On Translating More's *Utopia*

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Thomas More's most celebrated work appeared at Louvain in December 1516 from the press of Thierry Martens. It doesn't seem unreasonable to claim that it is the most widely known Neo-Latin book, though it is surprising how few people seem to realise that More wrote it in Latin (for a discussion of a range of translations and editions of *Utopia*, see McCutcheon, 'Ten English Translations/Editions'). It was seen through the press by Erasmus, who was conceivably responsible for the final title *Utopia* (as late as September More still referred to it as *Nusquama*), and it was aimed primarily at the readers of his *Encomium Moriae* (1511), an audience which, even if it didn't know Greek, might well aspire to do so. Thus we have the range of prefatory letters, again organised by Erasmus, which draws in a number of prominent figures in Netherlandish scholarship, and for the 1517 Paris edition even the great French Hellenist Guillaume Budé. It's a book, in other words, that is stylistically self-conscious. More, in practical terms a London lawyer and acting diplomat, is creating for himself an alternative identity in the republic of letters. Hence the intriguing games played in the *parerga*, when the fiction leaks out of its own world and appears to engage the real one, rather like those pictures in which a limb or a garment protrudes over the frame. However the word is taken, More was a witty man; he had a disconcerting sense of play, and this has important implications for any translator.

What motives might there be for translating *Utopia*? In contrast to the dual-language evolution of his *Richard the Third/Historia Richardi Tertii*, a vernacular rendering can hardly have been in the forefront of More's mind when he addressed his cosmopolitan audience, though he did target Anglophone readers with his translation of the biography of Pico della Mirandola as well as his later Reformation polemics. It's worth recalling his remarkable retraction in *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* where he asserts that

yf any man wolde now translate [Erasmus's] Moria in to Englyshe, or some works
eyther that I have my selfe wryten ere this…I wolde not onely my derlynges bokes but
myne owne also, helpe to burne them both wyth myne owne hands, rather then folke
sholde (though thorow theyr own faute) take any harme of them…

(*Complete Works* 8.1: 179)

More's point is that in the fraught atmosphere prevailing in 1532, when 'men by theyr
owne defaute mysseconstre and take harme of the very scripture of god', satire is
no longer a secure medium, especially in translation. In 1517 More's allusion in his
second prefatory letter to Peter Gillis, to 'that rushed and perfunctory way in which
priests tend to say their office (assuming that they say it at all)' (*Utopia*, tr. Baker-
Smith 19),[1] might raise a knowing smile, but a few years later it could fuel something
much more alarming. The *Moria* and the *Utopia* had been directed at a Latinate read-
ership equipped to handle irony and ambivalence, but once translated for a largely
undefined vernacular readership they might well slide out of control. To some extent,
then, the reception of *Utopia* was muffled by the outbreak of the Reformation, and I
would suggest that its ambivalence was in part compromised by the emergence of a
more cautious and literal mind-set.

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  The first Italian translation, by Ortensio Landi in 1548, was probably encouraged
by the Buonvisi family whose banking activities provided a link between More's own
circle, where Antonio Buonvisi was his intimate friend, and the family base in Lucca.
No fewer than four of Landi's books appeared under a Utopian pseudonym, and he
may well have been attracted by the book's implicit criticism of the established order,
as he had been with the works of Erasmus which he also translated. But that, of course,
meant focussing on Utopian institutions rather than on the mediating dialogue—on
the blueprint rather than the fiction—and this becomes the dominant characteristic
of most readings (and translations) of *Utopia* down to recent times (Nelson 1044).[2]
This tendency is evident in Francesco Sansovino's *Del governo dei regni et delle
republiche antiche et moderne* which appeared at Venice in 1561 and describes Utopia
along with actual states such as Fez, Sparta and Spain. Revealingly, Sansovino adopts
Landi's translation but only prints Book 2 and its account of Utopian institutions.
Clearly, he is more interested in the comparative study of political systems rather
than in the subtle probing of political motives which drives Book 1.

