SEARCHING FOR PARADISE: LANDSCAPE, UTOPIA, AND ROME*

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A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at.
Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism"

INTRODUCTION: FINDING UTOPIA

Utopia is a fraught term, often interpreted as a naïve and outmoded concept in modern political theory (Bobbio 1989 passim, Kloppenberg 1996.124–26), invented in the early modern period, and rooted in ancient Greek philosophical writings.[1] Even the definition of the term is contentious, and critics usually seek to separate ancient Greco-Roman works, particularly those connected with "Golden Age" nostalgia or the past, from representations of structured revolutionary social orders. Yet antiquity is invoked as the origin of the idea that utopia is a fundamentally urban phenomenon: Lewis Mumford, who believed that there had been a utopian origin to the formation of the city in Greece and the Near East, claimed that, "the city itself was transmogrified into an ideal form—a glimpse of eternal order, a visible heaven on earth, a seat of the life abundant—in other words, utopia"

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1 Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics* are usually cited, e.g., Logan 1983.174–77, 193–201, 212–17. Mumford 1966.7 writes, "[t]hough it is Plato's influence that first comes to mind when we think of later utopias, it is Aristotle who considers the actual structure of an ideal city . . . the concept of utopia pervades every page of the *Politics*."

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(Mumford 1966.13).[2] However, the ancient utopian texts discussed by John Fergusson in his 1975 *Utopias of the Classical World* have been dismissed as "more like Baron Munchausen stories than the realistic fiction of the utopia" (Kumar 1991.38). In other words, not even Plato, let alone any Roman fantasy worlds, would qualify as utopian.[3] Attempting to refocus this debate, Ruth Levitas concentrates upon "desire" as the central element in the utopian impulse. Levitas claims that, "we learn a lot about the experience of living under any set of conditions by reflecting upon the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies" (1990.8). This definition is inclusive and instructive, as it allows us to see all narratives of idealisation in their historical contexts, and it is within this framework that Golden Age descriptions of the past as well as fictional and geographical fantasy worlds encompass the utopian as much as prescriptive and radically alternative systems of existence.

While More's *Utopia* and those written in this tradition have often been viewed as texts which offer a critical perspective on the society which produced them,[4] it is easy to see narratives of the Golden Age and far-away paradises as tales which simply reproduce a nostalgic desire for easy primitivism. In contrast, looking at the utopian as "the repository of desire" (Levitas 1990.199) allows for the investigation of Golden Age narratives as they are specifically mobilised, that is, as they operate in context, rather than seeing them as repetitive examples of a universal trope.[5] Their function is

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2 The debate is wide-ranging, but centres around use of the word on the basis of content, generic form, or aims and function; "Utopia" can be interpreted narrowly as a literary fiction following the lead of More and excluding more overtly philosophical texts. Kumar 1991.25–42 excises all pre-modern texts from the pool. For a good discussion of the debate, see Levitas 1990.

3 See also Marin 1984.198–200 for the view that utopian writing is produced by particular conditions of capitalism and not found outside of the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries.

4 E.g., Goodwin and Taylor 1982.23–24. Jameson 1977.6 argues that utopia is not an ideal or model society but a reassessment of our own, and later claims that it can be defined as a "set of mental operations to be performed on a determinate type of raw material given in advance, which is contemporary society itself" (1991.xvi). Fox 1982.56–57 argues that, "[More's] Utopia and England share a shadowy identity," seemingly opposites but parallel in many aspects, including their island geography. Speaking more broadly, Marin defines utopia as "an ideological critique of the dominant ideology" (Marin 1984.xiv; similarly 195).

5 The Golden Age myth is often seen as a cross-cultural absolute (Heinberg 1989) and intrinsically conservative in ideology (see Goodwin and Taylor 1982.23 and the analysis below, p. 288).

historically determined, and, as will be argued here, the evocation of utopian landscapes is particularly important in harnessing the political and cultural potential of utopia. In addition, the textual and visual infiltration of Golden Age, millennial, and far-away landscapes into Rome will be investigated, along with the historical implications of such phenomena.

2. THE SOLAR BIRD

> In Arabia
> There is one tree, the phoenix' throne, one phoenix
> At this hour reigning there,
> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

In 47 C.E., it was recorded in the official records *(acta)* at Rome that a fabulous creature had been brought to the city, a unique bird, the phoenix. This was regarded as an event of such magnitude that, Quintus Plautius claimed, the miraculous bird was taken to the Comitium and put on display. Despite the official record of the visit, the Elder Pliny, our informant, does not hesitate to add that the narrative is undoubtedly fallacious (*HN* 10.5).[6] However, it's not the existence of the phoenix which is beyond the realms of belief,[7] merely the idea that it would appear at Rome, because it belongs in the far-away, perfumed paradise that is Arabia, where it is sacred to the sun.

Pliny mentions only one other location associated with the phoenix, and this comes into play when the bird regenerates itself on a 540 year cycle:[8] it builds a nest with scented materials such as cinnamon and frankincense, and, after its death, its bones turn into a maggot which grows into a

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6 47 C.E. accords with Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 4. Other accounts tell of the phoenix appearing in 36 C.E. in Egypt, which was later read as a foreshadowing of Tiberius's death (Dio 58.27.1), although Tacitus has 34 C.E. (*Ann.* 6.28).

7 The existence of only one phoenix is possibly fabulous ("haud scio an fabulose, unum in toto orbe," 10.3), but Pliny gives the senator Manilius (known for his learning) as a source for the bird and its life cycle.

