

### OTTOMAN ANALOGS TO *UTOPIA*.

« Your forefathers have always taken up arms for the recovery of Jerusalem with a wonderful sense of duty, and we read that they have performed great deeds in Syria. But far greater and more important to the Christian Commonwealth is that which Your Majesty is doing now. For as the Turks are more powerful than were the kings of Syria, this war must be considered graver and more dangerous. » Thus did Pietro Pasqualigo address King Manuel I of Portugal in his formal Latin oration to the King, on August 20, 1501. <sup>1</sup> Pasqualigo, ambassador extraordinary from the Republic of Venice, sought the aid of Manuel in the war between Venice and the Turks. <sup>2</sup> The ambassador, however, did not consider Ottoman power a peril to Venice only : « If ... the danger threatening the Christian religion is neglected -- would that I were a false prophet -- it is greatly to be feared that this fire that has already ravaged Greece and now torments the Venetian Republic will soon consume all Europe » (Weinstein, pp. 50-51).

The consuming of all Europe by the Ottomans was a possibility which R. W. Chambers thought gave form to *Utopia* : « The Turk was the imminent danger, and that imminent danger was never long absent from More's mind. » The expansion of European shipping suggested the travels of Raphael Hythlodæus : to avert the Ottoman threat and to profit from these expanding sea markets, Europe needed internal peace. <sup>3</sup> In his later works, More's references to the Turks and to the Grand Turk may be literal or they may be figurative, but they are direct. While *Utopia* makes no such direct reference, many incidents related in it, and many issues it raises may be read in the light of the history of the Ottoman Empire or of Turkish-European relations. One of the obvious controlling elements of *Utopia* is the need for peace ; Utopian society is structured therefore on two necessities : that of maintaining peace and its corollary, that of avoiding war. Raphael's description of the maintenance of peace and the avoidance of war in *Utopia* is so stated that it suggests many parallels, and Ottoman analogs may in some cases be as provocative as any others.

Pasqualigo's « fire that ravaged Greece » began, of course, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453. This fall and the ensuing dramatic rise of the Ottoman Empire have their ironic parallel in the founding of the commonwealth of *Utopia* by Utopus. Like the Ottoman Empire, *Utopia* took its name from the ruler who had had the strength to create from it a

national power. Ottoman, who about the year 1300 became the first ruler of the Turks to assume the title of emperor, was, according to More's contemporary, the diplomat-historian-bishop Paolo Giovio, « myghtye & strong bothe in name, power, & dignitie among the Turkes. »<sup>4</sup> From Ottoman's time, the power of his empire increased; and if Utopia and the Ottoman Empire took their names from strong leaders, the overtaking of Utopia by Utopus -- who was able to conquer Utopia only because of discord among the Utopians<sup>5</sup> -- may be seen as analogous to the conquering of the Byzantine Empire by Mohammed II. Giovio saw this victory as a reverse emblem of the original victory of Constantine over the heathens: « This is a thing by the way worthye to be marked, and to be thought as fatal: That lyke as the firste Emperour of Constantinople, was called Constantine and was the sonne of Helena, euen so he that succeeded hym. Mxxi yeres after, and was the last was lykewyse called Constantyne, & was the sonne of Helena, also. »<sup>6</sup> To Giovio, then, the collapse of the Byzantine Empire was, to use an anachronism, the photonegative of its rise.

The fall of Constantinople began a century before its actual completion, when in 1358 the Ottomans took first hold of European soil; and their victories cut off Constantinople from Christian Europe<sup>7</sup> as the island of Utopia had been cut off from a mainland (CW 4, p. 113), and awaited the arrival of Raphael and his companions to hear of Christianity (CW 4, pp. 217-19). The first entry of the Ottomans on European soil under Amurathes I (called in modern usage Murad I and II, these Ottoman rulers were known in More's time as Amurathes I and II) occurred because of discord and sedition between Greek nobles and the emperor of Constantinople, in violation of the truce made between Amurathes I and this emperor, who in turn had to seek liberal aid from Amurathes against his own seditious Greek neighbors, « the originall cause of the fall and distruction of the same Empire, and firste begynnyng of al our wretchednes and sorowe. » The Turkish soldiers returning from Greece described to Amurathes the products and pleasures of Greece as well as the sedition of the nobles, and in 1363 Amurathes I sailed through the Hellespont in two Genoese ships (Giovio, sigs. Aiiii<sup>r</sup>-Av<sup>r</sup>). Such broken agreements are numerous in the history of the relationship between Ottomans and Christians, and call to mind the Utopian refusal to make treat

commentary of the Yale *Utopia* refers the reader to Thomas Elyot's *The Governour*, where the contrast is made between Gentiles, Turks, and Saracens who scrupulously observe treaties and Christians who frequently neglect them (CW 4, p. 492).