  Ralph Robinson's pioneer English translation appeared in 1551. It was rather awk-
wardly dedicated to William Cecil, a rising statesman sympathetic to the Edwardian
reformation, with the apology that More, 'a man of so incomparable wit', could fail
to see 'the shining light of God's holy truth in certain principal points of Christian
religion'. Faced by the 'sweet eloquence of the writer' in Latin, as well as his 'witty
invention', Robinson fears that his own rudeness and ignorance in the English tongue
will lose the eloquence of the original and therefore the fruitfulness of the matter.
Just whom was he writing for? His high-flying school-mate, William Cecil, was one
of the principal secretaries to Edward VI and at the start of his illustrious public

career, so that some interest in reform may be assumed. Then it may be suggestive that Robinson's *Communication of Raphael Hythloday, Concerning the best state of a commonwealth* appeared just two years after Sir Thomas Smith's *A Discourse of the Common Weal*, another imaginary dialogue written in response to the social unrest prompted by enclosures. This, of course, is a major theme in Book 1 of *Utopia*, anticipating the 1517 inquiry set up by Wolsey to review the problem. Both books, Smith's *Discourse* and Robinson's translation, could be aimed at that fast growing class of Tudor gentry who had spent time at the universities or the Inns of Court and thus had some interest in matters of governance. So fiction here is seen as more of a narrative device than an exploratory medium, the honey that commends the medicine, and this seems to be true of most readings of *Utopia* down to relatively modern times. It would scarcely be surprising if late Tudor readings reflected contemporary anxiety about the displacement of the rural population and related issues of social justice, and I have sometimes wondered whether a future cultural historian might not regard the modern emergence of more complex readings, which shift attention to the debate in the garden, as a concomitant of the Cold War and its fear of totalitarian socialism.

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Some while ago I was invited to do a new translation of *Utopia* for Penguin Classics. I had written about the book, and talked about it on numerous occasions, but translation of any kind was a new departure for me, a challenge to become far more intimately involved with the text—and with the mental processes of the author. Given my reservations about some existing versions, I was not unattracted by the idea. If you glance at the Yale edition, published as part of the *Complete Works* back in 1965, Edward Surtz makes a few comments on the translation (the editors, Edward Surtz and J.H. Hexter, had, for some reason, adapted that of G.C. Richards, published originally in 1923), in which he refers to the ideal of 'recreating something like the original impact of *Utopia*' (cxciii). This rather guileless remark would not have fared well in the subsequent four decades of theory, but it turns out that what Surtz had in mind was the 'timelessness' of the original Latin (it's worth reflecting that when Surtz, a Jesuit, wrote that, the Catholic Church still largely operated in Latin). This he feels should rule out contemporary idioms (contemporary with the translator, that is), but then this can all too easily lead to the rather colourless prose often associated with translation—of which, it has to be said, much of Richards offers an example. Why the Yale project didn't venture on its own translation I'm not sure. But more recently we have had the 'Cambridge' *Utopia* (1995), the collaborative effort of Logan, Adams and Miller, which succeeds in combining accuracy with a degree of liveliness, and most recently Clarence Miller's own rendering (2001), arguably the best we have. My debt to these recent versions has been considerable.

Paradoxically, in the same year that saw the arrival of the Yale edition, Penguin Classics published Paul Turner's translation (1965, reissued 2003), and if the former might be said to address an academic audience then the latter was aimed at the casual reader. To this end it was unashamedly contemporary. We can take the issue of names. Whoever it was who actually replaced *Nusquama* by *Utopia*, the Greek com-

pound *ou-topos*, no-place, represents More's naming strategy throughout: the river running through the city of Amaurotum is the River Anydrus, from *an-ydros*, waterless; the Achorians, neighbours to the Utopians, from *a-choros*, have no country; the chief magistrate in a Utopian city has the title Ademus, from *a-demos*, without people, and so on. The self-negating character of these names may well look back to Plato's city of words in the *Republic* which, as Glaucon says, can be found nowhere on earth (592A-B). Turner grasps this opportunity with both hands: while he leaves Utopia alone ('it seems too well known to be changed'), he makes Anydrus into the River Nowater; the Achorians inhabit Nolandia; the Macarians, a happy people (from *makarios*) inhabit Happiland, while Amaurotum, dim or shadowy city (from *amauros*), which is the capital and seat of the federal senate, becomes Aircastle. The aim is clear enough, in the place of alien and baffling names we have playful and familiar ones which declare their allegorical connotations but, at the same time, make More's island sound depressingly like a province of Disneyland. So one question the translator has to face must be, just how serious is this fable 'nec minus salutaris quam festivus', 'no less instructive than delightful'?