8 The most common duration of the phoenix's life in early accounts is 500 years, so Herodotus 2.73, Ovid *Met.* 15.395, Mela *Chorographia* 3.83, Sen. *Ep.* 42.1, Aelian 6.58, Philostr. *vit. Apoll.* 3.49.28, Clem. Rom. *ad Cor.* 1.25. However, poetic sources, e.g., Martial 5.7.1–2, Auson. *Epist*. 24.9–10, often suggest that the bird regenerates every thousand years. Many of the details in Pliny's version differ from those of other sources; in particular, the exact method of rebirth varies: the new bird can be born from an egg of myrrh (Herodotus 2.73) or directly from its father's body (*corpore de patrio,* Ovid *Met.* 15.402).

chick and piously carries out the funeral rites for the bird that was. But the chick doesn't stay put: it carries its nest to the city of the sun (*solis urbem*), which is identified only as being "near Panchaea" (*prope Panchaiam*), and there places it on an altar.

There are various ways to interpret this tale. On the face of it, Pliny's phoenix stands at the most extraordinary edge of the *Historia Naturalis*'s "bird book," quickly giving way to more mundane creatures, eagles down to chickens. But the fantastic bird and the locations of its life, death, and rebirth assemble a plethora of utopian associations. Its longevity, relationship to time—through its identification as the bird of the sun and its reappearance at set, regular intervals—and its ability to regenerate endlessly make the phoenix an ideal symbol of eternity[9] as well as of renewal and change: a constant series of new beginnings, resulting in the creation of the same, utterly fantastic being.[10] Life and death coexist within the phoenix, an incongruity which the fourth-century C.E. author of *de ave Phoenice* recognised: *vivit morte refecta sua,* "she lives, remade by her death" (32).[11] Paradoxically, the phoenix myth is also comparable with the nostalgia and stagnation found in both Golden Age and utopian narratives: the Golden Age narrative tells a story of the desire to return to a time lost, regaining and retaining the bounty of a previous age; utopia is a vision that claims to provide the perfect society—but if it is perfect, it need not, and must not, change. Utopia can easily become dystopia, stable but stifling.[12] Who would really want to live under Plato's or More's strict regime?

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9 Longevity associates the phoenix with knowledge—only it knows the real length of its life (Aelian 6.58), but a visit to Egypt might impart this knowledge to a Roman tourist (Stat. *Silv*. 3.2.114). Conversely, its traditional home, Arabia, is relatively unexplored and unknown to Romans of the first century C.E.: only Aelius Gallus has ever led a Roman army there, and he has not investigated the whole country as he stopped at Caripeta (Pliny *HN* 6.160).

10 The phoenix tradition is analogous to that of the Egyptian *benu*, a bird which seems to have been an embodiment of Ra and Osiris. It, too, was strongly associated with the sun and the East, functioning "as the repository of information on earthly events of great cosmic importance" (Lloyd 1976.318; van den Broek 1972.14–26). For the Egyptians, the bird was also capable of shape-changing and could be identified with the inauguration of a new era (Lloyd 1976.319–20). However, the tales of the phoenix's self-immolation and rebirth seem to be of Greek origin.

11 The effect of the paradox is increased by the juxtaposition of "lives" and "death" in Latin. On the mysterious gender of the phoenix, see van den Broek 1972.357–92.

12 The conservative tendency of utopia has often been recognised in utopian studies, e.g., Bloch-Lainé 1966.201–02.

A more direct and literal connection with the Golden Age is the appearance of the startlingly garish bird: it is consistently described as golden (Herodotus 2.73, Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 3.49, Achilles Tatius 3.25). Pliny, like many others, adds red and purple, highlighting both fiery and regal qualities: "auri fulgore circa colla, cetero purpureus, caerulaeam roseis caudam pennis distinguentibus," "with the gleam of gold around its neck, it is otherwise purple; rosy feathers stand out from its blue-green tail" (*HN* 10.3).[13] The phoenix acquires a nimbus, sometimes with rays, as an attribute in the first century C.E. (van den Broek 1972.233, 245), as is shown on many Roman coins from the Hadrianic period onwards,[14] further emphasising its association with the sun (van den Broek 1972.237–51).

Furthermore, the link with the previous generation and funerary rituals is foregrounded: dreams about painting the phoenix are always connected to the dreamers' parents according to Artemidorus. Depending on which version of the myth is invoked, the dreamers will either be so poor that they will have to bury their parents themselves or they will lose them soon (*Oneirocritica* 4.47). The care taken by the phoenix in disposing of its predecessor's remains—wrapping its bones in fragrant plants, carrying them to a distant place, placing them in the Temple of the Sun—represented filial *pietas* for Romans like Hadrian,[15] the first to use the phoenix as a symbol on coins: an aureus of 117/18 C.E., bearing the legend DIVUS TRAIANUS PATER on the obverse, carries a radiate Phoenix on its reverse (*British Museum Coins Emp*. III 245.48–49, pl. 47.8–9; *Roman Imperial Coinage* II 343.27).[16]

The multivalent phoenix has the power to look forward as well as back, and in commemorating the obsequies owed to Trajan, Hadrian was also marking his own reign as a new age. From the earliest forms of the tradition, the bird is associated with huge cosmic movement and the beginning

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13 The standard reservations about the tonal range of Latin colours apply: *purpureus* can also be translated as "blood red," "rosy," and "shining" (*OLD ad loc.*). See Gage 1993.11, Grossmann 1988.86. All translations throughout are my own.

14 It appears throughout the second century C.E. on coins of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Faustina Maior and Minor; less often in the third century (Julia Domna, Trebonius Gallus, and Aemilianus). It reappeared under Constantine and became a symbol of resurrection and chastity for Christianity (van den Broek 1972.421–22).

15 Ovid calls the phoenix one of the *volucres . . . piae* ("dutiful birds") whom Corinna's parrot will join in Elysium (*Am.* 2.6.51).

16 Alexandrian coinage featuring the phoenix with a seven-rayed nimbus was released in 138/39 to commemorate the succession of Antoninus Pius (Macdonald 1905.459 no. 404).

of an era (van den Broek 1972.22–23).[17] Martial picked up on the phoenix's links with riches, renewal, and rebirth in an epigram congratulating Domitian on the new Rome emerging after the fire of 80 C.E. (5.7.1–4):

> Qualiter Assyrios renovant incendia nidos,
> una decem quotiens saecula vixit avis,
> taliter exuta est veterem nova Roma senectam
> et sumpsit vultus praesidis ipsa sui.
>
> Just as fires renew Assyrian nests,
> as often as one bird has lived ten ages,
> so the new Rome has been stripped of old age
> and she has taken on the face of her ruler.

