



Richard III by an unknown artist. National Portrait Gallery, London.

MORE'S USE OF ENGLISH PROVERBS IN *THE HISTORY OF KING RICHARD III*

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A study of *The History...* reveals that More knew the rhetorical principles relevant to the use of proverbs in a literary text. Thus they are used to persuade, to bolster arguments, and to emphasize important truths. But in true Morean fashion, his proverbs also serve to delight. Analysing the different ways they are embedded in the text, the contexts in which they are presented, and the places where they appear enables us to arrive not only at a better understanding of the nature of proverbs and the role they play in this work, but also at a greater appreciation of More's literary talents.

Key words: rhetoric, assimilation, wisdom, playfulness, rhythmic structure.

Une étude des proverbes qui se trouvent dans l'Histoire... révèle que More utilisait les règles de rhétorique qui s'imposent dans une oeuvre littéraire. Ainsi l'usage de proverbes lui sert à persuader, à soutenir des arguments et à souligner certaines vérités importantes. Mais selon la coutume de More, ils servent aussi à plaire. Une analyse des différentes façons dont les proverbes sont insérés dans le texte, des contextes dans lesquels ils se trouvent, ainsi que des endroits où ils se situent dans le récit nous permettra non seulement de mieux comprendre leur nature et leurs fonctions mais aussi d'apprécier davantage le talent littéraire de More.

Mots-clés: rhétorique, assimilation, sagesse, jeu d'esprit, structure rythmique.

Un estudio de los proverbios que se encuentran en *la Historia...* revela que Moro utilizaba las reglas de retórica que se imponen en una obra literaria. Así el uso de proverbios le sirve para persuadir, para apoyar argumentos y para subrayar ciertas verdades importantes. Pero, según la costumbre de Moro, los proverbios sirven también para agradar. Un análisis de los diferentes modos según los cuales los proverbios vienen insertados en el texto, de los contextos en que se encuentran, así como de los lugares donde se sitúan en el relato, nos permitirá no sólo comprender mejor su naturaleza y sus funciones sino también apreciar más el talento literario de Moro.

Palabras claves: retórica, asimilación, sabiduría, juego de ingenio, estructura rítmica.

A study of the proverbs in a literary work should perhaps take as its point of departure a definition of the term *proverb*. Yet as anyone who has worked on proverbs knows, definition is not an easy task. Even life-long paremiologists like Tilley and Whiting were unable to find a satisfactory definition, or indeed to distinguish between proverbs, proverbial expressions, sayings, maxims and proverbial similes. Indeed, people have been trying to define the proverb for centuries and many must have felt, like the indefatigable Archer Taylor, that "the definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking."¹

Heeding Taylor's statement, I have not tried to define the proverb myself. Several reasons supported this seemingly paradoxical decision. Firstly, this article is concerned, not with cataloguing and classifying the proverbs in *The History of King Richard III*, a task already accomplished by John Cavanaugh in his doctoral dissertation on More's use of proverbs,² but with studying in some detail the use that More makes of them and the ways in which he inserts them into the narrative, of which they are an integral part. Secondly, in dealing with Renaissance authors, it is more appropriate to take into consideration the definitions and uses of proverbs current in their time, for they differ in some degree from those found in today's writings on the subject. Since the most important sixteenth-century authority in the field, and one who opened up the study of proverbs for succeeding centuries, is More's great friend, Erasmus, the historical frame of reference is particularly apt. Lastly, I decided to include only those proverbs that were attested to in several proverb collections, although this of course was not without its pitfalls. M. P. Tilley's *Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* and B. J. Whiting's *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* are not wholly reliable: neither author was

¹ Archer Taylor, *The Proverb and the Index to the Proverb*. With introduction and Bibliography by Wolfgang Mieder (Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 1985), 3.

² John R. Cavanaugh, C.S.B., "The Use of Proverbs and 'Sententiae' for Rhetorical Amplification in the Writings of Saint Thomas More." Unpublished dissertation, University of St Louis, 1969.

able to define a proverb satisfactorily,³ both include entries that they considered had a "proverbial ring" because of their context or their form but which are not attested to in any other proverb collections, and Tilley even includes "pithy expressions of old truths or of accepted facts (...), accumulated wisdom that has stood the test of time." They are therefore to be used with caution and in this study have been supplemented with other works of reference.⁴

Although More himself, in his opening sentence of *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, offers a definition of a proverb as an "old said saw," for a full explanation of what proverbs are and how they should be used we must turn to Erasmus' *Adagia*, with its accompanying Letter to Lord Mountjoy, and *De copia verborum ac rerum*.⁵ In his Letter to Mountjoy, to whom his *Adagiorum Collectanea* of 1500 was dedicated, Erasmus defines a proverb (*proverbium*, *paroemia* and *adagium* used interchangeably) as a saying which is distinguishable from the maxim

³ Whiting does attempt a definition elsewhere "The Nature of the Proverb," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* XIV, 1932, 273-307, based on a tripartite division of proverbial materials into "true proverbs, proverbial phrases, and sententious remarks." Such a distinction, however, is no longer made by paremiologists, and was hardly respected by Whiting himself when compiling his 1968 proverb collection.

