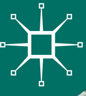

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN UTOPIANISM

Ludovico Agostini's 'Imaginary Republic'

Utopia in the Italian Renaissance

Antonio Donato

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Palgrave Studies in Utopianism

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Utopianism is an interdisciplinary concept which covers philosophy, sociology, literature, history of ideas, art and architecture, religion, futurology and other fields. While literary utopianism is usually dated from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), communitarian movements and ideologies proposing utopian ends have existed in most societies through history. They imagine varied ideal beginnings of the species, like golden ages or paradises, potential futures akin to the millennium, and also ways of attaining similar states within real time. Utopianism, in the sense of striving for a much improved world, is also present in many trends in contemporary popular movements, and in phenomena as diverse as films, video games, environmental and medical projections. Increasingly utopia shares the limelight with dystopia, its negative inversion, and with projections of the degeneration of humanity and nature alike. This series will aim to publish the best new scholarship across these varied fields. It will focus on original studies of interest to a broad readership, including, but not limited to, historical and theoretical narratives as well as accounts of contemporary utopian thought, interpretation and action.

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Translator's Note

The present translation is based largely on a manuscript edited by Luigi Firpo in 1957, which is the only complete edition of the *Imaginary Republic*. We depart from Firpo's text in only a few instances. In some cases, we follow the partial 1941 edition by Carlo Curcio; in others, we propose changes of our own. We explain our motivations in modifying Firpo's text in the notes to the translation.

This translation is aimed at rendering the text as readable as possible while remaining, nonetheless, true to the original. Although we did not deviate too radically from Agostini's text—with the purpose of making it 'sound' modern—neither did we use archaic syntax and diction to give the text a Renaissance 'feel.' We do not subscribe to the convictions of extremely literalist translators who think that when the original language is laborious and obscure, the translation should also be. Instead, we believe in the value of making the text accessible without betraying the original. Accuracy and readability can be combined in various ways, yet a translator's choices are never without consequences. A brief overview of the challenges posed in translating the *Imaginary Republic* and our ways of meeting them will allow the reader to understand the criteria guiding this translation. Some such challenges are common to other texts written by sixteenth-century Italian humanists; others are specific to Agostini.

By the sixteenth century, humanists had been employing Italian in their treatises for a while, yet their prose remained dependent on the classical Latin in which they had been trained. This Latin influence is most evident in Italian humanists' preference for very long sentences replete with dependent clauses characteristic of Ciceronian Latin, and Agostini is no exception. We attempted to make his intricate prose more accessible by dividing his lengthy sentences into shorter and more readable ones, and we often modified the order of some dependent clauses to improve readability. While making our prose more readable, we also tried to convey the 'interconnectedness' of different ideas that Agostini emphasises by utilising long sentences. His use of lengthy sentences seems motivated by the conviction that a long sentence with several

subordinates is more effective than several short sentences in making apparent how a particular idea is an extension or an elaboration of a previous thought. Admittedly, Agostini's long, hypothetically structured sentences are well suited to expounding complex, interconnected arguments; however, maintaining them would have made the prose exceedingly laboured. Thus, in our translation, we sought to remain true to the effect of interconnectedness between the ideas Agostini intended to reach by using long sentences creating a certain 'flow' between the various short sentences into which we broke his longer ones. A further recurrent trait of Agostini's prose, which he shared with other Italian Renaissance humanists, is the extensive use of pronouns, as opposed to nouns, a practice that often makes it difficult to identify the idea or person to which he is referring. We addressed this issue by reporting the nouns whenever confusion may arise. When considering Agostini's prose, we should also keep in mind that the type of Italian he used gave him access to an array of rhetorical tools—e.g. double negatives, appositives, antitheses, correlatives, parallelisms—that would have made our translation cumbersome if they had to be rendered literally. For the sake of clarity, we chose a more direct prose that, unfortunately, cannot fully capture the distinctiveness of his style.

In addition to the challenges posed by the features in Agostini's prose common to other Italian Renaissance humanists, there are some peculiar to the *Imaginary Republic*. One is the extensive use of Classical and Biblical quotations he often reports inaccurately, possibly because he quoted such passages from memory. In the notes to the translation, we warn the reader in those cases in which we corrected the quotations. A related difficulty posed by his frequent quotations, which are often interjected within a sentence, is that they break the rhythm of his prose. We tried to prevent this problem by translating them quite freely so that they fit more easily with the surrounding sentence. A peculiarity of Agostini—when compared to other Italian Renaissance utopists, with the exception only of Doni—is the occasional use of colloquial language within otherwise sombre prose. We have attempted to maintain the colloquial flavour of those passages since, we think, this mixing of high and low style is a surprising aspect of his prose, one overlooked by scholars, that deserves to be conveyed. One last noteworthy trait of Agostini's prose is that, at times, he leaves out words that are essential to the understanding of a sentence. We tackle this issue by occasionally adding words (placing them in square brackets) not present in the original Italian. However, our interventions are sparse; we insert words only in those cases where it would have been impossible to make the text intelligible.