Hadrian took the idea to its logical conclusion, producing an aureus in 121/22 C.E. which features a phoenix standing on a globe[18] on its reverse and declares P.M. TR. P. COS. III. SAEC. AUR., "Pontifex Maximus, Tribune of the People, Consul for the third time: the Golden Age." Hadrian's extensive building programme for Rome and the provinces and his creation of a luxury estate in the idyllic setting of Tibur are reflections of this claim in both utopian and paradisal form, constructing urban grandeur and rustic perfection on a huge scale.[19] The Templum Veneris et Romae is the largest temple ever built in Rome, at over 50 by 100 metres, and one of many projects to reject the past, as it was built over a section of Nero's Domus Aurea, while the hated features of the Colossus, modelled after Nero, were remodelled to those of the *Sun* god (Scriptores Historiae Augustae *Hadr*. 19.13). Yet the Hadrianic regime knew how to maintain the balance between revolution and retrospection, and even the radical design of the Pantheon purports to be the

17 Tacitus connects the Egyptian "Sothic period"—the coincidence of the Heliacal rising of Sirius with the Nile flood every 1461 years—with the reappearance of the phoenix; but see van den Broek 1972.26–32 for the view that this was a Hellenistic development. The bird was often connected with the idea of the *annus magnus* (see below, pp. 297–98).

18 The globe is held by a personified figure whose identity has been variously interpreted as the *genius* of the Golden Age (*Roman Imperial Coinage* II.356), Hadrian (as the ruler of the Golden Age), and Aion, the personification of eternity (van den Broek 1972.428).

19 Scriptores Historiae Augustae *Hadr.* 19.10 describes Hadrian's building work as infinite: *opera ubique infinita fecisset*, and Benario comments, "to Hadrian, grandeur embraced the concept of enormous size" (1980 ad loc.).

reinstatement of an Augustan temple.[20] Hadrian also stressed the comparison of himself with Numa Pompilius (Birley 1997.111), a king associated with the virtue and peacefulness characteristic of the Golden Age and credited with the formation of many of the rituals which had become institutionalised as Roman traditions (Plutarch *Numa* 3.4–8, 5.3, 14.1). In this period, Golden Age figures such as Pudicitia holding *cornucopiae* are also common on coins (*Roman Imperial Coinage* II cxxxi–ii), emphasising the return of moral values and plenty, and recollecting the Hesiodic myth.[21] Yet again the new era is also a redeployment of something very old, and the phoenix functions at both ends of the spectrum of time and memory.

Marcel Detienne connects the phoenix to his schema of opposites which sets the heat of the sun and the fragrant dryness of Arabian spices against the putrefaction of wet plants (1977.20–36). The phoenix represents extreme dryness when it burns on a pyre of perfumed spices and the contrasting extreme when it is born again as a worm. The worm, however, is not found in other first-century texts,[22] whereas the burning of the aged phoenix is common in this period (Lucan 6.680; Pliny *HN* 29.29; Martial 5.7.1–2, 10.16.6; Lucian *Peregr*. 27; Solinus 33.12). Certainly the connection with the sun's heat is emphatic throughout the tradition (Lloyd 1976.318, van den Broek 1972.233, 261–304): as early as Hecataeus, the bird flies to Heliopolis from Arabia to bury its father (*FGrH* 324 = Herod. 2.73). As Detienne comments, the bird's solar associations and regeneration fix it in the sphere of the celestial and elevated (1977.33–36), and Roman emperors also capitalized on the obvious associations which could be made between the everlasting bird and the immortality which they lavished on their predecessors and expected to receive in turn. In fact, the combination of the

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20 As is announced by its dedicatory inscription: M.AGRIPPA.L.F.COS.TERTIUM.FECIT. The Pantheon was only one of a number of Augustan buildings restored or rebuilt by Hadrian (Scriptores Historiae Augustae *Hadr.* 19.10); Boatwright 1989, MacDonald 1982.118–19 and 1976).

21 Aidos, the Greek equivalent of Pudicitia, leaves the earth during the time of the Iron Race (Hesiod *WD* 197–200).

22 Although van den Broek 1972.186–87 claims that the worm is a common element in the story, it is found only here, Pliny 10.4, quoting Manilius, and in later (mostly) Christian texts: Clement of Rome *I Clement* 25.3, Cyril of Jerusalem *Catech*. XVIII.8, *Const. Apost.* V.7.15, *Physiologus* 7, Epiphanius *Ancoratus* 84.6, *Greek Apocalypse of Baruch* 6.12 (add Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 4.47 to those cited by van den Broek). Van den Broek 1972.408 argues that the worm originates in interpretations of maggots as creatures spontaneously generated from decaying meat.

phoenix on coins with the legend AETERNITAS or AIΩN is common in the Antonine era,[23] particularly on those commemorating the deification of the emperor's wife: on the reverse of a post-141 C.E. sestertius, the goddess Aeternitas holds a globe on which sits a phoenix with a nimbus; a bust of the dead empress, *diva* Faustina, appears on the obverse (*Roman Imperial Coinage* III Antoninus Pius 1103 A & B, 1104–05).[24] Aeternitas with a globe had similarly commemorated Hadrian's apotheosis in a release of 139 (ibid. 18–19).[25]

3. LOCATION

> Est locus in primo felix oriente remotus . . .
> non ibi tempestas nec vis furit horrida venti
> nec gelido terram rore priuna tegit . . .
>
> [Lactantius] *de ave Phoenice*

The places said to be inhabited by the phoenix are also saturated with utopian elements. "Blessed Arabia," Arabia Felix, is most commonly associated with plenty and sensuality, and especially with the production of

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23 The legend AETERNITAS is present as early as Vespasian, often in combination with heads representing the sun and moon.