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Perhaps the most startling example in Turner is the name of the mysterious traveller encountered by More in Antwerp, Raphael Hythlodaeus. A lot of ink has been spilt on this subject: Raphael, with its angelic associations, might be said to link the intelligible and contingent worlds, but Hythlodaeus appears to suggest a purveyor of, or one expert in, nonsense or *hythlos*, that being exactly what Socrates is accused of talking in the *Republic* (336D). There has been a tendency for English versions to abbreviate his name to Hythloday, but Turner wants something more direct, and so we get Raphael Nonsenso. Personally, I see no problem about leaving More's exotic and self-negating names in their original form and providing explanatory notes, or at least retaining some form close to the original and just dropping the Latin ending—Anyder for the river Anydrus, Amaurot for Amaurotum. This is the course followed by the Yale editors, whose concern is to eliminate any archaic 'savor', in the hope that the names will strike the modern Anglophone reader 'as the names in Latin do the Latin reader.' In any case, I suspect that many among More's humanist audience—which did not have Liddell and Scott to hand—found the names hard to crack (even Gerhard Vossius had his problems (see Romm)), and in a multicultural society a reader is surely not going to be phased by their unfamiliarity.

The Sixties was a peculiar decade and typically impatient of the past, but leaving aside any subjective reactions to such recasting of the names, it seems to me that a principle is involved here. This is simply that the translator of a classic text, like any other interpreter, has a duty to the reader to make the text and its tradition accessible. By tradition I mean the cumulative experience of reading that surrounds a work, its surplus signification, which is of course the ground of its ambivalence. Clearly, this applies especially to a text like *Utopia* which has been argued about for almost five hundred years, but it can apply to other texts as well. If you start off with Mr Nonsenso, any reader who tries to take things a bit further by engaging with other

versions (even with the original) or with secondary discussion about *Utopia* will be nonplussed by references to Hythlodaeus. So how far should a translation point beyond itself? There is a limit as to how far you can hijack a text into contemporary idiom without compromising its identity, its relationship to a context. This is especially the case with *Utopia* which disguises its fiction under the form of a social event, a cultivated but informal conversation in an Antwerp garden where feelings run high but courtesies are observed. This humanist *convivium* is grounded with some care on a very precise historical occasion, More's 1515 diplomatic trip to Bruges: the issues it raises may be timeless, but the fabric of the discourse is not. This requires, then, that the translator renders it in sympathy with its historical setting since this—paradoxically—becomes part of the fiction. One argument in favour of Robinson's 1551 version is that it gives the competent modern reader some feel of humanistic debate (admittedly a bit muffled), but its Tudor English is unlikely to grip the attention of a non-specialist.

496   In the introduction to his account of sixteenth-century English literature 'excluding drama', C.S. Lewis says that he has translated the passages from Latin into Tudor-style English so that their seductive modernity will not give them an unfair advantage over those passages quoted from the vernacular (v). Paul Turner, in the note on his translation of *Utopia*, says just the opposite: 'Some such obscurity is inevitable when a sixteenth-century author writes in English, but when he writes in Latin it is quite unnecessary'. Latin being what Turner calls a 'temporal Esperanto', he feels free to use 'the sort of idiom which would interfere as little as possible with the entry of More's ideas into a modern mind' (22-23). As a student of literature I have to confess to some unease at this idea of a transparent linguistic medium by which ideas slide from mind to mind; it seems to me that with More, to adapt another slogan of the '60s, the medium certainly contributes to the message, and so deserves to be handled with some care.