Translating Agostini's technical vocabulary requires particular caution. In our translation, we have tried to be as sensitive as possible to the cultural distance between sixteenth-century Italy and ourselves. In general, we have avoided expressions that would sound too modern but without, at the same time, employing archaic expressions. We used special care with technical words that assume a worldview different from ours. Thus, in some cases, we could not adopt a literal translation that would have projected onto the text ideas foreign

to it. For example, translating the term *scienza* (and its cognates) as 'science' would have been misleading, as our notion of science is the product of the scientific revolution and did not exist in Agostini's time. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, *scienza*, which derived from the Latin *scientia*, referred to the type of abstract, theoretical knowledge one would attain when studying disciplines such as metaphysics. Thus, we followed the convention of Medieval and Renaissance scholars in translating *scienza* as 'knowledge.' In some cases, we faced the challenge of translating terms that in Renaissance Italian convey a cluster of related meanings and for which there is no corresponding English term with an equally broad semantic spectrum. For example, Agostini uses the term *forma* to mean 'constitution,' 'order,' 'organisation,' and 'role.' In these cases, we translated the term in different ways depending on the context and explained the rationale for our choice in the notes. A final peculiarity of Agostini's vocabulary is the use of uncommon words that even the editors (Curcio and Firpo) had problems understanding—as in the case of the term *antidotale*. An examination of Agostini's intellectual context allowed us to shed light on these otherwise mysterious terms; the notes to the translation present our findings.

The text we translate reports most of what Firpo edited under the title *Imaginary Republic*. However, on very few occasions, we skipped some portions of the text. Agostini's text is not a straightforward utopia; the *Imaginary Republic* contains, together with its depiction of the ideal society, investigations as different as theological discussions and examinations of ecclesiastical practices. We decided to omit those sections that we consider digressions that do not contribute to the account of the utopian society. The notes to the translation identify the portions of the text we left out and discuss the motivations for our choices.

Finally, translation reports in brackets the corresponding pages of the manuscripts of the *Imaginary Republic*. We use these references when referring to specific sections of the text.

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Abbreviations

COS	*The City of Sun*
EG	*Exclamations to God*
HC	*The Happy City*
IR	*The Imaginary Republic*
PG	*The Praise of Garamanti*
RA	*The Republic of Bees*
RE	*The Republic of Evandria*
RR	*The Royal Republic*
WCW	*Wise and Crazy World*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Imaginary Republic (*IR*) is the title modern scholars give to the last section of a dialogue by Ludovico Agostini titled *The Infinite* (*L'Infinto*), which was composed in the late 1580s. Though it is part of a larger work, the *IR* is a self-contained piece that is, for the most part, a depiction of a utopian society. It survives in only one manuscript housed at the Biblioteca Oliveriana of Pesaro, in the Italian region of Marche, where it lay forgotten until 1941. After centuries of obscurity, the text was rediscovered and edited first in part by Curcio and then in full by Firpo (1957). The latter also published a book-length study on Agostini's life and thought.[1] Ironically, the scholars who saved the *IR* from oblivion were also the ones who relegated it to the lot of minor works. Curcio and Firpo agree in their assessment of the *IR* and their verdict is quite unfavourable. From a literary perspective, they find the *IR* baroque and lacking a clear organisation. Theoretically, they regard it as unoriginal. In their view, the *IR*'s sole merit is that it is the only utopia which rigorously articulates the ethical and social principles of the Counter-Reformation.[2] In short, Curcio and Firpo consider the *IR* to be historically significant but not to have any literary or philosophical relevance. Scholars of utopianism have acritically adopted this reading and thus reinforced the idea that the *IR* is a work of limited value.[3]

It is therefore normal to wonder about the merits of dedicating an entire book to the *IR*. One of the main reasons for doing so is that a careful reading of the *IR* reveals that it is a hidden gem, scholarly opinion notwithstanding. However, its significance only emerges when it is investigated in light of its historical and cultural context. Today, we are in a much better position to contextualise the *IR* and recognise its originality than Curcio and Firpo were over sixty years ago. Recent studies on the traits of the literary genre of the dialogue in Renaissance literature and, more specifically, in Renaissance utopias, make it easier for us to appreciate the sophistication and originality of Agostini's use of this genre.[4] Similarly, the many works on Renaissance commerce, economy,

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finance, medicine, and law published in the last fifty years allow us to realise that what seemed to Curcio and Firpo commonplace remarks and arbitrary views are, instead, thoughtful responses to ideas widely discussed in Agostini's time.[5] These studies also provide us the tools needed to recognise that sections of the *IR* that Firpo consider pointless digressions are, in fact, attempts to address critical issues in sixteenth-century Italy.[6] Moreover, our improved knowledge of Renaissance utopias—and utopianism in general—permits us to detect more easily the original features of Agostini's utopianism that Curcio and Firpo had difficulty recognising.