⁴ Morris Palmer Tilley, ed., *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1950); Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); William Caxton, *The dictes or sayings of the philosophres* [sic], 1477; Richard Taverner, *Proverbs or Adages by Desiderius Erasmus Gathered out of the Chiliades and Englished by Richard Taverner*. Introduced by DeWitt T. Starnes (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1956); John Heywood, *A Dialogue of the Effectual Proverbs in the English Tongue Concerning Marriage*, Rudolph E. Habenicht, ed., University of California English Studies, No. 25 (Berkeley: U of California P, 1963); *Proverbia sententiaeque Latinitatis medii aevi*, Hans Walther, ed. (Göttingen, 1963-69); *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*. 3rd Edition. Revised by F.P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

⁵ For a comprehensive study of Erasmus' opinions on proverbs see Claudie Belavoine, "L'Essence de marjolaine, ou ce, de l'adage, que retint Érasme" (*La Licorne* 3, 1979), 159-83 and "Les principes de la parémiographie érasmiennne" in *Richesse du proverbe: Typologie et fonctions*, Françoise Suard and Claude Buridant, eds. Presses universitaires de Lille, (1981, 9-23), as well as Margaret Mann Phillips's *The 'Adages' of Erasmus: A Study with Translations* (Cambridge UP, 1964). See Clarence H. Miller for a discussion of Erasmus' application of his writings on proverbs to a literary work, *The Praise of Folly* ("The Logic and Rhetoric of Proverbs in Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*" in *Essays on the Works of Erasmus*, Richard L. DeMolen, ed., Yale UP, 1978, 83-98).

(*sententia*) and whose "conclusion should be distinguished either by a metaphor (...), an allegory (...), a conundrum (...), or any other obscurity"; its role is to decorate a work and bestow upon it the authority of antiquity, and also to "strengthen" it by serving as a most effective method of proof in argumentation.⁶ In the *Prolegomena*, or introductory section, of the 1508 *Adagia* and all subsequent editions, Erasmus would elaborate on these comments and define the proverb in a far more general way: "a proverb is a saying in popular use, remarkable for some shrewd and novel turn."⁷ Proverbs, he says, contribute to our knowledge of philosophy, to our powers of persuasion, to our grace and charm in discourse, and to our appreciation of literature. The second and third of these uses for proverbs are particularly applicable to a work like *The History of King Richard III*.

In the *Prolegomena*, Erasmus underlines how difficult it is to understand proverbs or weave them into discourse for, as Quintilian said of laughter, a proverb "is a risky thing to aim for." He compares the skill required in "aptly and fittingly" inserting proverbs into discourse with setting "a jewel deftly in a ring" or weaving "gold thread into purple cloth."⁸ Later, he suggests interweaving the more obscure proverbs by "correcting them in advance," or as we would say, using an introductory formula: "As the proverb runs," "As the old saying goes," "To put it in a proverb," "As they say in jest," or "As is commonly

⁶ Letter to William Blount, Lord Mountjoy [June 1500] in *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 31: *Adages. Ili to Iv 100*. Edited by Margaret Mann Phillips (U of Toronto P, 1982). The Latin original is in (ASD) *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami II-1. Adagiorum Chilias Prima*. M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk, Mann Phillips and Chr. Robinson, eds. (Amsterdam: North-Holland Press, 1993), and *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*. P. S. Allen and H.M. Allen, eds. (Oxford, 1906-47), Vol. 1, Letter No. 126, II. 210 ff. The quotation is as follows: "Ergo duo quedam ad hoc requiri videntur, vt paroemia sit: alterum vt aliqua re sit insignita clausula, aut translatione (...), aut allegoria (...), aut enygmata (...), aut alia quavis figura" ().

⁷ CWE 31,4 and ASD II-1, 46/44-45: "paroemia est celebre dictum, scita quapiam nouitate insigne."

⁸ CWE 31,19; ASD II-1, 65/416-18: "Siquidem vt non mediocris est artificii gemmulam scite includere anulo et aurum purpureae intertexere, ita non est, mihi crede, cuiusuis paroemiam apte decenterque orationi inserere" (*Non est, mihi crede, cuiusuis is itself a Greek 'idiom'*).

said."⁹ These observations, too, are pertinent to our study of More's use of proverbs.

Basing his comments on instructions in Book III of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Erasmus also points out some of the ways in which an author can vary his use of proverbs: fitting "the same wording with different meanings"; using a proverb ironically to mean the opposite; changing a small word to "make the proverb fit several meanings"; explaining an adage and holding it up for comparison; using it as a straightforward allegory; truncating the form of a proverb; or using only one word from a proverb, merely alluding to its meaning.¹⁰ Variation in the use of proverbs is exactly what we shall be examining in More's *History*, where we shall find a wide range of proverb use.