To take one simple example, there is More's almost instinctive resort to litotes: it occurs sufficiently often to rate as a character trait (see Elizabeth McCutcheon, who, in her splendid study of the figure in *Utopia*, 'Denying the Contrary', counts 140 examples). One feature of Utopian life is its constant exposure to public gaze, one is never out of sight of others; as a result all the citizens 'are bound to be either working at their usual trades or enjoying their leisure in a respectable way.' The Latin has 'aut consueti laboris aut otii non inhonesti faciunt' (More 1995: 144). The negative is missed out in all English versions (even Robinson), except for Richards, who gives, 'enjoying their leisure in a fashion not without decency.' My own provisional (and rather limping) attempt gives 'enjoy their leisure in some not unsuitable manner' (73). The fact is that litotes is often difficult to render in English without sounding mannered or clumsy—retaining that negative is a problem. Yet More's predilection for it reflects an important characteristic, his tendency to quietly, even ironically, point up tensions and contrasts which make us pause, and equally to avoid blunt assertions. Turner's rendering is typically straightforward: 'Everyone has his eye on

you, so you're practically forced to get on with your job, and make some proper use of your spare time' (84). But is this More? It misses the darker alternative implicit in 'non inhonestus'.

Turner's version, as we have seen, came out in 1965, the year of the Yale *Utopia*. The latter has provoked forty-five years of argument about the work, most of which has argued for its complexity and indirectness. As a result Turner appears rather stranded by his own positive approach: 'I am simple minded enough to believe, with certain qualifications, that the book means what it says, and that it *does* attempt to solve the problems of human society' (12). Certainly his translation does bring zip and liveliness to the text, but it is handicapped in my view by a radical misunderstanding of More's intention. In fact it fails to engage with the rhetorical controls built into the book, and as a result over-Lucianises it. Of course, someone might say at this point, well, isn't part of the problem the Penguin format? The series is meant, after all, to popularise the classics.[3] One can answer that by simply pointing to other Penguin volumes such as the Radice/Levi *Praise of Folly* and Michael Screech's Rabelais or Montaigne. I mentioned earlier the duty of the translator to make a text accessible: that means not only making it readable but also guiding the reader into new (or lost) and unfamiliar habits of reading.

More is clearly anxious to nudge his preferred readers towards the kind of reading that will respond to his careful balancing act between playful fiction and sober truth, and for that reason reading habits feature prominently in the two prefatory letters addressed to Peter Gillis. Quite apart from their studied confusion of historical places (Antwerp/London) and imaginary ones (Utopia), these letters have quite a lot to say about unsuitable readers, from humourless boors and pedants to those more sinister critics who pass judgement on an author, 'dragging him down by his writings as if they'd got him by the hair. Meanwhile, they keep themselves just "out of range" as the saying has it—so shaven and shorn are these good men, in fact, that there's not a hair left to grab them by' (14). These 'good men' are presumably hairless because they are tonsured, and it's worth recalling that at the very time that he must have devised this preface, October 1516, More warned Erasmus about the conspiracy led by Henry Standish, 'that prince among the Franciscan divines', in which 'they have divided your works among them, and taken an oath that they will read right through everything with the greatest care, and not understand anything' (*Collected Works of Erasmus* 4: 115, Ep 481). The clash between scholastic and humanist attitudes to language inevitably extends to reading habits, as More well recognised, and it stands out in his second letter to Gillis as he responds to an unnamed (and presumably fictional) critic:[4]

Iam quum dubitet verane res an commenticia sit, hic vero exactum ipsius iudicium requiro. Neque tamen inficias eo si de republica scriber decrevissem, ac mihi tamen venisset in mentem tallis fabula, non fuisse fortassis abhorriturum ab ea fictione qua velut melle circumlitum suaviuscule influeret in animos verum. At certe sic temperassem tamen ut si vulgi abuti ignoratione vellem, litteratioribus saltem aliqua

praefixissem vestigia quibus institutum nostrum facile pervestigarent. Itaque si nihil aliud ac nomina saltem principis, fluminis, urbis, insulae posuissem talia quae peritiores admonere possent insulam nusquam esse, urbem evanidam, sine aqua fluvium, sine populo esse principem, quod neque factu fuisset difficile et multo fuisset lepidius quam quod ego feci, qui nisi me fides coegisset historiae, non sum tam stupidus ut barbaris illis uti nominibus et nihil significantibus, Utopiae, Anydri, Amauroti, Ademi voluissem. (More 1995: 268)