A further reason to study the *IR* is that it is an excellent example of an intellectual tradition that has gone largely unnoticed in the scholarship: Italian Renaissance utopianism.[7] Most accounts of Italian Renaissance political thought—from Baron to Skinner—overlook utopias.[8] These studies do not relegate utopianism to the margin of political discourse but ignore it altogether. Skinner's influential picture of Italian Renaissance political thought makes no space for utopianism. In his view, the Italian Renaissance was characterised by two approaches to political philosophy. The first was rhetorical and moral. In the fourteenth century, this tradition was mostly concerned with exploring the qualities of the ideal ruler, and its representatives conveyed their views predominantly through mirrors for the princes and historical treatises. In the fifteenth century, this tradition morphed and developed into "civic humanism." The second approach was advanced by the scholastics who primarily studied the traits of political constitutions. These two political traditions, Skinner argues, took up the entire conceptual landscape of the Italian Renaissance but remained essentially distinct and did not converge in significant ways.

Though only a few utopias were written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they still represent a noteworthy contribution to Italian Renaissance political thought. One of their peculiarities is that they attracted the attention of all kinds of authors. Imagining an ideal society became a way of pondering about political issues shared by thinkers that had otherwise little in common. Utopianism cut across the boundaries between the rhetorical and scholastic camps and created a common ground between these traditions that common ground between these traditions had not significantly interacted with one another. Some utopists were civic humanists (e.g., Brucioli, Patrizi), while others were influenced by the Thomism (e.g., Agostini, Campanella). In the sixteenth century, some utopists were court-intellectuals (e.g., Albergati, Zuccolo) whose direct political experiences served as the foundations of their ideas of a perfect society. However, utopists were not only political theorists. Some were exquisite humanists, such as Giovanni Bonifacio, whose utopia is a cento that stitches together one hundred quotations from Virgil's *Georgics*. Others (e.g., Doni) were *poligrafi*, moderately educated writers who survived by publishing books on the most diverse topics. The variety of the utopists' intellectual makeup was also reflected in their intended audiences. Some wrote for rulers (Albergati, Bonifacio, Patrizi), some for the intellectual elites (e.g., Agostini, Brucioli, Zuccolo), and others for less-educated readers (Doni). Because of the

diversity in the intellectual identity of their authors and intended readers, utopias dealt with a great number of topics and so broadened the scope of the political debate by, among other things, including often neglected perspectives. For example, Doni's utopia could, because of its popular appeal, give voice to the less fortunate. Similarly, Agostini's life-long concern for the conditions of the poor made its way into his utopia and brought to the fore often ignored social problems.

However, utopias not only reached a larger audience than other types of texts in Renaissance political philosophy and introduced new concerns; they also explored a new conceptual approach to political problems. The scholastic tradition was mostly philosophical and took advantage of the power of abstract arguments. Civic humanists relied primarily on the insights offered by history—the interpretation of historical events and reflection on the political models of the past were the humanists' favourite tools. Although Italian Renaissance utopists employed both of these methods, their primary instrument was imagination, which they employed in a specific way. For the most part, they did not abandon themselves to flights of fancy but constrained their imagination by concentrating on reimagining the institutions of their age. Italian Renaissance utopists differed quite sharply from later ones due to their "realism." They devised institutions and lifestyles that did not (and often could not) exist, but were grounded in what they knew and did not depart too much from the realities of their time.[9] This "restraint" use of imagination allowed Italian Renaissance utopists to attain a peculiar mix of idealism and realism, which, in turn, permitted them to develop political philosophy in a way that other thinkers could not. Their creative approach gave them the freedom to entertain possibilities that the study of history and the rigour of philosophy did not allow for and develop innovative solutions to current issues others could not envision. Yet, the efficacy of the utopists' approach crucially depended on them carefully constraining their imagination.

A further factor makes the utopists' contribution to Italian political philosophy rather unique: the attention to everyday implications of social and political institutions. While civic humanists and the scholastics theorised about political and social institutions at a rather abstract level, utopists could never neglect the impact of such institutions on daily life since they described what it meant to live in the societies they imagined. They discussed the constitutions and laws of their ideal societies, yet much of their energy went into describing the ordinary lives of the citizens living there. In other words, utopias explored the everyday effects certain social and political institutions could have on people—a concern absent among other political thinkers.

Italian Renaissance utopists differed in yet another critical respect from the political theorists of the time: they enjoyed a much greater degree of freedom from traditional ways of thinking. During the Italian Renaissance, utopianism was not a crystallised tradition bound by specific political values and methodologies. It was rather a literary genre with virtually no fixed rules. The only trait utopists shared was the exercise of imagining a fictional society. Yet, they went

about it in very personal ways.[10] The utopists' intellectual freedom permitted them to entertain not only extreme views (e.g., communism) that they knew had no chance of being realised, but also to move along the political spectrum by adopting revolutionary ideas as well as conservative ones, often within the same work. The literary device of imagining a society also allowed Italian Renaissance utopists to combine views belonging to radically different traditions. They often borrowed ideas from sources as diverse as ancient thinkers, Arcadian romances, Machiavelli, Thomas More, and the monastic tradition.