Finally, Erasmus says, as an ornament of speech the proverb makes a text incite interest, bring delight, and inspire conviction. The passage on the decorative value of the proverb is remarkable for the language he chooses to describe a proverb's various roles: it makes discourse "glitter with sparkles," "gleam with jewel-like words of wisdom," and "charm with titbits of wit and humour."¹¹ Erasmus had already spoken to Mountjoy of the various roles of proverbs, amongst which is its ability to bring gaiety and wit to a text with the intent to charm and delight the reader. As Claudie Belavoine points out, playfulness heads the list and is closely followed by scholarly jokes and

⁹ CWE 31,28; ASD II-1, 82/679 ff.: *iuxta prouerbum, vt aiunt, aiunt, "vt antiquum ait dictum", "vt dicimus prouerbio", "vt dicunt iocantes", "iuxta vulgo tritum sermonem."*

¹⁰ CWE 31, 405; ASDII-1, 66/448-68/478: "Principio nihil vetat interdum, quominus idem dictum ad complures sensus accomodes. (...) Nonnunquam per ironiam ad contrarias etiam sententias deflectitur. (...) Fit interum, vt vnus voculae commutatione diuersis conueniat. (...) Praeterea nonnunquam explicatur adagium et confertur, nonnunquam simplex allegoria refertur. Aliquotis etiam mutilum proponitur. (...) Interim satis est vnico verbo alluisse." Erasmus mentions other uses of proverbs in his *De copia*.

¹¹ CWE 31,17-18; ASDII-1, 64/381-84: "Proinde si scite et in loco intertextantur adagia, futurum est, vt sermo totus et antiquitatis ceu stellulis quibusdam luceat et figurarum arrideat coloribus et sententiarum niteat gemmulis et festiuitatis cupediis blandiatur."

sophisticated wit—qualities that would surely have sufficed to endear proverb use to More.¹²

Erasmus' comments on the uses and roles of proverbs, their placement in the text, and the variance of their reformulations grow out of writings on rhetoric by Aristotle and other Classical authors. But as schoolboys, Erasmus and More would have studied the use of proverbs in manuals which summarised the thoughts of Cicero and Quintilian on the subject and contained theme exercises using proverbs as a topic, as a proof in argumentation, and as an ornament or a figure of speech. As well, manuals of rhetoric and poetics throughout the Middle Ages, and well into the sixteenth century, stressed the importance of proverb use in composition and set down the rules which determined where, when and how they were to be introduced into the text. It is therefore hard to over-estimate the extent to which writers like More would have been steeped in knowing, and knowing how to use, all forms of proverbial wisdom. It is now time we pass to an examination of that knowledge in as far as it applies to the proverbs in *The History of King Richard III*. Our study of their nature and the roles they play in the work will consider three aspects of More's proverb use: the various ways in which he embeds the proverbs in the text; the types of contexts in which he introduces them; and the places in which they appear.¹³

Textual Integration of the Proverb

In embedding the proverbs in the text, or interweaving them "aptly and fittingly," as Erasmus says, More used three different

¹² Belavoine, 164. The quotation is: "Quid enim aequè conducit ad orationem vel lepida quadam festiuitate venustandam, vel eruditis iocis exhilarandam, vel urbanitatis sale condiendam, vel translationum gemmulis quibusdam distinguendam, vel sententiarum luminibus illustrandam, vel allegoriarum et allusionum flosculis variegandam (...) ?" (Allen, Vol. 1, N° 126, ll. 32 and 37.).

¹³ For the methodology used in this paper, I am indebted to Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker's *Proverbes et expressions proverbiales dans la littérature narrative du Moyen Age français: Recueil et analyse* (Paris: Champion, 1985). Although her corpus of texts is composed of medieval French narratives, whose pertinence to a humanist text such as More's is perhaps not immediately apparent, her methods of analysing the role of proverbs and the techniques by which they are introduced into a text are immensely useful for a study of any author's use of proverbs in a literary work.

procedures, all sanctioned by the rhetoricians: direct quotation, assimilation, and inclusion in a series or cluster of proverbs.

The first and most direct way of using a proverb in a narrative is to quote it directly, respecting its formal characteristics, that is to say, its binary rhythmic structure, its archaic and often incomplete grammatical structure, its frequent use of lexical oppositions, and the connotational value of its various elements, Erasmus' "metaphorical disguise."¹⁴ The proverb might or might not be introduced by a well-known formula like "as the old saw says", or "thus said the sage." It might or might not be followed by a development of some sort like a paraphrase, commentary or explanation.

Of the almost sixty English proverbs that I have been able to identify in *Richard III*, only eight are direct quotations. Five appear alone in the text and respect the formal structure of their originals. When the people are told that Lord Rivers, Lord Richard and Sir Thomas Vaughan had deserved their execution, they say "*it were almoise [a good deed] to hang them.*" (24/15).¹⁵ The proverb of course heightens the irony of the passage since, because the men were nobles and courtiers, they had in fact been beheaded, and thus spared the usual hanging and evisceration meted out to less well placed traitors. The Narrator uses a proverb to describe Morton, Bishop of Ely, tempting Buckingham to rebel. Because of his ever-changing fortune, Morton "*had gotten by great experience the very mother & mistress of wisdom*" (91/19-20). When Warwick the Kingmaker is slain by Edward, the Narrator philosophically explains his reversal of fortune with "*nothing lasteth alway*" (66/1).

Elsewhere, More uses a proverb to heighten his ironic tone. Speaking of Mistress Shore's abuse by the King, he says her husband

¹⁴ Erasmus' "metaphorical disguise" is echoed by a modern scholar whose analysis of the proverb states among other things that "les proverbes sont des éléments connotés [où] le signifié ne se situe pas au niveau de la signification [des référents]." J. Greimas, "Les proverbes et les dictions," in *Du Sens: Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970, 309-14).