'Now, it's when he wonders whether the account is true or made up that I find his own good judgement at fault. I don't deny that if I had decided to write about the commonwealth, and a tale like this had sprung to mind, then I might have settled for a fiction by which the truth could sweetly slip into the mind as though smeared with honey. But I would certainly have so ordered matters that, even though I wished to exploit the ignorance of the crowd, I should at the very least have set up signals for the more literate in order to alert them as to what was going on. Accordingly, if I had just applied such names to the governor, the river, the city, and the island as would warn the skilful reader that the island was nowhere, the city illusory, the river waterless, and the governor without a people, it wouldn't have been difficult, and a lot more subtle than what I actually did; for even if historical objectivity had not compelled me, I'm not so dense that I would have chosen such outlandish names as Utopia, Anyder, Amaurot or Ademus which signify nothing.' (20)

Which, of course, is exactly what they do signify; like Plato's republic they are to be found nowhere on earth. In such a context it does seem to be part of a translator's duty to install the reader in the ranks of 'the more literate'.

It may seem a bit perverse, but when I began to translate More's apparent travel fantasy, I began with Book 2; more precisely, I followed the likely sequence of composition proposed by Hexter—starting with Raphael's monologue about the newly discovered island and its society, before turning back to the introductory dialogue in Antwerp. There is a persuasive case that the work began as a diversion in Antwerp, where during a lull in diplomatic negotiations More had leisure and even, conceivably, the stimulus of a glance at the new Aldine Greek text of Plato's *Republic* (1513) —his previous acquaintance with the text would have been in a Latin translation, most likely that of Marsilio Ficino. Raphael's account, then, is in a plain discursive style, fitting for a traveller's narrative. Only at the end does he raise the emotional pitch in his ferocious condemnation of European society, though (for the reader) this has been anticipated in his earlier clash over private property with the fictive More (Morus) and Peter Gillis at the end of Book 1.

More's talent for dialogue finds full scope in the debate over political participation which dominates Book I and resurfaces in the closing lines of Book 2; this was certainly composed back in London after the account of Utopia had been finished. So the descriptive style allotted to Raphael in Book 2 in order to present a model society is enclosed within the frame of a discussion that raises questions about the accessibility of the ideal and its relevance in a fallen world. I would suggest (cautiously) that the *fortuna* of *Utopia* in English, from Robinson down to recent times, has been distorted by an over-emphasis on the practices on the new island, with too little attention to

the goings-on in Antwerp. This suggestion may not be so far-fetched as it sounds: as we have already seen, one effect of the Reformation was to dampen down imaginative play, and the recovery of Renaissance habits of perception and expression in a later age might be expected to counter this pressure. Certainly, the standard for a satisfactory version of *Utopia* must be an adequate rendering of the tensions within the dialogue.

By way of conclusion we can look at a specimen from More's text which illustrates the challenge of presenting the vigour and subtlety of his Latin in English, and I have appended it, along with Robinson's version and my own rendering. For many it can be rated as one of the most pregnant sections in Book 1. Once the speakers have settled in the garden and Raphael has given some account of his wanderings, Pieter Gillis is driven to exclaim (echoing the advice of Andrea Corneo to Pico della Mirandola which More had himself translated in the *Life of Pico*) that Raphael should enter the service of some prince, a proposal that is not well received and which gives rise to Raphael's quibble between *inservio*, to serve, and *servio*, to be enslaved. Raphael here is very close to Pico in his retort, that philosophers 'repute them self kingis of kingis: they love liberte: they can not bere ye proude maners of estates: they can not serve' (More, *Complete Works* 1: 87). This leads to what might almost be called an insert in the flow of the dialogue, the episode at Cardinal Morton's house which Raphael recalls from his English visit of 1497. Much (and little) has been read into this section, and it certainly has the feel of being composed at a late stage, probably at the same time as Raphael's closing peroration in Book 2, but at its centre is the claim that moral performance cannot be wholly severed from social conditions (much the same argument that Erasmus would later direct against Luther). You steal because you can't eat. This gives extra weight to the subsequent exchanges about mixing politics with philosophy: first there are Raphael's imaginary fly-on-the-wall excursions to royal councils in session, one of them French, the second a thinly disguised exposure of economic policy under Henry VII. How can idealism intrude on scenes like these? The effect is to give a wholly new turn to the old debate about action and retirement, *negotium* and *otium*: given the power of custom to constrict the moral imagination (a point More returns to several times), and given that society is founded on custom, how can you introduce alternative values into such a closed system?