24 See *Roman Imperial Coinage* III Antoninus Pius 347, 833, 1051, 1156–57 for similar combinations. Aeternitas also frequently appears alone with a globe or in combination with other goddesses (*Roman Imperial Coinage* III Antoninus Pius 61A, 114, 125, 345–55, 1099–1115, 1154–68, 1182–83). The goddess alone had celebrated Sabina's apotheosis on coins of 134–38 C.E. (*Roman Imperial Coinage* II 327–28). Marcus Aurelius also commemorated Faustina Minor's deification with the figures of the phoenix, Aeternitas, and elephants (symbols of longevity) in issues of 176–80 (*Roman Imperial Coinage* III Marcus Aurelius 667, 738–40, 1691–99). Faustina's death coincided with the commencement of a new "Sothic period" (see note 17 above) and was linked with this alignment of cosmic forces.

25 Although there is no direct reference to the phoenix, gold and solar imagery recur in relation to Augustus's funeral and deification in second- and third-century texts: Dio describes his bier of gold and ivory, with a gold and purple covering and a gold image of Augustus accompanying it (51.34), while Suetonius lists dreams and prophecies, such as his father's dream that the sun shone out of his wife's womb, which predict his elevation to the sky by associating him with the sun and Apollo (*Aug*. 94.4). Furthermore, an eagle, the bird which Detienne claims is also associated with the sun and is closest to the phoenix among verifiable species (1977.31–36), was released from Augustus's pyre as it was lit in order to carry his soul to the sky (Dio 51.42.3).

exotic spices and fragrances—it is an important trading source for these products.[26] Distance from Rome and a long tradition of being regarded as "Blessed" make Arabia an ideal location for the phoenix, but Panchaea, literally "all good things," is perhaps even more suitable: a mythical site, an island off Arabia somewhere in the Indian Ocean, a place which does not exist for Pliny in his geographical books and which otherwise only arises in the *Historia Naturalis* as a possible site for the invention of mining and smelting of gold (*HN* 7.197). "Gold" is a verbal reminder of the Golden Age, yet, paradoxically, metal-working is the very kind of activity which is more typical of the iron age.[27] Indeed, this island is the subject of a long-running debate in the ancient geographies: invented by Euhemerus in the early third century, it was the location of his depiction of an idealised society which eliminated private property, money, and slavery.[28] Panchaea contains an abundance of natural bounty: all varieties of tree, plant, and flower, vines, fruit, and nuts, and health-giving springs, in fact "a prospect worthy of the gods" (Diodorus Siculus 5.42–44), thus allowing for the reintegration of gods and humans, a trope of the Golden Age. Almost instantly, Panchaea became a byword for both Euhemerus and for his unreliability as a geographical authority: Eratosthenes calls him a "Bergaean," after Antiphanes of Berga, a well-known fabricator of travellers' tales (Polybius 34.10), and Strabo claims that you might as well believe in Panchaea as the land of the

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26 Fragrances: Herodotus 3.113, Mela *Chorographia* 3.79, Pliny *HN* 6.161, 12.51–104. Pliny sees Arabia as a location of extravagant and luxurious consumption: Roman *luxuria* contributes to the riches which Arabia Felix amasses. In fact, Pliny plays on the "blessed" tag, claiming that the epithet *felix* is undeserved, *falsi et ingrati cognominis*; rather, Arabia has become *beata,* "blessed," "wealthy" on the scents purchased for the dead and the Arabian Sea pearls bought for women by decadent Romans (12.82–84). Also see Detienne 1977.6–36.

27 Smelting metals was one of the "crimes" associated with the later ages; gold was particularly evil because of its association with iron-age greed: Tib. 1.10.7: "divitis hoc vitium est auri," "this is the evil of rich gold"; Ovid *Met.* 1.141–42: "iamque nocens ferrum ferroque nocentius aurum / prodierat," "and now harmful iron, and gold, more harmful than iron had appeared."

28 Diodoros Siculus (5.42–46, 6.1.4–10) is the main source for Euhemerus's *Sacred History*, which was translated into Latin by Ennius (Cic. *de Nat. Deorum* 1.119, Varro *Res Rusticae* 1.48.2, Lactantius *Divin. Inst.* 11.65, 14.2). Slavery does not exist in any source, and the social structure elevates only the priest class (Ferguson 1975.105). It is notable that Mela's only comment on Panchaea is that the inhabitants are snake-eaters (3.81), which seems to be a wilful suppression of the tradition; see Silbermann 1988 ad loc.

Cimmerians (*Geography* 7.3.6).[29] A mirage, it emerges and then vanishes in Roman geographical texts. Panchaea's very insubstantiality is what sets it apart as utopian: it is symptomatic of what Louis Marin describes as the "displacement" practiced by utopian discourse—it is found in an "unsituatable 'other' place": a critical characteristic of utopia is that it is "other" in time and/or space (Marin 1984.195).[30]

4. INSULARITY AND AMBIVALENCE

> Utopus me dux ex non insula fecit insulam . . .
> Thomas More, *de optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*
> (Latin translation of "Tetrastichon Vernacula Utopiensium Lingua")

Utopias are usually inaccessible in either space and/or time. If they exist on this earth, like Panchaea, they are often islands: from Atlantis in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Krito*, to Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1966), the island location of the utopian signifies its unattainable status. More's Utopia is an island actually created by human labour, cut off from the mainland by its founder/dictator Utopus, as the island itself acknowledges in the first line of a quatrain quoted above. In a sense, the story that the island is artificially manufactured reflects More's understanding that all ideal societies are constructs.[31]

Locations of desire in Greco-Roman antiquity are similarly isolated, often as islands, always situated on the periphery; as Herodotus noted, "the most beautiful regions of the world are the furthest" (3.106), and here, as elsewhere, their naturally favourable features—the abundance of gold,

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29 Strabo's source is Hecateus; he also mentions the lands of the Gorgons and Hesperides, Alcman's web-footed men, and Aeschylus's dog-headed men. Strabo views all information from geographers who believe in Panchaea to be suspect. This is a theme to which Strabo often returns: see also 1.3.1, 2.3.5, and 2.4.2 (citing Polybius 34.5–10). Plutarch (*Mor.* 360A–B) concurs. For Odysseus as a liar, see Lykophr. fr. 764, Lucian *TH* 1.3, Ovid *Met.* 13.32, and Bömer 1982 ad loc.