¹⁵ All quotations are taken from *The History of King Richard III*, ed. by Richard S. Sylvester. Vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (Yale UP, 1963), and page references will be given in the text. Spelling and punctuation are modernized. The proverbial matter will be in italics. All the proverbs quoted are attested to in one or more of the reference works quoted in note 4.

was of no help, adding "as he was an honest man & one that *could his good [knew what was good for him]*" (55/18). Buckingham puts a proverb to a different use. After a long passage in which he advocates force to deliver the younger prince from sanctuary and berates the Queen for her fear, a word he repeats over and over, he concludes that she is coming "to fear her own shadow" (29/13). Only one directly quoted proverb is introduced by a formula, a procedure that Erasmus recommends in the final section of the *Prolegomena*. The biblical *Woe is that Realm that hath a child to their King. Veh regno cuius rex puer est*, is preceded by "And that the great wise man well perceived," a reference to Solomon, supposed author of the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (74/17-18), who was commonly used in introductory formulas.

Two other quoted proverbs are followed by a development that reinforces their meaning and thus increases their persuasiveness. Hastings is afraid that Rivers and his friends might disrupt the young king's coronation and "bring the matter so far *out of joint*." He adds for good measure, "that it should never be brought in frame again" (23/20-21). Morton also feels the need to reinforce his proverb with a further statement: "I purpose not to *spurn against the prick*, nor labor to set up that God pulleth down" (92/12-13 and apparatus).¹⁶

The second way of embedding a proverb in a narrative is by a procedure that might be called assimilation. This is a more complex method than direct quotation, for it requires imagination and verbal dexterity. It is to More's credit as a writer that the vast majority of his proverbs are used in this way. By assimilation, we mean that the proverb glides into the discourse, as it were, thinly or not so thinly disguised by lexical or syntactical change. The disguise is in no way intentional, since this type of procedure sometimes includes the use of an easily recognizable introductory formula such as "the old saw said" or "thus said the sage," whose purpose is to impart authority or, in the

¹⁶ Erasmus uses this Biblical proverb to demonstrate the metaphorical nature of the *paroemia* in the Letter to Mountjoy, CWE 31, 176, Allen, I, N° 126, l. 212.

case of obscurity, as Erasmus says in the concluding section of the *Prolegomena*, to pave the way should the proverb prove obscure.

There are only two assimilated proverbs with an introductory formula. The queen, defending her refusal to release the young Duke of York from sanctuary and claiming that she trusts only herself to look after her younger sick son, states: "As physicians say (...) double the peril in the recidivation, that was in the first sickness" (35/9-11). Her proverb is a reworking of "*the relapse is more dangerous than the disease*," itself a new rendering of a classical proverb.¹⁷ Later in the speech she will use another formula, "for," which this time introduces a proverbial subordinate clause. Speaking of her two sons, she sees "nothing for them both more perilous, than to be both in one place. For what wise merchant adventurith all his good in one ship?" (41/31-32). Again, the proverb is a reformulation of an English one based on a classical source: *Venture not all in one bottom*.¹⁸

More subtle, however, is the assimilated proverb without any introductory formula. This type can be sub-divided into three categories representing three points of distance from the original proverb: some are so far as to be simply a vague echo, for they retain neither lexical nor syntactical links with their source but simply a shared notion; others contain a lexical or notional kernel of the original proverb; still others constitute proverbial expressions, sharing lexical elements although freely reworking the original.

The proverbs in the first group are the most difficult to identify because they deviate the most from their source, but I have found eight in *Richard III*. Richard pleads with the court to remove the younger prince from sanctuary, supposedly in the interest of his older brother's well-being, for: "Sometime without small things greater cannot stand" (26/15-16). This is suggested by *dispraise not a little thing, for it may increase*. He is of course twisting the very notion of the proverb to suit

¹⁷ See note to 35/10 on page 201 attributing this to Livy: "in graviorem morbum recidere." More also uses the proverb in his Latin version of *The History*, again reworking it a little into an assimilated form: "neminem in morbum nisi duplicato periculo recidere" (10-11) and CW15, 380/5.

¹⁸ The Latin proverb, "Ne uni navi facultates," is recorded by Erasmus in his *Adagia*, No. 1026.

his purpose: under guise of praise for "small things" he is hoping to destroy the small prince, along with his "greater" brother. The queen, who prior to the older boy's removal from sanctuary had spent much time saying the brothers should not be separated, now desperately contradicts herself with the statement, "the brother hath been the brother's bane" (41/25-26), an echo of the Cain-and-Abel-inspired proverb "*no hate like to brothers if they fall at debate*," pleading that history has known brothers fighting for the throne. Although a mere echo of the original proverb, it nevertheless preserves something of its rhythm and alliteration, and it achieves its purpose: the queen has played into Richard's hands, which he is quick to recognise.