The section at issue, and printed at the end of this essay, follows immediately on More's longest sentence, just 926 words in the original printing, which has the effect of numbing the reader until moral resistance does indeed seem hopeless; in the Cambridge edition (1995) it is broken up into twenty-four sentences (88:1-94:19). It is the effect of the consequent exchange that I want to emphasize—the sentences are short to moderate in length, closely following the line of thought; the language is forceful: *ingero* suggests an aggressive approach to opponents who are themselves *vehementer inclinatos* to the contrary view, and More's emphatic *surdissimus* speaks for itself, followed as it is by one of the only two expletives in the book (how can you translate *hercule* or *mehercule* for a four-letter culture?). Morus develops the contrast

between the unshackled play of mind associated with *philosophia scholastica* and the guarded terms of counsel: while Pliny the Younger (Ep. 9.2.3) writes of *scholasticae et umbraticae litterae*, the fruits of leisured speculation, which conjures up something rather like a debate in an Antwerp garden, it seems clear (and the point is reinforced by the marginal note) that here it echoes the charge of irrelevance made by human-ists against school philosophy—that it has no purchase on practical life, that it's not going to change the world (and again we have a Morean litotes, 'non insuauis est haec philosophia'). *Philosophia civilior*, on the other hand, is a matter of decorum, of accommodation to circumstance, hence the two examples given by Morus—the actor playing a role or the mariner reacting to natural forces. It is a cluster of allusions which closely follows Erasmus's adage 'Servire scenae', 'to be a slave to your theatre… to accommodate oneself to the present situation' (*Adagia* I.i.91): in both contexts we get the acting and the sailing metaphors, but More subtly develops the former, upset-ting decorum by a projected Plautine/Senecan clash in which the comic chatter of slaves intrudes on the solemn tones of the wise counsellor Seneca, in his own tragedy, the *Octavia*.[5] It is important for any translation to get the full impact of this as the reader is confronting one of the key issues of the book, the introduction of reform. We have the stage world of the domestics and into it enters Seneca, played in this case by Raphael, in the guise of a philosopher (*habitu philosophico*—recall Raphael's carelessly slung cloak), to exchange a series of stichomythia with Nero on the nature of good government.

> *N. Ferrum tuetur principem S. Melius fides.*
> *N. Decet timeri Caesarem. S. At plus diligi.*

> (*Octavia* 456-57)

> *N.* Steel is the Emperor's guard. *S.* Better loyalty.
> *N.* It fits Caesar to be feared. *S.* But more to be loved.

And so on. But More must hope that his ideal reader will be able to call to mind the wider episode, how prior to Nero's entry Seneca recalls the tranquil days of contem-plation, before he entered imperial service, and reflects on the lost age of Saturn when all goods were common property, 'communis usus omnium rerum fuit' (*Oct.* 403). At the same time, one suspects that the reader is meant to recall Seneca's enforced suicide when his counsel proved unacceptable.

So, how to translate *philosophia civilior*? 'More civil', 'a more civilized form of phi-losophy' (that's Turner), 'more practical for statesmen', 'more suited for the role of a citizen', 'more suited to civil affairs'? It does seem essential to get in some hint of what we now know as civic humanism: not least because there are indications of an active interest in 'civic philosophies of government' among London law officers in the later Middle Ages (see Rees Jones 123). For them a *philosophia civilior* would not be an exotic import. But to be civil rather than scholastic, Morus argues, requires that one works *obliquo ductu*, not head on but crabwise, in accord with circumstance. Here

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Robinson seems to lose the thread rather—'you must with a crafty wile and a subtle train study and endeavour yourself…to handle the matter wittily…'. This sounds closer to Machiavelli than to More, and I would suggest something less tortuous, 'you must do your best to operate through an indirect approach, and try to handle everything tactfully'. The important thing is to impress on the reader the centrality of this section and the issue of social engagement that it raises. In 1501 the young More had lectured on Augustine's *City of God*, and he must have been struck by the saint's remarks on this issue:

> In his tenebris vitae socialis sedebit iudex ille sapiens an non audebit? Sedebit plane. Constringit enim eum et ad hoc officium pertrahit humana societas, quam deserere nefas ducit. (*De civitate Dei* 19.6)

> Given that social life is surrounded by such darkness, will the wise man take his seat on the judge's bench…? Clearly he will take his seat; for the claims of human society, which he thinks it wicked to abandon, constrain him and draw him to this duty.