With a cutting irony to which he himself is impervious, but which is shared by More and the reader, Raphael continues that in the parts of the world where Utopia is located « treaties and alliances between kings are not observed with much good faith. » In Europe by contrast,

and especially in those parts where the faith and religion of Christ prevails, the majesty of treaties is everywhere holy and inviolable, partly through the reverence and fear of the Sovereign Pontiffs. Just as the latter themselves undertake nothing which they do not most conscientiously perform, so they command all other rulers to abide by their promises in every way and compel the recalcitrant by pastoral censure and severe reproof (CW 4, p. 197).

Both the Yale edition of *Utopia* (CW 4, p. 493) and the definitive French edition of André Prévost suggest that Popes Alexander VI and Julius II are attacked here by what Prévost calls 'l'ironie cynique de ces remarques.'<sup>8</sup> A most dramatic example, however, of papal bad faith in the keeping of treaties had occurred in the disastrous battle of Varna in 1444. Earlier in his reign as Ottoman emperor<sup>9</sup>, Amurathes II made war with Ladislaus, King of Hungary and Poland. Ladislaus won the battle and forced Amurathes II into a peace, in the words of Heinrich Bullinger, 'verye necessarye and profitable for the Christians, » a peace confirmed by an oath. Christianity at that point had an advantage over the Ottomans, but Pope Eugenius IV sent Julianus Caesarinus (Cesarini) as ambassador to Hungary to convince Ladislaus that he was not bound by an oath with the Turks for no one should make peace with infidels or heretics, and therefore promises made to them should not be kept. Ladislaus consequently made war with Amurathes II, the latter « greatly blaming the periuerie of the Christians, and their breakyng of the peace, where hee slewe the young king which had bin deceiued by other ... » Not satisfied with this victory, Amurathes II took an army into Greece, killed the emperor's brother, and wasted the Peloponnesus. Any Christians who survived were taken into slavery. « And this was the great good prouision and commoditie, which the counsell of the bloody and periured Pope Eugenius purchased to the Christians. »<sup>10</sup> The chronicler Cuspinian reported that during this battle of Varna, « Amurathes beholding the crucifixe in Ladislaus his standerd, and the crosses also which the souldyers had on their brestes, he sighed & sayd, o crucified, crucified behold and se thy false forsworne people, & yf thou be a god take vengeance vpon their periury. »<sup>11</sup>

The victory of Amurathes II at Varna led to that of his son Mohammed II at Constantinople in 1453, and the bad faith of a pope, which made the first victory possible, lends impressive irony to Raphael's naive description of European Christianity, and papal good faith : « Popes are perfectly right in thinking it a most disgraceful thing that those who are specially called the faithful should not faithfully adhere to their commitments » (CW 4, p. 197). Raphael's outlining of the lack of trust in treaties in the new world actually describes the broken agreements between Christian nations and their Ottoman foes. The treaty-makers whom Raphael speaks of use every manner of cunning, fraud, and deceit to « break both the treaty and their faith. » Thus the Utopians make no treaties (CW 4, p. 199) ; if in war they make a truce with the enemy « they keep it even under provocation » (CW 4, p. 215).<sup>12</sup> Another allusion to the battle of Varna may be in Raphael's rather long recounting of how the Utopians never pursue a fleeing army without a reserve force of their own, since such a pursuit may leave an apparently victorious army in disorder, letting the conquered enemy become « conquerors in turn » (CW 4, p. 213). Such was the case at Varna when the Ottoman forces had been put to flight and Amurathes II was ready to flee for his life. Two rash Christian bishops pursued their fleeing enemies and the Ottomans were able to break into the leaderless Christian lines. Amurathes II was thus able to regroup his forces and the Ottomans « conquered their conquerors in turn. »<sup>13</sup>