Of the other heavily disguised assimilated proverbs, five are used to comment on events in the story. The Narrator describes the naive Hastings as "trusty enough, trusting too much" (52/22) (*in trust is treason*), laments the state of England with "in what unsurety standeth this worldly weal" (86/22 and apparatus) (*the world's bliss lasts but a while*), and comments on the wickedness of the world three times: on Richard's indecent haste to be proclaimed king with "a gay goodly cast, foul [badly] cast away for haste" (54/12) (*haste makes waste*); with irony, on his malice in pretending he did not want to be king, "more by God's special providence than man's provision" (79/11-12) (*man proposes, God disposes*); and on the wickedness of Tyrell and Dighton and their punishment, "what wretched end ensueth such dispiteous [pitiless] cruelty" (86/24) (*an ill life and ill end*). Lastly, Buckingham uses a proverb to persuade people that they should help in removing the young king from sanctuary: "If wise men would set their hands to" (31/18-19) (*to put a helping hand*).

Easier to identify is the assimilated proverb that contains a kernel of its original source, be it lexical or notional. There are twenty of these in More's text, all without formulas. The following thirteen will illustrate what is meant by this type of proverb and how More integrates it into his text.¹⁹ Speaking of the queen's family, Richard warns

¹⁹ The other examples are: "long time tossed in either fortune, sometime in wealth, oft in adversity" (3/14-15) (*fortune is fickle or fortune is changeable*); "not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill" (8/9) (*to give a Judas kiss*); "and a sure ground for the foundation of all his building" (10/2-3) (set thy house on a good foundation); "But as for the thieves (...) which never fall fro the craft" (30/15-16) (*once a knave, always a knave*); "them whom wilfull unthriftiness

everyone not "to trust a new friend made of an old foe" (15/21-22), reformulating the proverb *be well ware of a reconciled enemy*. Earlier, in speaking of the young princes, he had said: "youth, namely which is light of belief and soon persuaded" (15/3). It is an echo of *youth and white paper take any impression*. The only lexical link is "youth"; the succinct form of the proverb is lost, as is the binary form of "youth and white paper"; however, the notion remains that youth is impressionable. The subject of the princes and sanctuary inspires three other proverbs. Buckingham tries to allay the queen's fears by saying "here is no man that will be at war with women" (28/22-23) (*He is mad that quarrels with woman or beast*), while the queen reproaches Richard for wanting the young prince out of sanctuary, saying he "maketh so high a matter upon such a trifling pretext" (38/14-15) (*much matter of a wooden platter*). When Richard succeeds in persuading the queen to release the young king into his keeping, the Narrator comments that they brought him up "in greate haste, not in good speed" (17/6-7) (*the more haste the worse speed*). Later, he recounts the cardinal's efforts to stop the Lords from asking the queen the reason for her anxiety and to change the subject, to "harp no more upon that string" (36/33) (*to play on one string*).

Other characters assimilating proverbs into their speech are Morton, who justifies his shift of allegiance from Henry VI to Edward IV by saying "I was never so mad, that I would with a dead man strive against the quick" (92/9-10) (*we ought to live by the quick and not by the dead*), and Edward IV, who responds to his mother's criticism of Elizabeth Grey "part in earnest part in play" (63/2), or as the original proverb says, *half in game and half in earnest*. But, the character with the greatest number of proverbs is the Narrator. Besides the two we have just mentioned, five describe people in the narrative: Hastings meets a kinsman at Thames Wharf and the Narrator ironically comments that he was "nothing ware that the axe hang over his own head" (52/8) (*to have a sword over one's head*); of Mrs Shore he says there was "nothing left but rivelled skin and hard bone" (55/31) (*to be*

hath brought to nought) (30/26-7) (*willful waste makes woeful want*); "children could not play but with their kindred, with whom for the more part they agree much worse" (38/19-20) (*the nearer in kin the less in kindness*); "men's hearts of a secret instinct of nature misgiveth them" (44/25-6) (*man's mind gives warning of evil to come*).

but skin and bone); in a social comment, he says that it is "not common people only that wave with the wind" but also some lords (45/7) (*unstable as the wind or changeable as the wind*); of Buckingham, who slandered the Lord Chamberlain, Hastings, and his entourage, "it was the less marvel, if ungracious living brought him to an unhappy ending" (53/29-30) (*he that evil lives, evil shall end*); the impostor Perkin Warbeck was taken for the younger prince because things were "so covertly demeaned, one thing pretended and another meant" (82/26) (*to say one thing and think another*).

The most common form of assimilated proverb in *Richard III* is the proverbial expression. This may be a free syntactical reworking, going as far as a paraphrase, but it must contain shared lexical and notional elements. More has twenty of these. Space will not allow us to discuss them all in detail but, again, some examples should suffice to demonstrate what is meant by More's use of proverbial expressions.²⁰ The Narrator rather acidly remarks that the queen hated her husband's kindred: "as women commonly not of malice but of nature hate them whom their husbands love" (7/6-8) (*women hate what their husbands love*). Other proverbial expressions are reworkings of common proverbs of Biblical origin like *do not give the wolf the sheep to keep*, which More renders as "the lamb was betaken to the wolf to keep" (24/30 and 25/1), or *to take the woe with the weal*, of which he has two variations: "while that part was in wealth & nonetheless left it not nor forsook it in woe" (90/24-5) and "after their own weal, or our woe" (15/9). The Narrator, commenting on the rumours Richard spread about the queen,