30 Nevertheless, attempts have been made by modern scholars to locate the island of Panchaea, including "sites from North America to Russia" (Ferguson 1975.206).

31 In addition, the geography of the island is internally inconsistent, making it even less achievable: "More presents us with a Utopia, a 'Nowhere,' that cannot be mapped" (Goodey 1970.21).

scents, fruits, and fresh springs—are stressed. The northern land of the Hyperboreans is at the furthest extent of one compass point. Although Greek texts stress the piety[32] of the inhabitants, Roman poets concentrate on their remote location,[33] and Roman geographers draw the contrast more sharply between this *gens felix* and the savage peoples, such as Nomads and Anthropophagi, whom they live beyond: "ultra Amazones ultraque eas Hyperborei," "beyond [Scythia] are the Amazons, and beyond them the Hyperboreans" (Pomponius Mela *Chorographia* 1.13; see also 3.36 and Pliny *HN* 4.88–89). This is a pastoral utopia: the Hyperboreans live in *nemora lucique*; they welcome Apollo the sun god, in winter, so that, although in the far north, their land is "open to sunlight" (*regio aprica*) and the climate is fortunate, *felix*, the epithet of Arabia, and a word which recurs in relation to idealised spaces. Some think that the Hyberboreans have six months of daylight, leading to a seemingly absurd acceleration of fertility, whereby seeds are sown and the harvest gathered on the same day (*HN* 4.89).[34] Utopia hijacks time and refuses to submit to the cosmic law of the seasons. In a further subversion of nature, Hyperboreans die only by choice when they have exhausted life, and their mode of suicide—leaping off a cliff—is said to lead to an extremely blissful burial: *hoc genus sepulturae beatissimum*. Even death creates no labour, as the bodies are self-interred. The location of the Hyperboreans, however, is subject to debate: Pliny puts them in northern Europe, but tells us that some place them in Asia or in a much more mysterious position "midway between the two suns, the sunsets of the antipodes and our sunrise" (*HN* 4.90). The Hyperboreans exist in a shadowy world, cut off from the *orbis terrarum*, conceptually beyond insurmountable boundaries.

Similarly remote, the Fortunate Isles are set outside the Pillars of Hercules in the Ocean, cut off from known continents, inaccessible to travellers. Lucian associates Arabia Eudaimon with the Fortunate Isles, as both possess the same sweet smell.[35] A western paradise, they display the

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32 Most concentrate on the connection with Apollo and Delos, see Hesiod *Cat.* fr. 150.21 MW; Alcaeus fr. 307 LP; Herodotus 4.32–37; Soph. fr. 956 Pearson; Pindar *Ol.* 3.16, *Pyth.* 10.29–45, *Paean* 8 (6) 1 Snell; Bacchyl. 3.57; Callim. *Hymn* 4.281–99.

33 The Hyperboreans become a byword for remoteness: Catullus 115.6, Virgil *Georgics* 4.517, Horace *Odes* 2.20.16, Lucan 5.23, Martial 4.3.5, 7.6.1, 8.78.3, 9.45.1, 9.101.20.

34 Admittedly a six-month long day!

35 Lucian *True Histories* 2.5: the scents of flowers, trees, and vines are said to be those which Herodotus ascribes to Arabia Eudaimon; Lucian typically takes no responsibility for the information.

labourless abundance of easy primitivism, demonstrating excessive fertility and mystical plenty (Pomponius Mela *Chorographia* 3.102):[36]

> Contra Fortunatae insulae abundant sua sponte genitis, et subinde aliis super alia innascentibus nihil sollicitos alunt, beatius quam aliae †urbes† excultae. Una singulari duorum fontium ingenio maxime insignis: alterum qui gustavere risu solvuntur in mortem; ita adfectis remedium est ex altero bibere.
>
> Facing [the Atlantic coast of Africa] the Fortunate Isles overflow with spontaneously generated life, and they nourish people who lack nothing, as plants are produced in succession, more blissfully productive than other †cities†. There is one island especially notable for the unique nature of its two fountains: those who taste one of them bring on death by laughter; the cure for those affected is to drink from the other.

Ambivalence is typical of utopian scenarios, whose heightened fecundity and involuntary production can generate sinister overtones and suggestions that one might luxuriate oneself to destruction, albeit in a deeply pleasurable way.[37] Spontaneous production is a trope of these utopian landscapes, a feature of the Hesiodic golden race and of ideal sites, both past and elsewhere, and so ubiquitous that, already in fifth-century texts, it was parodied as a cliché: Pherecrates and Teleclides have food begging to be eaten and rivers of bean soup and porridge, as nature provides both nourishment and

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36 Insulae Fortunatae: Horace *Epodes* 16.40–65, Strabo *Geography* 2.150, Ptolemy *Tetrabiblos* 4.6.14. Plutarch *Sertorius* 8–9 makes the comparison between the Fortunate Isles and Elysium explicit; Pliny *HN* 6.202–05 gives a much less positive view of the islands, though they are still hyperfertile, and, as in Plutarch, the fertility is dependent upon a mild climate. For similarly spontaneous production nearby, see also Mela *Chorographia* 3.104–05: alongside the deformed and degenerate inhabitants of West Africa are extremely fertile lands and areas rich in natural resources such as ivory and *murex*.