A final element to consider is that utopists dramatically changed the method of Italian Renaissance political thought. Typically, civic humanists and scholastics limited themselves to discussing the political and social structures of a state. In contrast, since the utopists had to envisage a whole society in rather detailed ways, they had to address virtually all of its aspects, including agriculture, commerce, healthcare, finance, urban planning, etc. Though they were not experts in these fields, they were knowledgeable enough to devise policies informed by the newest findings in these areas. They thus adopted what today would be called an "interdisciplinary" approach. The utopists' method implicitly indicated that political thinkers needed to broaden their horizons and address all main areas of citizens' lives by taking into account what other disciplines had to teach them. For Italian Renaissance utopists, politics had the role of "directing" the various fields necessary to make citizens' lives comfortable and fruitful—a notion that curiously resembles Aristotle's ideal of politics as the "architectonical" science.

In short, utopianism brought into the Italian Renaissance a radically different form of political thought that challenged the methods and ideas previous thinkers had adopted. Determining the impact of utopianism on Italian Renaissance political thought would require a separate study. At this stage, it is sufficient to note that Italian Renaissance utopianism represents a significant tradition epitomising the richness and complexity of the intellectual debate of the time. Ignoring it would mean not only overlooking an important development of Italian Renaissance culture but, more crucially, failing to consider a thought-provoking way to address political issues and conduct political philosophy.

In this book, we explore Italian Renaissance utopianism by offering a comprehensive study—including introductory essays, a translation, and notes on the translation—of Agostini's *IR*. Approaching the analysis of Italian Renaissance utopianism via a case study presents a distinct advantage, as it offers a direct and up-close illustration of the features of this intellectual tradition. The *IR* is an ideal text for this type of investigation since it is the lengthiest and most comprehensive of the Italian Renaissance utopias. Nearly all the main traits of an ideal society are examined in Agostini's work. Moreover, the *IR* effectively illustrates the originality of Italian Renaissance utopianism vis-à-vis other European traditions. It is commonly assumed that Italian utopianism is derivative from the English tradition and its development is a consequence of the arrival in Italy of Thomas More's *Utopia*.[11] However, the *IR*—and other

Italian utopias—tells us a different story. Agostini's utopia uses Plato's *Laws* as its primary model and bears little trace of More's *Utopia*. The *IR* thus shows that Italy had its own utopian tradition dependent on Classical thinkers, which maintained its identity even when it interacted with *Utopia*.

However, the *IR* is a text worth examining in its own right and not only as a representative example of Italian Renaissance utopianism. From the literary point of view, it stands out as an original dialogue that breaks with the literary conventions typical of the genre during the Renaissance. The characters have peculiar identities and their interaction defies the norms of Renaissance dialogues. Agostini further departs from his contemporaries by regarding the literary genre of the dialogue as a form of "spiritual exercise," adopting the perspective of some Classical thinkers and Petrarch.[12] The *IR* is also significant theoretically since it develops an original way of conceptualising utopianism. For Agostini, utopianism is not yet another way of conducting political thought, but an inevitable dimension of *any* political discourse. In other words, he argues that any form of political investigation has an essential utopian dimension and inevitably ends up engaging in some form of utopian thinking.

This book departs from the prevalent manner of studying Renaissance utopias. In this field, scholarly contributions are mostly monographs; this format is ideal for tracing a synthetic picture of several utopias, but less suitable for in-depth historical, literary, and philosophical investigations.[13] In this scholarly approach, the textual intricacies of Renaissance utopias often go unnoticed. Moreover, current studies tend to reduce utopias to rather broad categories of texts sharing specific traits and fail to sufficiently examine the specificity of each work. This book aims to address these shortcomings. Although the initial four chapters will still provide an overview of *IR* and its historical and intellectual background, the notes on the translation will offer a close-up examination of Agostini's text. They will investigate his linguistic and literary choices as well as the philosophical implications of his ideas.

The notes will also aim to identify what motivated Agostini to organise his ideal society the way he did. Reading Renaissance utopias, one often has the feeling that their authors do not have a clear rationale for selecting certain topics and discussing some traits of their utopias and not others. However, if we contextualise these texts, we realise that utopists are often driven by the desire to address issues and theories that were relevant to their immediate situation. In this analysis, utopias no longer appear as random descriptions of arbitrarily selected institutions and ways of life but rather as coherent responses to a specific historical and cultural context. The scholarly challenge is thus to bring such context to the fore so as to constantly remind the reader of the utopists' rationale in selecting certain topics and institutions. Notes on the text are, we believe, an effective way to address this exegetical difficulty even though text-comments are extremely rare in the literature on Renaissance utopias.[14] In this book, the notes will constitute a substantial part of the study. They will contextualise the *IR* and compare and contrast the features of Agostini's ideal society with those of other Italian Renaissance utopias.

On a final note, one could question our choice of devoting a substantial portion of this volume to a translation of the *IR* instead of only offering an examination of Agostini's political thought and its significance. Our choice lies in the conviction that translations are pivotal instruments in the transmission of ideas. They allow a broad audience to access texts that would otherwise be confined to only a few experts. Translations also have the advantage of giving the readers the chance to develop their own take on the text instead of depending on the mediated views of others. Moreover, the act of translation has the merit of forcing us to give account to an author's every single word, thus preventing us from rushing generalisations about his ideas and providing direct access to his way of thinking. We hope that our translation will bring the *IR* to the attention of a broad readership and make more accessible a utopia that has been so far (mostly) forgotten and misunderstood.