²⁰ Other examples are: "things passed cannot be gaincalled" (13/6-7) (*it is hard to call again thing that is past*); "the desire of a kingdom knoweth no kindred" (41/23-4) (*ambition knows no kin*); "I am as sure of the man (...) as I am of mine own hand" (50/24-5 and note) (*to know as well as one's hand*); "when he most feared he was in good surety; when he reckoned himself surest, he lost his life" (52/14-5) (*he that thinks himself surest is often deceived*); "a proper wit had she (...) neither mute nor full of babble" (56/2-4) (*a fool is known by much babbling*); "the truth coming to light" (67/2-3) (*truth will come to light*); "they stood as [if] they had been turned into stones" (68/25) (*to stand as still as stone*); "that was for a word spoken in haste" (70/14) (a hasty word may be too sore bought); "marriage not well made, of which there is so much mischief grown" (73/22) (*an ill marriage is a spring of ill fortune*); "in which [the crown] he had ever perceived much more labour and pain" (78/34-5) (*crowns have cares*); "either he must take it or else (...) go from it" (79/27-8) (*take it or leave it*); "what mischief worketh the proud enterprise of an high heart" (86/22-3) (*pride brings many a heart to woe*).

says, "the Duke of Gloucester soon set afire them that were of themselves easy to kindle" (15/27) (*nothing kindles sooner than fire*) and describes the troubles that started as soon as Richard was crowned: "Now fell there mischief thick. And as the thing evil gotten is never well kept," (82/13) (*things ill gotten come to no good end*). Several are as succinct as their proverbial sources: "and lo how the world is turned" (52/11) (*the world turns, as a ball*); "good plain ways prosper" (12/3-4) (*no way as sure as the plain*).

The third procedure for embedding proverbs in a narrative suggested by the rhetoricians was to assemble a series or cluster of them within a given piece of discourse. The purpose of this was to heighten the effect of the passage. Usually, such series or clusters would occur within long speeches or dialogue, or in passages in which a character interjects or initiates a digression. Such in fact is the case for *Richard III*, although More avails himself of this procedure only three times.

The queen's long impassioned refusal to give up her son ends with three assimilated proverbs: "We have also had experience that *the desire of a kingdom knoweth no kindred. The brother hath been the brother's bane*" (41/23-6), already quoted on page 8, and, four lines later, "For what wise merchant *adventureth all his good in one ship?*" (41/31-2) The effect of this is to emphasize the queen's desperation to save her younger son. In the face of Richard's determination to remove him from sanctuary, she goes from attempting to appeal on emotional grounds to raising the spectre of brotherly discord and civil war if they are reunited in one place.

Another cluster, this time of four proverbs, serves to emphasize the irony of Hastings' fate. His meeting with his kinsman takes place at Tower Wharf, where his own head will shortly be impaled, and this sets the ironic tone of the passage. Within twenty-two lines, irony will pile upon irony as expressed in a series of proverbial comments. Hastings speaks of the queen's kindred who that day at Pomfret have been beheaded, but is himself unaware that "the axe hang over his own head," both metaphorically and literally (52/8-9). Immediately following this, he muses on their fate, again ironically applicable to himself: "And lo how the world is turned" (16 above) (52/11). His

exclamation that he now feels safe, whereas before he had feared for his life, elicits a prompt comment from the Narrator in the form of a proverbial expression: "when he reckoned himself surest, he lost his life" (52/15). Only seven lines later, he will describe Hastings's demise, saying he was *trusty enough, trusting too much* (14 above) (52/22), which sums up all the previous comments on the knight, too naive for life at court.

The third series of proverbs occurs when the moralizing Narrator censures the two murderers, Tyrell and Dighton. They would not live long, he states, for "in what unsurety stand this worldly weal" (86/22). This view is immediately supported by the reflexion on "what mischief worketh the proud enterprise of an high heart" (86/22-23) and a concluding statement that their violent end befits men who have committed such a crime: "what wretched end ensueth such dispiteous cruelty" (14 above) (86/24). The proverbs make it clear that, ultimately if not immediately, crimes will be punished, for at that point in the narrative, Dighton is inconveniently still alive. This placement of proverbs in a series serves to emphasize the horror of one of the most shocking events in the *History*, the murder of the two princes, but also to support the retributive view of history that More puts forward in the work.

Proverb and Context

As authors had a choice of ways in which to weave proverbs into their compositions, so too they could select the types of contexts in which to place them. By contexts is meant the types of discourse used: direct discourse in the form of monologues or dialogues, indirect discourse in the form of reported speech or narrated commentary.

Nearly one third of More's *Richard III* consists of direct discourse, in the form of either monologues or dialogues. Six characters use proverbs or proverbial expressions in these passages. In the Yale edition, Buckingham is given the greatest number of lines, 344, and the greatest number of proverbs, nine; the queen comes next with 167 lines and five proverbs; Richard has 110 lines and four proverbs; Edward IV has 72 and two proverbs; Hastings has 34 and two proverbs; Morton has only 24 but two proverbs. More therefore has all his major characters use proverbs. Only Buckingham and Morton quote proverbs directly;

the others assimilate them into their discourse in a variety of ways ranging from far-off echoes to fairly close reformulation. The topics illustrated by the proverbs display a similarly wide range: inter-family relationships, marriage, the nature of women, and general truths like Edward's nostalgic "things passed cannot be gancalled" (16 n.20 above) (13/6-7). One of Morton's is Biblical: "I purpose not to spurn against a prick" (12 above) (92/12-13). One of Richard's illustrates how a proverb can serve two purposes at the same time, as an element of persuasion and a means of reinforcing the irony of a situation. Hypocritically pleading to let the Duke of York join his older brother the king, Richard clinches his argument with "sometime without small things greater cannot stand" (13 above). (26/15-16). Furthermore, the reformulated proverb might well cloak an allusion to his "smaller plans" to become the boys' Protector, a stepping-stone to his "greater plans" to kill them and become king. In this case, the irony is further heightened by the proverb.