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> (Tr. Dyson 927)

To operate *obliquo ductu*, drawing on the resources of the persuasive arts rather than on speculative philosophy, is to recognise the compromised nature of the social world, one in which men are not yet all good. As Morus dryly observes, 'After all, it's inconceivable that everything should turn out well unless all men become good, and that I don't anticipate for quite some time to come' (50). Some eight years later, writing against Luther's assertion of human depravity, Erasmus attributes sin less to human nature than to corrupt education, bad company, and the custom of sin (see *Hyperaspistes* 2: 575). In other words, to the imperfect social system that embraces us. This is not so far from Raphael's point about theft and social deprivation. To participate is to risk contamination, and yet—as Augustine might ask—what alternative is there? This seems to be the case put by Morus, and it is in this rather than in any social blueprint that the originality of More's book lies.

Utopia is a work of the political imagination, devised to explore the process by which ideas might modify the forms of social life. It is immediately after this *obliquus ductus* passage that we encounter the first reference to the Utopians: Raphael's dismissive retort to Morus contrasts two verbs—'Quod si aut ea dicerem quae *fingit* Plato in sua republica aut ea quae *faciunt* Utopienses in sua…'; 'What if I were to tell them about the scheme that Plato *imagines* in his republic, or that which the Utopians actually *practise* in theirs?' (50). Plato *imagines* what the Utopians *perform*: fiction and fact, just the alternatives which the book pretends to reconcile. Surtz's reference to a timeless style has its point, but it is the issues that are timeless. At the end, when Morus takes his prickly guest into supper, he confides to us, the readers, his own perplexity—and that is the condition More tries to leave us with. At least the shackles of custom have been loosened: rather than a blueprint what we are offered is a state of mind, and the translator's job is to make sure we realise it.

More's Latin and an English version

Haec ergo atque huiusmodi si ingererem apud homines in contrariam partem vehementer inclinatos, quam surdis essem narraturus fabulam?

Surdissimus, inquam, haud dubie: neque hercule miror, neque mihi videntur (ut vere dicam) huiusmodi sermones ingerendi aut talia danda consilia, quae certus sis numquam admissum iri. Quid enim prodesse possit aut quomodo in illorum pectus influere sermo tam insolens, quorum praeoccupavit animos atque insedit penitus diversa persuasio? Apud amiculos in familiari colloquio non insuavis est haec philosophia scholastica. Ceterum in consiliis principum, ubi res magnae magna auctoritate aguntur, non est his rebus locus.

Hoc est, inquit ille, quod dicebam, non esse apud principes locum philosophiae.

Immo, inquam, est verum, non huic scholasticae quae quidvis putet ubivis convenire: sed est alia philosophia civilior quae suam novit scaenam, eique sese accomodans, in ea fabula quae in manibus est suas partes concinne et cum decoro tutatur. Hac utendum est tibi. Alioquin dum agitur quaepiam Plauti comoedia, nugantibus inter se vernulis, si tu in proscaenium prodeas habitu philosophico et recenseas ex *Octavia* locum in quo Seneca disputat cum Nerone, nonne praestiterit egisse mutam personam quam aliena recitando talem fecisse tragicomoediam? Corruperis enim perverterisque praesentem fabulam dum diversa permisces, etiamsi ea quae tu adfers meliora fuerint. Quaecumque fabula in manu est, eam age quam potes optime, neque ideo totam perturbes quod tibi in mentem venit alterius quae sit lepidior.

Sic est in republica, sic in consultationibus principum. Si radicitus evelli non possint opiniones pravae nec receptis usu vitiis mederi queas ex animi tui sententia, non ideo tamen deserenda respublica est, et in tempestate navis destituenda est, quoniam ventos inhibere non possis. At neque insuetus et insolens sermo inculcandus quem scias apud diversa persuasos pondus non habiturum, sed obliqo ductu conandum est atque adnitendum tibi uti pro tua virili omnia tractes commode, et quod in bonum nequis vertere efficias saltem ut sit quam minime malum. Nam et omnia bene sint fieri non potest, nisi omnes boni sint, quod ad aliquot abhinc annos adhuc non exspecto.