Notes

1. Agostini, *La Repubblica immaginaria* (partial edition) in Curcio (ed.), *Utopisti e riformatori*; Agostini, *La Repubblica immaginaria* (complete edition), Firpo (ed.); Firpo, *Lo Stato*.
2. Curcio, *Utopisti e riformatori*, xviii; Firpo, *Lo Stato*, 238.
3. Eliav-Feldon, *Realistic Utopias*; Manuel, Manuel, *Utopian Thought*.
4. Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*; Houston, *The Renaissance Utopia*.
5. Curcio only makes a brief assessment of the *IR* and does not offer an in-depth analysis of its features, as Firpo does.
6. Curcio does not examine the *IR*'s many apparent digressions.
7. The claim that Italian Renaissance utopianism constitutes a "tradition" is contentious. We justify our view in II.2.
8. Baron, *The Crisis*; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.
9. We will further discuss this feature of Italian Renaissance utopianism in Chap. 2 (i.e. II.2).
10. We will discuss the literary traits of Italian Renaissance utopias in Chap. 2 (i.e. II.2).
11. Manuel, Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, 150–3.
12. We examine the idea that the genre of the dialogue can be a form of spiritual exercise in Chap. 4 (i.e. IV.2).
13. Chordas, *Forms in Early Modern Utopia*; Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*; Houston, *The Renaissance Utopia*.
14. A notable exception is Surtz's monumental commentary on More's *Utopia*. See Surtz E., Hexter J. H., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* Volume 4, *Utopia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965).

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PART I

Ludovico Agostini's *Imaginary Republic* and Italian Renaissance Utopianism

CHAPTER 2

Searching for Italian Renaissance Utopias

Utopia and Utopianism

Any study of utopia must face the preliminary yet necessary task of clarifying the technical terms at the core of this tradition: 'utopia' and 'utopianism.' This task is necessary since these terms are often used in widely different ways, giving rise to endless confusion and conceptual problems. Moreover, these are also contentious and loaded terms. Some take 'utopia' as a synonym for naive and unrealistic ways of approaching political and social issues. Others understand it even more negatively, mostly because of developments in twentieth-century history, as a notion intrinsically connected with totalitarianism. However, it is possible to regard utopia positively as an essential dimension of human thinking. There is more than a grain of truth to the saying: 'The utopias of the past are the realities of today.' The technological advancements of our time, the recent scientific discoveries, and the comfortable living conditions in much of the developed world nowadays would have seemed unrealistic dreams only a century ago. However, the attempt to clarify 'utopia' and 'utopianism' is fraught with difficulty. Any analysis of these terms is, in fact, likely to be somewhat arbitrary, theoretically problematic, and historically questionable. In light of these challenges, we propose accounts of these terms that do not aim to be definitive but, instead, plausible working tools that are reasonably accurate theoretically and historically and useful for our study's aim, i.e. the investigation of Italian Renaissance utopianism.

Examining the origin of the term 'utopia' and its curious development is necessary for any attempt to explore the meanings of 'utopia' and 'utopianism.' 'Utopia' has a unique place in history. It is a Greek neologism invented by Thomas More for the title of his book (a depiction of an ideal commonwealth called 'Utopia'), which came to indicate a literary genre, a way of conceptualising how to improve society and, even more broadly, a general attitude towards life. A further peculiar aspect of 'utopia' is that, due to its success as a literary

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category, it was eventually employed not only for texts written after More and inspired (to a lesser or a greater degree) by him, but also retrospectively for texts written centuries earlier. For example, Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* are regularly identified as utopias today, though in a qualified way. This broad use of the term 'utopia' inevitably renders it fuzzy; scholars have contributed to this confusion since 'utopia' is often used quite loosely and rarely clarified.

More would probably have appreciated how the term he invented evolved. He conceived 'utopia' as an intrinsically ambiguous term, as the poem accompanying the first edition of *Utopia* reveals, and its history furthered the ambiguity.[1] For More, 'utopia' has two meanings. It is a Greek neologism that can be interpreted as combining the noun *topos* (place) with the prefix *ou* (not), thus meaning a 'no place.'[2] The choice of calling an ideal society a place that does exist raises all sorts of questions, creating an aura of ambiguity intended by its author. Is the utopia a pure fantasy? Is it a society that can never be realised? Is the book a pure speculative enterprise? Does the book intend to undermine any attempt to conceive any ideal society? However, More made this initial ambiguity even greater by indicating that 'utopia' can also be understood as the combination of the prefix *eu* (good) and the noun *topos* (place), since *eutopia* in Greek is pronounced as 'utopia.' In this interpretation, 'utopia' means a 'good place.' More's term encapsulates the conceptual problem of whether the 'good place' can only be a 'no place.' More's text expressed the ambiguity of the title in a variety of ways. In *Utopia*'s concluding lines, one of the characters reflects that the ideal society, which is portrayed for most of book II as an ideal place, seems to him absurd and undesirable.[3] However, he refrains from voicing his objections and promises to raise them in a later discussion that never occurs. Thus, the reader is left wondering about the desirability of the ideal society. The names and identities of *Utopia*'s characters further contribute to creating additional ambiguity. The character depicting Utopia is a learned person, yet his surname, 'Hythloday,' undermines his message since it is yet another Greek neologism which means 'purveyor of non-sense.' At the same time, his first name, 'Raphael,' seems to guarantee the validity of his ideas, as it alludes to the Archangel who is God's messenger to humanity. The character calling into question Hythloday's celebratory depiction of Utopia is More, who is presented as a thoughtful statesman. However, his ideas are somewhat called into question by his name, which can be taken as a pun of the Greek word *moria*, which means 'folly.'