If the fall of Constantinople and its antecedents constitute the background of *Utopia*, its immediate context is the reign of Selim, known variously as « the Terrible », « the Grim », and « le Féroce ». <sup>14</sup> Selim marched from the Crimea to the Danube in the spring of 1512, and on April 25 forced his father Bayezid II to abdicate. Bayezid died a month later, unquestionably poisoned by his son (Bury, p. 90 ; Merriman, p. 22). Next Selim assassinated any potential contender for Ottoman rule : « He began, in orthodox fashion, by ridding himself of all possible rivals for the throne. His two elder brothers and eight nephews were disposed of in rapid succession » (Merriman, p. 23). « Thus Selim put into practice a ruthless law which had been enacted by the policy of Mohammed II, that it was lawful for a Sultan in the interests of the unity of the realm, which was the first condition of its prosperity, to do his brothers and their children to death » (Bury, p. 90). This elimination was justified by a verse in the Koran : « revolution is worse than executions » (Merriman, p. 11). Richard Knolles referred to this practice when he wrote that with all their virtues, the Ottomans thus « breake and infringe the lawes both of

Nations and Nature, » and that they excused these murders on grounds of safety to the state. By eliminating competitors, the Ottomans kept the empire whole and without division.<sup>15</sup> The Yale edition, however, refers only to More's *History of Richard III* (CW 4, p. 503) as commentary on Raphael's description of what must surely be a Utopian adaptation of this Ottoman custom ; since the Utopians do all in their power to avert war, one of their tactics is to reward handsomely one of the enemy who either assassinates, or better still captures alive, his king. « If this plan does not succeed, they sow the seeds of dissention broadcast and foster strife by leading a brother of the king or one of the noblemen to hope that he may obtain the throne » (CW 4, p. 205).

Fortunately for the Christian nations, which « trembled » (Merriman, p. 36) at his accession, Selim's wars were not with them. Just before the writing of *Utopia* his activities were concentrated against the Persians, over whom he eventually won a monumental victory at Chaldiran on August 23, 1514 (Marc'hadour, p. 206). One of the features of warfare in Utopia -- in those rare cases in which the Utopians go to war -- is that « men and women alike assiduously exercise themselves in military training on fixed days lest they should be unfit for war when need requires » (CW 4, p. 201). When need does require, wives and children surround the Utopian husband in battle « so that those may be closest and lend one another mutual assistance whom nature most impels to help one another » (CW 4, pp. 209-11). The Yale editors (CW 4, p. 507) and Prévost (p. 712) cite several parallel situations, one drawn from Herodian : the Persians, says the third-century Greek historian, « all the available men, and sometimes the women too, mobilize at the King's order » (CW 4, p. 507). Closer analogs to *Utopia*, however, can be found in Ottoman-Persian warfare.

Bertrandon de la Brocquière related that on the way to Antioch in 1432, he stopped one day beside a river to water his horse :

On the opposite side of the river is a long and vast plain, where we met six or eight Turcomans, accompanied by a woman. She wore a tarquais like them, and, on inquiring into this, I was told that the women of the nation are brave, and in time of war fight like men. It was added, and this seemed to me very extraordinary, that there are about thirty thousand women who thus bear the tarquais, and are under the dominion of a lord, named Turcgadiroly, who resides among the mountains of Armenia, on the frontiers of Persia (p. 312).

And in his description of Selim's war against the Persians, Giovio recounted : « I was enfourmed by the relation of credible persons, which were

present at this battayle, that manye of the Persiens wyues were founde slayne among dead bodyes, which beyng harneysed lyke manly soldiers, folowed theyr husbundes in al auenterous ieopardies. These women Selimus caused to be buried honorably » (sig. Kiiii<sup>r</sup>).

The history of Ottoman wars again suggests itself in the famous discussion of thievery in which Raphael laments to Cardinal Morton that the turning of tillable land into sheep-grazing pasture causes sheep to devour human beings (CW 4, pp. 65-67). Wool production is a profitable industry, and the temptation of wealth leads « noblemen, gentlemen, and even some abbots » to lust after such profit to the extent that « they leave no ground to be tilled ; they enclose every bit of land for pasture ; they pull down houses and destroy towns, leaving only the church to pen the sheep in » (CW 4, p. 67). The poor are thus driven from their homes and left no recourse but stealing, vagrancy, and begging. This ruinous situation is producing a society of wretchedness for the many and of affluence for the few, and Raphael pleads for the restoration of farming for useful employment of the idle (CW 4, p. 71). In Utopia itself, by contrast : « Everywhere in the rural districts they have, at suitable distances from one another, farmhouses well equipped with agricultural implements » (CW 4, p. 115).