Hac, inquit, arte nihil fieret aliud quam ne dum aliorum furori mederi studeo, ipse cum illis insaniam. Nam si vera loqui volo talia loquar necesse est. Ceterum falsa loqui sitne philosophi nescio: certe non est meum. Quamquam ille meus sermo ut fuerit fortasse ingratus illis atque molestus, ita non video cur videri debeat usque ad ineptias insolens. Quod si aut ea dicerem quae fingit Plato in sua republica aut ea quae faciunt Utopienses in sua, haec quamquam essent (ut certe sunt) meliora, tamen aliena videri possint, quod hic singulorum privatae sunt possessiones, illic omnia sunt communia. (More 1995: 94-98)

'If, then, I were to force these ideas and others like them on people fiercely committed to the opposite point of view, would I not be preaching to the deaf?'

'Stone deaf,' I replied, 'without a shadow of doubt, and I can hardly say that I'm surprised. To speak frankly, it seems to me futile to urge propositions of this kind or to proffer such advice as you know will never be accepted. What good can it do? How can such an alien line of argument touch those whose minds are wholly taken over and possessed by the contrary opinion? In a discussion among friends this sort of academic philosophy isn't without its appeal, but in the councils of princes where major issues are debated with great authority, it's quite out of place.'

'Exactly my point,' replied Raphael, 'philosophy has no place among princes.'

'That's certainly true,' I said. 'There is no place for that academic mode which holds that you can discuss anything you like, regardless of the setting. But there is another philosophy, more attuned to public affairs, which knows its stage and adapts itself to the play in hand, acting out its role fittingly and with due decorum. This is the sort of philosophy you must use. Otherwise it's just as if in the course of a play by **503** Plautus—when the domestics are swopping jokes—you stride onstage in the guise of a philosopher and declaim that speech in the *Octavia* where Seneca disputes with Nero. Wouldn't it be better to act a dumb part rather than turn the whole thing into a tragi-comedy by uttering such inappropriate lines? When you mix in alien elements, even if they are an improvement, you wreck the play. Do the best you can in the play that's being performed, and don't wreck it because you happen to have thought of one that might be more entertaining.

'That's exactly how things are in public affairs and in the councils of princes. Even if you can't eradicate harmful ideas or remedy established evils, that's no reason to turn your back on the body politic; you mustn't abandon ship simply because you can't direct the winds. Equally, you shouldn't force strange and startling ideas on those with whom you know that they'll carry no weight because their convictions run the other way. Instead, you must do your best to operate through an indirect approach and try to handle matters tactfully, so that whatever you can't turn to good will at least do the minimum of harm. After all, it's inconceivable that everything should turn out well unless all men become good, and that I don't anticipate for quite some time to come.'

'The only outcome of that approach,' he retorted, 'will be that while I try to remedy the insanity of others I shall end up raving with them. If I want to speak the truth then I'll have to do it my way. Whether it's the role of the philosopher to utter lies I have no idea, but it's certainly not mine. My manner of speaking may well strike courtiers as tasteless and even offensive, but I don't see why it should seem odd to the point of absurdity. What if I were to tell them about the scheme that Plato imagines in his republic, or that which the Utopians actually practise in theirs? However superior these may be (and without question they are), they would still seem outlandish here because the rule is private ownership of property, while there all things are held in common.' (49-50)

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of More's *Utopia* are the author's.

2. For a comprehensive review of early translations and adaptations see Cave.

3. There is now also some question about the existence of a casual or general reader; how many readers approach *Utopia* today without some academic incentive?

4. The second prefatory letter only appeared in the second edition of *Utopia* (Paris, 1517); perhaps its mocking of literal-minded readers had something to do with Parisian opposition to Erasmus. For the Latin text see More, *Utopia* 1995: 266-68.

5. The play was generally attributed to Seneca himself until Justus Lipsius dropped it from the canon in 1605; Nero's clash with his counsellor was emblematic for Renaissance readers, and it is memorably adapted by Monteverdi in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*.

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