The term More, introduced as a sophisticated intellectual joke, developed a life of its own, reaching a level of popularity and taking on meanings that would have surprised its inventor. As we pointed out, 'utopia' came to mean a literary genre modelled curiously only on the section of More's text (book II), depicting an ideal commonwealth. In spite of its undoubtable influence, the impact of *Utopia*'s on the utopian genre has been overemphasised by scholars to the point that it is plausible to speak of a 'More's bias,' i.e., the tendency of exaggerating the influence More's text had on later utopias. Several Renaissance and modern utopias, for example, harken back to classical texts and show little

or no trace of *Utopia*. The 'More's bias' also manifests in the tendency to consider texts written centuries before More as part of the same tradition that he crystallised in a definitive form. This view is problematic, since More did not consider his work as part of an ongoing tradition to which he meant to contribute. This excessive emphasis on More's impact on the history of the utopian genre leads to the paradox that many texts classified as utopias have little in common with *Utopia*. Calling utopia texts that describe ideal societies going back to Ancient Egypt is so engrained in the scholarship that we cannot do away with the term. However, we should be aware that More represents only a chapter, though crucial, in a larger tradition on which he had a limited influence.

After More, 'utopia' was also taken in a way quite unrelated to the literary tradition to indicate a particular way of conceptualising the project of improving society—a meaning that More only indirectly explored. To point out the layered complexity of 'utopia' (and its cognates) and disentangle some of its ambiguities, we have to distinguish 'utopia' from 'utopianism' The latter is a semantically and conceptually broader term that indicates a universal and natural yearning towards a world better than the current one. This yearning can be channelled in various ways. It can be expressed creatively by imaging an ideal society via a treatise of architecture, a work of literature, philosophy, music, or even a painting. It can also be conveyed religiously by picturing a better, new world brought about by religious reform, divine intervention, or by adopting a specific way of life (e.g. monasticism). The utopian yearning is sometimes channelled through social and political activism by promoting concrete and immediate changes in society. Utopianism is also a conceptual category that describes the dynamics responsible for the social and political changes occurring throughout history. In short, utopianism is a form of dreaming about an ideal society that can be directed in the most different ways for the most diverse purposes.

The literary genre of utopia is thus a particular way of channelling utopianism by imagining a society regarded as ideal by its creator via a work of literature, philosophy, or a treatise of architecture. Though rather broad, this definition is the one scholars tend to adopt, and it has given rise to a widely recognised canon of utopian works.[4] Scholars have traditionally believed that the intended audience of these works can range from common readers, humanists, philosophers, rulers, and statesmen. These works' primary goals, scholars argue, could be as varied as entertainment, philosophical investigation, political and social analyses, satire, and even offering the blueprint for a future society.

The wide-ranging way of considering the literary genre of utopia just outlined was silently endorsed by Manuel & Manuel in their essential study on utopia, although they deliberately avoided defining the utopian genre. They argued that their only criterion for choosing the texts they discussed was that of considering works that channel a universal yearning they labelled 'utopian propensity' and that we more simply called 'utopianism.'[5] The basic idea behind Manuel & Manuel's approach is that the utopian genre changed so much throughout history, as new traits were introduced and old ones were

transformed or abandoned, that it would be unwise to try to define it since the utopian propensity cannot be crystallised into a particular form without losing its richness. The undoubted merit of this approach is that it does justice to the complexity and protean form of the utopian genre. Nonetheless, casting such a wide net is not without serious problems. The most obvious is that although an inordinate number of texts qualify as utopias, only some can be considered. Thus, scholars end up either assuming unspoken criteria for what to include or making a completely arbitrary selection, such as Manuel & Manuel, who included authors (e.g. Kant and Hobbes) whose connection with the utopian tradition is tenuous at best. This broad account of the utopian genre poses the further problem of relying on a category that, because of its wide scope, becomes so blurred that it is difficult to assess the distinctiveness of this genre. In this approach, even a basic historical survey of the utopian genre is problematic, since we have a hard time finding any common thread among the texts considered and determining each work's' contribution. In short, without a relatively narrow notion of the utopian genre, we can only merely place the texts we examine side by side without being able to assess their specificities and virtues.