Since the most remote of times, the battle between herdsmen and farmers was fought in Europe and Asia. The first Ottomans, as « the children of the steppes, » nomadic clansmen of the Turkish tribe Oghuz, represented the herdsmen ; and when under Amurathes I, « oriental nomads of an alien and intolerant religion were planted as the dominant race amid the Christian population » (Bury, p. 67), the metaphoric process of sheep devouring men began. Ottoman devastation of Greece in 1452 left to the Albanian shepherds who had settled there a century earlier after the Ottoman victories in Servia an even wider range for their herds, and Greek peasants were forced into overcrowded towns (Bury, p. 74). The Ottoman method of taxation, otherwise so well organized, was unintelligent in the handling of the land tax, levied in somewhat the manner of a tithe of the harvest. Harvesting could not begin until the tax collector came to each farm and had his portion set aside. Such a method proved a waste of time and a source of injury to crops. The law also stipulated certain primitive methods of agriculture enforced by the tax collector (Bury, p. 102). The Utopians, on the other hand, are able to produce more than they need and thus distribute supplies to their neighbors : « When the time of harvest is a hand, the agricultural phylarchs inform the municipal officials what number of citizens they require to be sent. The crowd of

harvesters, coming promptly at the appointed time, dispatch the whole task of harvesting almost in a single day of fine weather (CW 4, p. 117).

In the framework of *Utopia*'s construction as a work controlled in part by the need for maintaining peace and avoiding war, the agricultural practices on the island are directly connected with the avoidance of war. One of the outstanding features of that commonwealth is the absence of money as a means of exchange and the subsequent communal sharing of property, including food. By eliminating private ownership, both poverty and greed are at least theoretically eliminated also. Since all property is held in common, the citizens of Utopia are not greedy because of want, while « pride which counts it a personal glory to excel others by superfluous display of possessions... can have no place at all in the Utopian scheme of things » (CW 4, p. 139). That More links this « superfluous display » and the temptation to warfare is demonstrated by the disdain with which Utopian society forces itself to regard gold and silver. A great deal of both are brought into the island through trade with other nations (CW 4, p. 149), but these metals are regarded as inferior. « To gold and silver, however, nature has given no use that we cannot dispense with, if the folly of men had not made them valuable because they are rare » (CW 4, p. 151). Disdain for these precious metals -- so often the incentive for war -- reduces them in Utopia to chains for slaves and marks of infamy for criminals (CW 4, p. 153). A tradition preserved by historians of More's time -- although discounted by later historians <sup>16</sup> -- was that when Tamerlane defeated Bayezid I in 1402, he kept him in an iron cage, bound with gold chains like Utopian slaves, carrying him about for display through Asia and Syria until death relieved the defeated emperor of his disgrace (Giovio, sigs. Biiii<sup>v</sup>-Bv<sup>r</sup>).

If the lack of sufficient wealth and the desire for superfluous wealth precipitate wars, so also does the existence of a class whose only purpose in life is warfare. If money as a necessary means of exchange can be eliminated by common ownership of property and disdain for unnecessary display, another encouragement to war -- as well as another costly expense to society -- can be obliterated by eliminating standing armies. In Book I of *Utopia*, Raphael equates soldiers with thieves, and assails the keeping of standing armies as a pretext for war (CW 4, pp. 63-65). The Utopians hire foreign mercenaries only to spare their own citizens (CW 4, pp. 149) when war is a necessity, but their contempt for a paid soldiery is clear, since they « do not care in the least how many Zapoletans they lose, thinking that they [the Utopians] would be the greatest benefactors to the human race if they could relieve the world of all the dregs of this abominable and impious people » (CW 4, p. 209). Marginal notation in the Louvain and Paris editions of *Utopia* identified the Zapoletans with Swiss