The passages in indirect discourse, which as we have said constitute almost two thirds of the overall text, comprise both the Narrator's own comments and those of others that he relates in reported speech. Here are found 35 of the text's 59 proverbs. Six occur in reported speech but no fewer than 29 serve to encode the Narrator's own point of view on happenings in the narrative. It is true to say, then, that the Narrator's proverbial voice is a strong one and deserves some detailed commentary.

Of the six proverbs the Narrator attributes to others in reported speech, four belong to members of the court who also use proverbs in direct discourse: Richard, Buckingham and Hastings. Two, however, introduce new elements into the narrative by reflecting the voice of the common people: a gullible crowd approves the execution of the queen's relatives, shouting "it were almouise to hang them" (11 above) (24/15); a disapproving school-master from St Paul's criticises Richard's proclamation for coming so soon upon the heels of Hastings's death, "a gay goodly cast, foul cast away for haste" (14 above) (54/12).

The Narrator's own comments on people and events are of more interest. Since only two proverbs are quoted directly (55/13 and 66/1), his penchant is obviously for assimilated proverbs. Nor is this

surprising. Representing a great variety of uses and affording a great number of formulations, they can be adapted to many different situations. Aware of this, More fully exploits proverbial lore and the various ways of integrating it in passages of indirect discourse.

In commenting on people, the Narrator sometimes applies proverbs stating truths of a general nature: to Hastings, the danger of being too trusting; to Richard, the need to be decisive; to Buckingham and Richard, the price to be paid for an evil life; and to the queen, women's contrariness. He also uses proverbs to describe characters: three are found in the portrait of Mrs. Shore, three in descriptions of the common people, amongst others. The only two proverbs he quotes directly in a passage of narration rather than reported speech concern his opinions of people, but are used to different effect. The first is a humorous comment on Mr. Shore, who left his wife to the king because he "could his good" (55/18). It leaves the reader in no doubt as to what he thinks of Mrs. Shore. The second is a comment on Morton's tempting of Buckingham to rebel against Richard. Morton, says the Narrator, had long experience, "the very mother & mistress of wisdom" (91/19-20), of "politic worldly drifts." The proverb reinforces the positive portrait of Morton that the Narrator is striving to give us, but it also helps to justify rebellion against a crowned king who is nevertheless a usurper and tyrant.

Proverbs are also useful for describing or commenting on events. They lend an air of authority and veracity to the Narrator's reporting and focus our attention on the moral to be drawn from the tapestry unfolding before our eyes. Some of these proverbs express truths of a general nature: "nothing lasteth alway" (11 above) (66/1); "in what unsurety standeth this worldly weal" (14 above) (86/22). These imbue the account with a timeless quality, at the same time encouraging the readers to apply the significance of the events to their own time. They can also aid the Narrator in making his point. Thus when he describes the crowd being goaded to call out "King Richard" yet remaining quiet throughout Dr. Shaa's toadying sermon, he concludes they stood "as they had been turned into stones" (19 above) (68/25), which strongly evokes their passive resistance. Perhaps fearing that his reader will not believe all the ills that follow swiftly upon Richard's

coronation, he appeals to a proverb to support his interpretation of the event: "And as the thing evil gotten is never well kept" (82/13). The wedge Richard drives between Edward's and the queen's families is called a "sure ground for the foundation of all his building" (10/2-3), which gives credence to the Narrator's claim that Richard started plotting his enemies' downfall from an early stage. In stark opposition to the sureness of Richard's path is the vacillation, not only of the common people, but also of the nobles and even wise men, who all "waver like the wind" (45/7). Again, the Narrator has recourse to a proverb to demonstrate how Richard took advantage of human foibles to prepare his seizure of the throne. In all these examples, proverbs act as evidence that the facts the Narrator is telling us are historical.²¹

Proverb and Placement in The Text

Part of the effectiveness of proverbs in a work resides in their careful placement. Once again, More for the most part treads the traditional path laid down by classical authors and handbooks of rhetoric. According to the rules, the textual functions of proverbs were several: to introduce and or conclude a work, or individual units of discourse within a work; to mark a transition between parts of a unit of discourse; and to mark a switch between modes of discourse or various voices.