Conscious of the conceptual and exegetical difficulties of Manuel & Manuel's approach, some scholars have ventured in the opposite direction by adopting a narrow definition of the utopian genre. Davis offers the most compelling contribution in this tradition; he argues that utopia is a type of ideal societies together with arcadia, Cockaigne, millennium, and perfect moral commonwealth.[6] All these imaginary societies are designed to attain, albeit in different ways, the same goal: minimise social conflict and maximise harmony amongst citizens. The challenges they all face are the scarcity of natural resources and the attempt to satisfy men's unquenchable desires. Utopia is a particular solution to these problems. It does not depict a society in which (i) human desires are simplified so that human beings can be easily met (arcadia), (ii) conflicts are avoided by gratifying men's more basic appetites (Cockaigne), (iii) humankind is transformed through divine intervention (millennium), or (iv) human nature is radically changed, giving rise to a just society. Instead, utopias accept that human nature is innately faulty and can be reformed but not altered and devise social and political institutions that guide men to curtail their desires to live in harmony. Davis's approach has the merit of giving precise contours to the utopian genre and making it possible to find elements of continuity and discontinuity within it. However, his approach is not without serious drawbacks. One is that he defines utopia in such a way that fits the period and culture he studies (sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England) but is at odds with utopias belonging to other traditions. For example, his analysis hardly applies to Greek utopias, in which the concerns about the scarcity of material resources were less central, Italian utopias, whose primary aims are often moral, psychological, and spiritual, or several nineteenth-century utopias (e.g. Bellamy, Morris), which depict human nature as inherently good. Moreover, Davis's narrow definition of what counts as a utopia puts him in the problematic position of having

trouble meeting his own criteria. He is sometimes forced to discuss texts that have traditionally been part of the utopian canon but do not conform to his definition, such as Neville's *Plato Revisited*. A broader problem with Davis's approach is that he reduces utopias to their economic, political, and social proposals and thus leaves no room for the kind of questions that constitute the most theoretically stimulating aspect of utopias. Is utopia a way of exposing the limits of society? Is utopia a blueprint for a political programme? Is it a way of articulating the kind of society that best meets the needs of human nature? Finally, Davis' exclusive focus on social and economic issues flattens the richness and complexity of utopias that often have psychological concerns (Plato, Aristotle), spiritual aims (Agostini, Patrizi), or aesthetic objectives (William Morris).

We have discussed at some length the contributions of Manuel & Manuel and Davis since the shortcomings of these otherwise excellent works are a compelling indication of the formidable challenges anyone investigating the utopian tradition faces. Our task in this study may seem easier since we deliberately avoid reaching a broader conclusion on the utopian tradition and focus only on what can be learned from a specific tradition: Italian Renaissance utopianism. However, as well shall see, our goal is more complex than it may initially appear.

What Is Italian Renaissance Utopianism?

Our fundamental aim in the next pages is to determine what an Italian Renaissance utopia is. As we will see, there is no scholarly consensus on this topic, and the significance of discussing this issue is not felt by scholars who tend to use this category rather cavalierly. They often select texts depending on what fits their interests without much concern for using this category in a rigorous way. Our further challenge is that of deciding whether the texts we consider are part of a *literary tradition* or they only share what Davis calls a *literary mode* of depicting ideal societies.[7] In a literary tradition, authors are aware of those that came before and react to each other's works—they see themselves as transmitting, extending, and transforming the same tradition. In contrast, authors who adopt the same literary mode simply employ a similar way of conveying their ideas without any sense of or intention to contribute to a shared heritage. Since a literary mode is only a common literary structure, it tends to be remarkably stable over time. Instead, a tradition is quite flexible, and it is possible to trace its history and its crucial turning points. Given its dynamic nature, a tradition is ill-served by narrow definitions that are unable to capture its rich and complex developments. However, before we can discuss whether Italian Renaissance utopianism is a tradition or a literary mode, we must consider the way it has been traditionally identified.

Typically, scholars of Italian Renaissance utopias adopt a broad yet not accurately defined and mostly intuited idea of what an Italian Renaissance utopia is. However, this approach has not prevented the creation of a more or less official canon of Italian Renaissance utopias. The relatively recent work by Fiorato

provides one of the most complete collections of Italian Renaissance utopias.[8] It includes Agostini's *Imaginary Republic*, Campanella's *City of Sun*, Doni's *Wise and Crazy World*, Patrizi's *Happy City*, and Zuccolo's *Republic of Evandria* and *Happy City*. Nonetheless, Fiorato does not offer a rationale for his selection and does not investigate whether it is possible to speak of Italian Renaissance utopias as part of a tradition in the way we define it. To address these issues, it may thus be useful to trace the history of the development of the canon of Italian Renaissance utopias.