37 A less extreme parallel are the double drinks available on Pliny's Ombrios (6.203), also one of the Fortunate Isles. Here sap of two kinds is extracted from trees: the black juice is bitter (*amara*), while the lighter fluid is pleasing (*iucunda*).

table service (Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 6.268–69).[38] Even if labour is required, the crop is spectacular in these locations; in fact, hyperfertility becomes competitive around this time: Pliny claims that India has two to three harvests per year (*HN* 6.58, also 6.79), while Mela cites some islands off to the west of Spain that are able to generate at least seven per year (3.47),[39] and, in Lucian's parody, the Fortunate Isles produce apples and pomegranates thirteen times a year (*True Histories* 2.9).[40] This is an overproduction which Strabo claims is realized close to home for the Romans in Campania, whose fields produce two to four harvests per year, including the finest grain and olives and the best wines: Falernian and Calenian (*Geography* 5.4.3).[41] Elements of the utopian invade the depiction of locations near at hand and easily visited, so that fantasy islands like Panchaea, which Strabo derides as products of a feeble mind, inhabit his text in weakened form, as metaphorical islands of plenty, states of prosperity, landscapes of utopia.[42]

Italy occupied a superior position in the locatable world, but supernaturally idealized landscapes existed only at a temporal or spatial remove. Even the return to easy primitivism, seemingly promised by the Sibylline prophecies,[43] is figured as a non-specific future. In the late first century B.C.E., there is a coalescence of ideas suggesting a new era, including that of

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38 See Lovejoy and Boas 1935.38–41. For a Roman equivalent, see the variously dated [Virgil] *Aetna* 9–16 which can be paraphrased as, "who does not know the Golden Age as well as one's own?"

39 Apparently found only here.

40 India abounds in land, cities, and population (6.59) while functioning as a location of honey-dripping easy primitivism for Mela (3.62).

41 *Geography* 5.4.3; similar rhetoric is applied to the Chersonese, which is "everywhere level and fertile, and extremely well-blessed in the production of grain, yielding thirty times as much if furrowed by a plough-share. The people who live here are called the 'Georgi' as opposed to the Nomads who live beyond them" (*Geography* 7.4.6).

42 Perhaps the most famous invocation of heightened fertility in a locatable region are the *laudes Italiae* of Virgil's *Georgics* 2.136–76, especially lines 149–50: "hic uer adsiduum atque alienis mensibus aestas: / bis grauidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos" ("here there is eternal spring and summer in months that do not belong to it: / twice the flocks are pregnant, twice the tree profitable with fruit"). But Thomas 1988.190 has a far less optimistic reading of the passage: "the realities of agricultural activity in the *Georgics* are totally antithetical to the idealized status of the golden or Saturnian age"; see also Thomas 1982.38–45.

43 The date of the extant *Oracula Sibyllina* is debated, but they are probably of the Common Era; see Parke 1988.137. *Or. Sib.* 3.168 points to the arrival of a sun king.

the *annus magnus* or "great year" which begins when all of the heavenly bodies return to the positions they occupied at the beginning of the universe.[44] The time frame for the *annus magnus* is vague,[45] but Pliny (10.2.5), citing Manilius, suggests that it is 540 years, coinciding with the lifespan of the phoenix—a theory which connects the great year to the fabulous creature from the East.[46] Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* flirts with the idea of the *annus magnus*: "ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas; / magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo," "the last age of the Cumaean song has now come / the great succession of the centuries is born afresh" (4.5), before describing at length the imminent peace and plenty foretold by the Sibyl. In *Eclogue* 4, cyclical time, remote fantasy, and paradisal fertility combine to depict a landscape in which the Golden Age is reborn: its fragrances are worthy of the utopian East, natural dangers are seemingly neutralised, and fecundity runs riot (*Eclogue* 4.18–30):

> At tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu
> errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus
> mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho.
> Ipsae lacte domum referent distenta capellae
> ubera, nec magnos metuent armenta leones.
> Ipsa, tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores.
> Occidet et serpens, et fallax herba veneni
> occidet; Assyrium vulgo nascetur amomum.
> At simul heroum laudes et facta parentis
> iam legere et quae sit poteris cognoscere virtus,
> molli paulatim flavescet campus arista,
> incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva,
> et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella.

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44 See Taylor 1975.176 for Julius Caesar's evocation of the *annus magnus* to suggest that a new era was beginning with his rise to power.

45 See Cic. *de Rep.* 6.24, also *de Nat. Deorum* 2.51, and Plato *Timaeus* 39.

46 Furthermore, the new era is cast as that of Apollo, the sun god (*Ecl.* 10), while the phoenix is reborn in the city of the sun (*HN* 10.4). Coleman 1977.134 points out that there is an inherent contradiction in *Eclogue* 4, as the idealized age has already been named as that of Saturn (*Ecl.* 4.6), but he sees the apparent anomaly as an indication of the cluster of ideas involving renewal and change. The internal incoherence is typical of illogicalities present in utopian narratives.

> But for you, child, the earth, uncultivated,
> will pour forth your earliest little gifts:
> ivy wandering randomly with foxglove
> and lilies mixed with laughing acanthus.
> The she-goats will return home, their udders swollen
> with milk, and the flocks will not fear the great lions.
> Your cradle will stream with alluring flowers.
> The serpent will die, and deceitful poisonous herbs
> will die; Assyrian balsam will spring up everywhere.
> But as soon as you are able to read the praises of the heroes
> and the deeds of your father and to recognise courage,
> little by little, the field will turn golden with pliant grain,
> and the reddening grape will hang on the wild thorn-bush,
> and the oak will exude honey, dripping like dew.