mercenaries, an identification understandably omitted from the 1518 Basel edition (CW 4, p. 504). The reputation of the Swiss for venality is unfounded; in 1513 they refused to fight for both the Pope and his enemy of the moment, Francis I, claiming it unsuitable for soldiers from the same nation to confront each other in contending armies (Prévost, p. 711). These well-paid mercenaries so detested by the Utopians might perhaps be more subtly identified with the Janissaries. In all Ottoman history, the contending emperor preferred by the Janissaries tended to defeat his rivals for kingship, and this emperor was always the most warlike of the contenders, since the Janissaries as an institution were incompatible with peace and always a danger to a peaceful ruler (Bury, p. 90). The term Zapoletan suggests « seller, buyer » (CW 4, p. 504), which in turn suggests the popularly-derived notion that Janissaries were obtained as child tribute from subjugated Christian countries. The English word Janissary has no clear meaning, but exists only as an attempt to transliterate and Anglicize Turkish *yani chari* or new soldiery (Bury, p. 99). Another derivation suggested for Zapoletan, « a people with numerous citizens » (CW 4, p. 504), may indicate the endless source of children available to the Ottomans from their continuous victories over Christian nations.<sup>17</sup>

If poverty, greed, and a standing army are absent in Utopia, one more deterrent to peace and incentive to war -- religious discord -- is also banished there. « Utopus had heard that before his arrival the inhabitants had been continually quarreling among themselves. He had made the observation that the universal dissention between the individual sects who were fighting for their country had given him the opportunity of overcoming them all » (CW 4, pp. 219-21). The history of Ottoman-Christian conflicts recounts endless examples of divisions among Christians which made Ottoman victories easy. The Turks, on the other hand, exhibited harmony. The « fruite of comon wealth, » wrote Edmund Dudley in 1509, « was often and many tymes found among the turkes and Sarasyns, for all those sectes haue motche delyte to vphold the tree of comen wealth ... Hathe not ther tree the rote of concord and vnytie emongest them selves ? Yes, to well, the more pittie it is. »<sup>18</sup>

A most vivid example of Ottoman victory over Christian disunity is perhaps the fact that Mohammed II was able to conquer Constantinople more easily because Greek and Roman Christians cared nothing for each other's welfare: « the bigoted hatred existing between the Latin and Greek Churches went far towards paralysing the sympathies of the Catholic countries. » With complete success, Mohammed II encouraged the bad feeling between the Greek and Roman churches. To the Greeks,

« the supremacy of the infidel Sultan seemed more tolerable than the supremacy of the heretical Pope » (Bury, p. 103). There is, therefore, freedom of religion in Utopia -- even though one religion is seen as superior (CW 4, p. 127) -- and a freedom to proselytize but not to the point of harassment of others (CW 4, p. 219). One over-zealous convert to the newly imported Christianity was in fact exiled « not for despising their religion but for stirring up a riot among the people » (CW 4, p. 219), indicating once more the need to maintain peace as a controlling element in More's « optima Republica ».

But even peace, desirable as it is in itself, was a means to a still more desirable end: « Utopus laid down these regulations not merely from regard for peace, which he saw to be utterly destroyed by constant wrangling and implacable hatred, but because he thought that this method of settlement was in the interest of religion itself. » Violence and threats as forms of religious persuasion Utopus regarded as « insolence and folly. » He thought on the contrary that « truth by its own natural force would finally emerge sooner or later and stand forth conspicuously, » while « arms and riots » would overwhelm « the best and holiest religion » (CW 4, p. 221).

If « truth by its own natural force » is to « emerge sooner or later and stand forth conspicuously, » then a consideration of « the best state of a commonwealth » makes analogies to many commonwealths, including the Ottoman Empire. As the « Quatrain in the Utopian Vernacular » states, « ungrudgingly do I share my benefits with others; undemur- ringly do I adopt whatever is better from others » (CW 4, p. 19).

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#### NOTES

1. Donald Weinstein, *Ambassador from Venice: Pietro Pasqualigo in Lisbon, 1501* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 49.
2. Weinstein, « Preface, » n. pag. Pasqualigo's Latin oration was published in Venice in December of 1501.
3. *Thomas More* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 166.

4. Paolo Giovio (Paulus Jovius), *A Shorte treatise vpon the Turkes Chronicles, compyled by Paulus Jovius ... Drawen Oute of the Italyen tong into Latyne, by Franciscus Niger Bassiantes. And translated out of Latyne into englysh by Peter Ashton* (London : Edward Witchurche, 1546), sig. Aii<sup>r</sup> and v.

5. Edward Surtz, S.J. and J.H. Hexter, eds., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Volume 4 : Utopia* (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 219-21. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the body of the text as CW 4.

