų jautrumo formų ir jų iškilimo žemėlapį modernybės pradžioje. Dėmesys telkiamas į didžiuosius Renesanso ir Baroko rašytojus bei mąstytojus – François Villoną, Niccolò’ą Machiavellį, serą Thomą More’ą, Erazmą Roterdamietį ir Williamą Shakespeare’ą, šių kūrybių mintys ir darbai geriausiai atveria tas moderniųjų kultūrines kategorijas ir moralines sąvokas, kuriomis mes gyvename. Kadangi literatūra dažnai nuima kaukę nuo politikos, kaip nuo valdymo meno ir sykiu kaip nuo galios mechanikos, geriau nei tai padaro bet kokia politinė teorija ar politologinė analizė, mes visada esminiai praturtėjame iš interpretacinės struktūros, kuriuose galime aiškintis modernišias įtampas ne kaip kažkai unikalą naują, o kaip kažkai, kas iškilo kartu su didžiaisiais filosofijos ir literatūros darbais. Iš čia ir kitas dėmesio laukas – Europos mažosios istorijos ir didieji naratyvai kaip moderniosios politikos sandai.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: distopija, galia, jautrumas, modernybė, literatūra, politika, utopija.