Wild animals will no longer pose a threat, nor will the more pernicious plant life; productive livestock and crops will prove hyperfertile—and all without touching the earth. But intertwined within this narrative of Golden Age return are the uncontrolled tendrils of ivy, the flowers which flood the cradle, and the seductive scents of the East. If Campania represents a contemporary paradisal scenario, is it any wonder that Strabo (5.4.3) adds that the Etruscans were made weak by contact with this overproduction?[47] Paradisal landscapes are morally ambivalent in addition to being internally incoherent—so Mela's Fortunate Isles contain within them the means of laughing oneself to death.[48]

It is clear that idealised locations, in their many forms, are no simple vision of perfection. The Golden Age and its associated soft primitivism are complex ideas, capable of bearing ominous meanings and open to appropriation, as in the case of the parodies noted above. Greek tradition, from Hesiod (*WD* 109–20) onwards, presents the reign of Kronos as one of absolute harmony, with no strife between gods and men, and with the type of

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47 Fertility has an uneasy relationship with morality: hence Horace's metaphorical use of *fecundus* to denote an "era full of sin" (*fecunda culpae saecula*: *Odes* 3.6.17) when describing the wife who prostitutes herself with her husband's full knowledge; she herself has too much knowledge of the dubious East in the form of Ionic dances (*Odes* 3.6.21–32).

48 Utopia is, in general, a concept which lends itself to equivocacy, hence the subtitle of Ursula Le Guin's 1975 novel, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. See Fox 1982.56–57 on the negative aspects of More's Utopian society.

abundant fertility we see in geographically remote paradises.[49] Yet in Roman texts, in marked contrast, there are no accounts of Saturn's rule as the Golden Age before the Augustan era (Lovejoy and Boas 1935.53); indeed, Ennius claims that the succession of Jupiter initiated civilisation by forbidding cannibalism (*Euhemerus* fr. 9). This inability to imagine an unambiguous paradise is linked to a particularly Roman anxiety about their morally dubious origins which stressed immigration and criminality rather than autochthony, fratricide and belligerence rather than initial harmony.[50]

An analysis of paradise as a discourse helps us to understand how the myth of the perfect past can operate as social commentary: its usage is highly historicized rather than representing the re-emergence of a timeless, essentialized trope. Texts of the late first century B.C.E. highlight the "easy primitivism" of not needing to produce food and are particularly good at showing the malleability of paradisal landscapes. For example, Augustus's military coup could be expressed in both literary[51] and artistic media as the return of the Golden Age. For Anchises, the prophesied *aurea saecula* is analogous to Saturn's age and synonymous with empire (Virgil *Aeneid* 6.791–95):

> hic uir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
> Augustus Caesar, diui genus, aurea condet
> saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arua
> Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
> proferet imperium;
>
> This is the man, this is he, whom you have often heard
> promised to you,

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49 Kronos and the Golden Race: Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* 16.7; Cratinus apud Athenaeus 6.267e; Aristoph. *Clouds* 398, 1070, *Plutus* 581; Plato *Pol.* 268c–74d, *Laws* 712e–14b; Lucian *Saturnalia* 20. See Baldry 1952.

50 Cat. 64.397; Wiseman 1995, Cornell 1995.60–61. Late first-century writers acknowledge that vice, including primal guilt, is linked to civil war: Livy *praef.* 9; Vir. *Ecl.* 4.13, 4.35; Horace *Epode* 7 (especially 18–21), *Odes* 1.35.33–34, 3.6.1–4, 3.24.25–29. Virgil also hints at this in the so-called *laudes Italiae* (*Georg*. 2.150–54) by emphatically rejecting any claim to birth from the soil for Italians, preferring instead to stress the less fabulous crops which emerge from the land.

51 Also Horace *Odes* 4.2.37–40, *Consolatio ad Liviam* 343–44. See Wallace-Hadrill 1982 on the social function of Golden Age discourses under Augustus and the ways in which it was useful for the regime to be cast as saviour of a morally corrupt Rome.

> Augustus Caesar, the child of a god, who will found the golden
> ages again in Latium through the fields once ruled
> by Saturn, and over both the Garamantae and the Indi
> will he extend his power;

The abundant bounty associated with the Golden Age is also inscribed onto the design of the surrounding wall of the Ara Pacis Augustae (dedicated 9 B.C.E.) from the copious foliage of its lower frieze to the gracefully sculpted goddess, seated with fruit and corn overflowing from her lap, holding twin babies who clutch at the food and her breast, and surrounded by grazing animals—all indicators of the opulence and fertility which connect the stability of the principate to the *aurea aetas*.[52] The complexities of utopian landscape pervade this image, and the narrative of abundance and prosperity is nowhere more fully realized than it is here. This visual amalgamation of paradisal themes exemplifies the wide range of signification which can be encompassed by the utopian economy. The Augustan regime shrewdly manipulated the paradox of renewal and stability, opposites which can be united in utopian discourses. In this instance, Golden Age associations are deliberately manipulated to produce a version of the world which predates the criminality of civil war and the loss of farm property due to confiscations. Augustus brings the dawn of a new Roman peace (this goddess has been seen as Pax and Venus, as well as Italia and Tellus), which recasts itself as the world before lack. Senators and the imperial family represent tradition alongside the new iconography of a ruling dynasty. "Ever new yet changeless" (*aliusque et idem*: *Carmen Saeculare* 10) was how Horace described the sun which would rise over Rome's future, summing up the collision of antitheses. Golden Age discourses are here employed to contain the paradox of transformation and stability at a time when Rome demands both cures: paradise configures renewal of the most conservative kind.

Whereas utopian landscapes were traditionally thought to exist in remote and hermetically sealed regions, on the Ara Pacis the location of the ideal is left conveniently vague, though implicitly representing the potential for Pax to accomplish such effortless fertility here and now, at the centre of the Roman imperium—especially if the goddess is read as a personification

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52 Zanker 1990.172–83 discusses this and other reliefs showing images of bounty, pointing to the strong parallels with Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* (17 B.C.E.).

of Italia—and the altar was originally situated in close proximity to monuments celebrating Augustan victory (the obelisk) and the imperial dynasty (Augustus's Mausoleum). The swirling patterns of the lower panels of the Ara Pacis represent seemingly boundless fertility, but they are safely enclosed within borders of Corinthian pilasters, surmounted by orderly processions of senators, priests, and imperial family members, and sealed in by scenes which freeze moments of Rome's mythic life—it is a vision of nature, energetic and productive, yet ultimately strictly controlled by the forces of the Roman state (Castriota 1995, Simon 1967). Even the chaotic ivy and acanthus conform to a pattern of balance and harmony when viewed from a distance; in contrast with *Eclogue* 4, they are neither wandering nor laughing. Such a close guard on fertility mirrors the regime's social control of sexuality, enshrined into law in 18 B.C.E., just five years before the monument was decreed.[53] The altar seems to negotiate the difficult territory between discipline and excess. Nevertheless, here, too, the menace which afflicts utopia is glimpsed: disturbing elements invade the tranquil scenes, as scorpions and serpents can be seen among the foliage by the careful viewer.