6. Giovio, sig. Di<sup>v</sup>. The last of the Greek Emperors, Constantine Palaeologus, was killed on the day of the taking of Constantinople, May 29, 1453. See Roger Bigelow Merriman, *Suleiman the Magnificent 1520-1566* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1944), p. 17.

7. J.B. Bury, « The Ottoman Conquest, » pp. 67-103 in *The Cambridge Modern History*, eds. A.W. Ward, G.W. Prothero, Stanley Leathes, I, The Renaissance (Cambridge : At the University Press, 1902), p. 67. See also Merriman, p. 9.

8. André Prévost, ed., *L'Utopie de Thomas More* (Paris : Mame, 1978), p. 705.

9. Bullinger (see Note 10) gives the date as 1416, but Amurathes II did not come to the throne until 1421 (see Merriman, p. 13). Bullinger is probably confusing the date of the accession of Amurathes II with the peace made in 1416 between Mohammed I and the Venetian commander, Loredana, at Gallipoli (see Merriman, p. 13).

10. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Tragedies of Tyrants ... Written by Henrie Bullinger 1572, and now Englished* (London : William How, 1575), pp. 84<sup>v</sup>-86<sup>r</sup>. See also Giovio, sigs. Ci<sup>r</sup>-Ciiii<sup>v</sup>.

11. Giovio, sig. Ciii<sup>r</sup>. These marginal notes of early chroniclers were added by Giovio's English translator, Ashton. See also Merriman, pp. 14-15, n. 11, who mentions the retelling of this incident by Richard Knolles and Cotton Mather.

12. Examples of the breaking of treaties and truces among Christian nations and of bad faith among leaders of Christian nations and among Popes are numerous in Christian-Ottoman relations.

13. Giovio, sigs. Ciii<sup>r</sup>-Ciiii<sup>r</sup>. Twelve years before the battle of Varna, Bertrandon de la Brocquière had visited the court of Amurathes II during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Bertrandon wrote his advice to Christian Europe on how it might defeat the Turkish forces. He firmly warned the Christian armies that they must not pursue the numerically stronger retreating Ottoman troops. See « The Travels of Bertrandon de la Brocquière » pp. 368-69, in *Early Travels in Palestine*, ed. Thomas Wright (London : Henry Bohn, 1848 ; rpt. New York : AMS Press, 1969), pp. 283-382.

14. Merriman, p. 22 ; Bury, p. 90 ; Germain Marc'hadour, *L'Univers de Thomas More* (Paris : Vrin, 1963), p. 190.

15. Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turks* (London : Adam Islip, 1603), sig. A5<sup>r</sup>.

16. See for example the entry under « Bayezid I » in *Chambers's Biographical Dictionary*, eds. Wm. Geddie and J. Liddell Geddie (Edinburgh and London, W. & R. Chambers, Ltd., 1953), p. 61. Merriman does not even mention the iron cage story in his treatment of the relationship between Bayezid and Tamerlane, pp. 11-12.

17. Some historians doubt that the Janissaries were obtained through child tribute, but that view would still have been the prevailing one in More's time. See William M. Langer and Robert P. Blake, « The Rise of the Ottoman Turks and Its Historical Background, » *The American Historical Review*, XXXVII (Oct. 1931-July 1932), pp. 468-505 (New York : The Macmillan Company, 1932), pp. 503-04. See also pp. 407-408 and 410 of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Volume 12 : A Dialogue of Comfort* (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1976).

18. *The Tree of Commonwealth*, ed. D.M. Brodie (Cambridge : At the University Press, 1948), pp. 51-52.