The story began in the 1940s, when Curcio brought to the attention of scholars a group of texts he identified as 'utopias' and regarded as significant for the history of Italian political thought. However, his attempt mostly fell on deaf ears—still today, as we pointed out in Chap. 1, Italian Renaissance utopias do not inform the way scholars think about Italian Renaissance political thought. Perhaps not surprisingly, Curcio did not explore the common traits of the texts he selected. His contribution took the form of two anthologies that collected various Italian Renaissance political works. The first one was published in 1941 and was entitled 'Utopists and Social Reformers of the Sixteenth Century' (*Utopisti e riformatori sociali del Cinquecento*).[9] In the introduction, he did not provide any indication of his rationale for selecting the texts he chose and did not offer any explanation of why he focused only on the sixteenth century. The lack of any elucidation for is selection is problematic, since he grouped very diverse types of texts. The *Wise and Crazy World* by Anton Francesco Doni (1513–1574) is a satirical work by a *poligrafo* influenced by More's *Utopia*. The *Happy City* Francesco Patrizi (1529–1597) is a philosophical treatise that bears no trace of *Utopia* but is clearly modelled on Aristotle's *Politics* VII and VIII. The *Imaginary Republic* by Ludovico Agostini (1536–1609) is an erudite work by a humanist whose primary model is Plato's *Laws*.[10] The last work in the collection, the *On the Republic of Genoa* by Umberto Foglietta (1518–1581), is even more at odds with the other works since it is a social and political critique of sixteenth-century Genoa that has little in common with the imaginary ideal societies depicted in the other texts. The title of this anthology is also puzzling, since it is unclear what the connection between the utopists and social reformers of the title is. This is not a pedantic question, since the focus of the two groups tends to be quite different. Utopists usually dream of ideal places with limited concern for their feasibilities; social reformers tend to focus on possible improvements in existing societies.

A few years later (1944), Curcio published a second anthology in which he dropped 'social reformers' from the title, which became 'Italian Utopists of the Sixteenth Century' (*Utopisti Italiani del Cinquecento*).[11] In this new collection, he republished the works of Agostini, Doni, and Patrizi, and added a few more texts. Some were grouped together as texts that portray a return to the Golden Age; some were depictions of ideal societies located in far-away exotic lands: *The Praise of the Gramanti* by Mambrino Roseo (1500–1573/1580) and the *Island of Narsida* by Matteo Buonamico (sixteenth century). Curcio did not explain the relationship between the new collection and the old and did

not indicate why he felt the need to add new texts to those contained in his previous anthology. However, he did offer a brief definition of utopia, which was relegated to a footnote, giving the impression of being an afterthought. He regarded utopias as societies 'designed without any concern for the possibility, immediate or remote, of their feasibility.'[12] However, this definition is at odds with some of the texts in the collection (e.g. Agostini's *IR*; Patrizi's *HC*) that depict societies that, in some respects, are not too different from Italian Renaissance society.

Curcio's second anthology was part of a larger project directed by De Mattei, who promoted the study of Utopists by creating a book series, published by Colombo, entitled 'Utopian Series' (Collana degli Utopisti). Over the course of about ten years (1944–1953), he published various utopias, not only Italian ones. In the series, appeared translations of the utopias of Bacon, More, and Harrington, but also of those of Fourier, Cyrano, and Saint Simon. As for Italian utopists, in addition to Curcio's anthology, De Mattei published the *City of Sun* by Tommaso Campanella (1597–1634) and a collection of works by another Renaissance author, Ludovico Zuccolo (1568–1630), incorporating two utopias (*Republic of Evandria* and *Happy City*) and a critique of More's Utopia (*Aromatario* or *The Republic of Utopia*).[13] This collection was a major factor in including Zuccolo's utopias in the canon of Italian Renaissance utopias; nonetheless, De Mattei did not define utopia or discuss his criteria for adding Zuccolo to his series. Later on in his life, De Mattei published an influential work on Italian Renaissance political thought in which he examined two more Italian Renaissance works that he regarded as utopias: *The Regal Republic* by Fabio Albergati (1538–1606) and the *Republic of Bees* by Giovanni Bonifacio (1547–1635)[14] However, these texts never made it into the canon.

The creation of the canon of Italian Renaissance utopias was completed by another collection edited in 1964 by Bruno Widmar, 'Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Political Writers' (*Scrittori politici del '500 e '600*).[15] The stated goal of the collection was to bring together lesser-known works representing three different types of political works: utopias, perfect commonwealths, and treatises on the reason of state.[16] Unfortunately, Widmar did not clarify what texts fit with what category. Although it is easy to determine the texts that belong to the last category, sorting out which works represent the other two categories is more problematic. In the introduction to the anthology, Widmar began with a seemingly promising distinction. He defined 'utopias' as ideal societies that are totally disconnected from history and are not designed to modify current or future societies. The articulation of moral, religious, and aesthetic ideals in utopias thus has no concern for historical realities and developments. By contrast, 'perfect commonwealths' are grounded in history, aim to transform society, express a reformatory spirit, and propose not some far-fetched model of societies that will never exist but minor modification to existing societies.[17] However, at closer scrutiny, his distinction between utopias and perfect commonwealths is not persuasive. Its main problem is that Widmar's definitions of 'utopia' and 'commonwealth' are at odds with the