This model of contained profusion is repeated in domestic settings, notably in the Roman garden, and in wall paintings which represent garden landscapes. Roman gardens—in a sense *all* gardens—negotiate a nexus of contradictions, providing the natural, the living, and the rural in a built, urban environment. The garden delivers the illusion of spontaneous growth within a fabricated frame; and, in Roman contexts, this is more than a juxtaposition of the two elements, as nature is physically enclosed within a colonnaded peristyle, a Hellenistic structure[54] which delineates the extent of the wilderness.[55] The peristyle, a contained, protected space in the natural world, could be made even more secure with a low wall, fence, or curtains between the columns.[56] Like the Ara Pacis, the Roman garden sets strict limits on growth,[57] while creating the effect of cultivated countryside.

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53 This reading is particularly attractive if the fertility goddess is identified as Venus.

54 On walled gardens as Hellenistic and, originally, a Persian concept (hence the term "paradise" from *paradeisos*, Persian for "an enclosed garden"), see Farrar 2000.9.

55 Segal reads Roman pastoral landscapes as artificial and unreal analogues to wall painting's "enclosed, controlled architectural framework which shuts out the real landscape and replaces it with one that is man-made" (1963.50–51).

56 For example, panels were inserted between columns to reduce bright sunlight in the Villa at Oplontis; see Farrar 2000.29.

57 Farrar 2000.28 discusses the peristyle as a border or frame and comments that pseudo-peristyles (painted onto walls or using engaged columns) are often found where space was

Wall painting is capable of going one step further, situating the pastoral directly within the domestic, by transforming architectural materiality into rural fantasy. This is particularly visible in what is usually known as "second style" wall painting (c. 80–c. 15 B.C.E.: Ling 1991.23), which breaks through the solid plane of the wall to create the double illusion of exteriority in an interior setting and natural growth in an artificial environment.[58] Perhaps the most famous example is that of the garden room from Livia's Prima Porta villa, which once enclosed an interior dining room with the coherent illusion of an exterior space. The room provides the perfect combination of variety and abundance with stylisation and order: the flowers immediately behind the wall—rose, chrysanthemum, poppy, periwinkle—are orderly and inviting, further back the plants become wilder. The birds are not only free and flying but also in cages, which indicates the input of human activity, as do the walls and manicured lawn path. As the foliage recedes, evidence of human interference decreases. But all of these plants are emphatically restrained behind an elaborate stone and lattice-work fence: only a neat border of white flowers, small bushes positioned at regular intervals, and strategically placed trees[59] invade the territory of the foreground (Gabriel 1955.10).

The garden room is unusual in that it minimises architectural elements: columns and framing at the top and bottom of the painting (Gabriel 1955.6–7). To the superficial view, the natural is therefore privileged over the artificial, but it is, in fact, a fantasy garden: the visual details of the plants are correct, but different seasons appear together. Periwinkles bloom in early spring, irises, roses, and poppies later, oleanders in summer, chrysanthemums in September, and pomegranates in late autumn (Gabriel 1955.11). The impossible synchronicity of this garden links it to descriptions of hyperfertility in utopian landscapes. The flowers allow nature to transgress the laws of nature, displaying a subtle control of time itself, control which is mirrored by Augustus's use of his Egyptian victory monument, an obelisk, as a sundial, the Horologium Augusti. Bounty and triumph

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lacking in order to give the illusion of space. I would add that the pseudo-peristyle also gives the illusion of a coherent enclosure.

58 Although there is insufficient space to discuss the phenomenon here, it should be noted that landscape panel painting performs a similar, though less illusionistic, function, by confining and defining the limits of the natural environment. See Pavlovskis 1973.7 n. 22 on the subjugation of nature in Campanian landscape painting, and note that the genre was invented in the Augustan age (Pliny *HN* 35.116).

59 Including the laurel, an ideologically encoded image; see La Regina 1988.72.

combine in the new dawn of the princeps's rise to power as calendric time is co-opted by Augustus; these monuments confirm Roman control over both empire and the forces of the cosmos.

The interiorisation of landscape indicates a desire to exert a degree of permanent control over nature, a counterpart to the control exercised over nature in real gardens by topiary (*nemora tonsilia*), the stylised shaping of trees and bushes invented by Augustus's friend, Gaius Matius (Pliny *HN* 12.13).[60] In reality, it would require considerable labour to maintain the effect of order, for the peristyle garden is never finished (Horace *Epistles* 1.10.22–25):

> nempe inter varias nutritur silva columnas,
> laudaturque domus longos quae prospicit agros.
> Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret,
> et mala perrumpet furtim fastidia victrix.
>
> Surely, a forest nursed among the colourful columns,
> and the house which looks out on distant fields is praised.
> You will drive out nature with a pitchfork, but she will
> always hurry back,
> and, stealthily, she will burst through your foolish
> disdain, triumphant.

5. CONCLUSION

Utopian scenarios are invoked in specific, historical situations. The associations which they assemble, as well as the functions which they might fulfil, are not conditioned by an appeal to a universalised Golden Age. Landscapes are bearers of morally-loaded meaning, of political messages; utopian landscapes slip easily into ambiguity and parody: they negotiate a yearning for, and suspicion of, the ideal. But most of all, in literary, geographical, artistic, and horticultural media, they demonstrate a desire to organise and circumscribe the natural world, to delineate a potentially perfect future, and to provide a space for analysing the uncertainties entailed by paradise.

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60 See Masson 1987.5 for discussion.

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