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• **RECHTSKUNDIG WEEKBLAD** est un hebdomadaire d'information juridique publié à Anvers. Y parut en 1948 une conférence d'Antoon Fimmers sur « Thomas Morus, onze confrater », prononcée le 13 déc. 1947. Et le 16 déc. 1978 (42<sup>e</sup> année, n° 16) y paraît un discours d'ouverture (du 14 oct. 1978) de Jean Mertens de Wilmars, intitulé « Thomas Morus, Viif Ecuwen Utopie » (pp. 1010-1024). Geert van den Steenhoven, qui nous a envoyé le texte, aurait dû nous en fournir un résumé. L'orateur a beaucoup lu, notamment en anglais -- jusques et y inclus le NPG catalogue et *Thomas More Through Many Eyes* -- et en néerlandais : le *Thomas More* de Daniel Sargent a été traduit en cette langue (1948), et une « tragédie de More et Erasme, » par N. De Rooy, jamais mentionnée (que je sache) dans *Moreana*, a pour titre *Utopia gewonnen en verloren* -- « l'Utopie gagnée et perdue ». L'accent mis sur More juriste nous conduit vite à l'*Utopie*, et à quelques problèmes d'actualité que soulève cet ouvrage, en particulier l'euthanasie, dont la plupart des assemblées législatives ne tarderont pas à discuter, si ce n'est déjà fait. Pour conclure en canonisant, malgré ses frustrations, le rude labeur de l'utopiste, l'orateur cite Albert Camus dans *Le mythe de Sisyphe* :

« La lutte vers les sommets suffit à remplir un coeur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux ».

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• Dans le numéro de *SCN XXXVII* (Spring-Summer 1979), Dee Tweedle, recensant *Common Field and Enclosure in England*, de J.A. Yelling, rappelle que l'*Utopie* éclaire ce problème. A la même page 27, James Egan donne un compte rendu élogieux de Peter Milward : *Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age*. La section « Neo-Latin News » de ce numéro double est riche en « tidbits » concernant l'univers d'Erasme et de Moré.

## L'UTOPIE : ENTRE LE MIMÉTISME ET L'ENGAGEMENT.

• *IMPACTS* (n° 1 de 1980) publie une conférence de Przemysław Mroczkowski à l'Université Catholique de l'Ouest, intitulée « Entre le mimétisme et l'engagement : Thomas More et son *Utopie* après 500 ans. » (pp. 45-61) Comme les méandres de cette pensée fluide autant que ferme se prêtent mal à un « abstract », nous reproduisons quelques bribes du texte.

Le terme mimétisme, disons-le une fois pour toutes, employé ici au sens large, va inclure l'activité du comédien, professionnel et amateur, celle de l'écrivain, de l'homme d'affaires, de nous tous enfin à certains moments de notre vie quotidienne ou officielle. (p. 47)

Mais tout ce que nous relevons ici comme « épanouissement mimétique », déploiement du talent de l'*impersonation*, la joie d'employer une « langue d'autrui » (ici celle de la Rome antique) et de l'employer brillamment (ce qui assez vite s'impose sur le plan international), tout cela allait de pair avec une réflexion critique sur le contenu. (p. 49)

Puis vient un moment unique : la mission diplomatique à Anvers en 1515, dont va résulter encore une « incarnation », l'exploit de More écrivain, l'échappée la plus surprenante, la production de l'*Utopie*. L'envoyé d'Henri VIII se voit soudain libéré de ses tâches habituelles grâce à une impasse dans les négociations dont il était chargé. Le loisir n'est pas cependant un temps sans nuages. More est chagriné par le manque de justice et par d'autres abus sociaux dans son pays (et peut-être autre part), par ce règne particulier de la folie dont le règne général avait été décrit et décrié par Erasme dans l'*Encomium Moriae* déjà sept ans auparavant. Il est possible que ce soit la pression de ce chagrin et de cette irritation intellectuelle qui ait abouti à l'idée initiale de l'*Utopie* : elle pourrait se résumer sous la forme d'une question assez simple : si l'actuel est tellement mauvais, pourquoi ne pas essayer d'esquisser le contraire ? Et pourquoi ne pas donner à l'esquisse le caractère d'un interlude mi-philosophique ? Il est probable qu'à ce moment était ébauchée la qualité énigmatique de l'*Utopie* qui a intrigué tant de lecteurs. (p. 51-52)

Citer les pages sur « l'expérience des ordres monastiques », *the paradise of fools* et le jeu dans cette « haute comédie intellectuelle » qu'est l'*Utopie* ne vous dispenserait de lire l'essai intégral, dont voici la conclusion :

L'*Utopie*, c'est l'annonce de l'âme de la ruche : c'est, pour parler avec exagération, un peu comme la définition malicieuse du ciel bouddhique où chacun est quelqu'un d'autre, *everybody is somebody else*. Il est donc indispensable de se souvenir de la vie de son auteur qui était *unlike everybody else*, l'homme qui reste lui-même puisqu'il a su trouver ses racines.