The History, unlike *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, does not begin with a proverb. Nor does it end with one. The same is true of the large units within the work. More does however use proverbs to open or conclude three small units. After Richard's speech pleading with the queen to release the young Duke of York (14-5), a new unit opens in which he will sow the seeds of discord among the nobles by discrediting the queen's family. Starting with a proverb, he tells them he does not know if her relatives thirst "after their own weal, or our woe" (15/9). Later, marking a new phase of Richard's progression from protector to king, the Narrator explains that his reign of terror will

²¹ Erasmus explains the use of proverbs as evidence to support the truth of historical narrative in the *Prolegomena*, where he praises proverbs as the safeguards of facts that have vanished in written sources like inscriptions, statues and marble tablets. CWE31, 16-17; ASD II-1, 62-3.

escalate. He does so by using a proverb: "as the thing evil gotten is never well kept" (17 above) (82/13-4). A third small unit ends with a proverb. Hastings has quieted the lords' fears about imprisoning the queen's relatives and spread rumours, which the wise question but the common people believe wholeheartedly. The Narrator concludes this section on the build-up of conjecture, rumour and propaganda in the realm by using a proverb that exaggerates the state of affairs: the people go as far to say "it were almoise to hang them" (11 and 19 above) (24/15).

Elsewhere, More makes use of a proverb to mark a switch within a unit of discourse. After a long speech in which she refuses to deliver her son to Richard, the queen concludes with three proverbs that bolster her argument and underpin the reader's hopes that she will hold firm (25/24-5, 25/26, 31/31)--false hopes, for in the next breath she delivers him, "all this notwithstanding." A proverb can also mark a smooth transition within a unit. Edward IV, on his deathbed, catalogues all his past mistakes before expressing hopes that his son will make amends. Two proverbs, Janus-like, point to the switch from past to future: "evil drifts drive to nought, & good plain ways prosper" (12/3-4).

Lastly, More uses proverbs to mark a switch between direct and indirect speech. The Narrator gets carried away in reporting one of Richard's speeches and slips into direct discourse, a slip that is signalled by two proverbs (15/3,9). Later, he uses three proverbs to end his account of how Richard pretended to decline the crown, then switches into direct discourse for the acceptance speech (78-9). In one case, he interrupts a passage of dialogue to give his opinion. More indicates the change with an exclamation, "O good God," and a proverb (52/14-15). In each of these instances, proverbs act as signals of change in modes of discourse and in voice and they function as vehicles for setting new parts of the narrative in motion.

Before concluding this study of More's use of English proverbs, two other points should be mentioned. Ten expressions that at first seemed to be proverbs, simply because they had that "proverbial ring", Tilley and Whiting attributed to More, not to earlier writers, and

the OED followed suit.²² Indeed, I was not able to trace them to any collection of proverbs predating More. I felt, therefore, that they could not accurately be called "proverbs used by More," since they were not proverbs when he was writing *Richard III*, and have not included them in this study. This does nothing to diminish More's status as a user of proverbs, however. Quite the contrary. Not only does his use of existing proverbs set him squarely in the medieval and Renaissance tradition, but phrases like "evil words walk far" (26/19), "with ifs & with and's" (48/25) and "wed myself to mine own will" (27/17) demonstrate that his very mode of thinking and writing was often cast in proverbial form, and they also contribute to the enduring quality of his prose.

Secondly, few allusions have been made to the Latin text of *Richard III*, for the present study is concerned only with the English version. A comparison of More's use of proverbs in the two texts would undoubtedly yield some very interesting results and might shed some light on the question of the composition of the Latin and English histories, but it would constitute a subject for a whole new article. Meanwhile, although I was focussing on More's English proverbs, I was curious to find out if they had equivalents in the Latin version and if so, what they were like. The following comments are inspired by a purely preliminary reading of the Latin text. Nine of the 60 proverbs found in the English *History* occur in the final part of the text, for which there is no Latin version; fifteen proverbs are absent from the Latin although the text surrounding them is not; five were absent because the whole passages surrounding them were too. However, the remaining thirty-one were extremely close to the English, both lexically and syntactically. In the Arundel manuscript, this rises to forty-one, which perhaps upholds Sylvester's statement that it is much closer to the English than the later, revised 1565 one (p. xliii). A second point is also of interest. Of these 31 Latin equivalents, only three are close to classical proverbs of the

²² More is given as the first source for all the following: "or otherwise had any inkling thereof" (9/16); "evil drifts drive to nought" (12/3); "as evil words walk far" (26/19); "wed my self to mine own will" (27/17); "and broken all the dance" (46/1); "with ifs & with ands" (48/25); "as friends fail fleers [those who flee]" (50/16); "men use if they have an evil turn to write it in marble; & whoso doth us a good turn, we write it in dust" (57/5-6); "as still as the midnight" (75/16); "as many well counterfeited jewels make the true mistrusted" (82/30).

sort found in the *Adagia*. More, it would seem, preferred to couch his proverbs in his own words, even in his Latin text that was intended for an international humanist audience. An in-depth study of his Latin proverbs would shed more light on this and other aspects of his proverb use.

Returning to the subject of this study, we can conclude that More certainly knew the rhetoricians' rules of employing proverbs in literary texts. Many he applied rather sparingly, like using proverbs to mark the beginning and ending of units of discourse (but not, in the *History*, the beginning or ending of a work), or switches in discourse and voice. Other principles he generously put to traditional use, reflecting views that were reiterated by humanist rhetoricians and particularly Erasmus. Thus his proverbs serve to persuade, to provide evidence for his arguments, and to emphasize important truths. But they also serve to delight. Presented in various ways, either as direct quotations or, far more often, in reformulated versions, they demonstrate how able More was to "interweave adages aptly and fittingly," as Erasmus said, making his text "gleam with jewel-like words of wisdom, and charm us with titbits of wit and humour."²³

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