

More--to propose that the bishops "be and ever have been and shalbe very false and nought."⁴⁵



Show the Heavens More Just: Ordering Society in *Utopia*, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest*¹

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Using essentially dramatic methods, creating an imaginary country, and setting up moral tension by having characters interact in a realm of complex ideas, Thomas More in *Utopia* draws the reader into active participation. Later, Shakespeare carries forward some of the ideas introduced in *Utopia*. In *King Lear* he responds to similar social and legal problems, and in *The Tempest*, inspired like More by recent discoveries of new lands, invents a strange world. Using georgic or pastoral dimensions, both authors explore the nature/nurture theme. While implying Christian ideals, More sets his fictive world outside Christianity, introducing it explicitly as the work reaches its conclusion - a technique Shakespeare echoes. By stimulating imaginative sympathy in their audience, these works open the way to a sense of community which accords with natural law.

Key words: Thomas More, *Utopia*, Shakespeare, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, natural law.

En faisant essentiellement usage de méthodes dramatiques, en créant un pays imaginaire, et en établissant une tension morale lorsque ses personnages dialoguent dans un contexte d'idées complexes, Thomas More entraîne le lecteur à participer activement à son Utopie. Plus tard, Shakespeare empruntera certaines idées introduites dans l'Utopie. Dans Le Roi Lear, il répond à de semblables problèmes sociaux et de droit ; dans La Tempête, inspiré comme More par les découvertes récentes de terres inconnues, il invente un monde étrange. Utilisant des dimensions géorgiques et pastorales, les deux auteurs explorent le thème de nature/culture. Tout en supposant des idéaux chrétiens, More établit son monde fictif en dehors de la chrétienté, l'introduisant cependant explicitement lorsque l'œuvre s'achemine vers sa conclusion

⁴⁵ CW 10, p. 137.

¹ This paper was given as a talk at the Thomas More Conference in Maynooth in 1998.

– technique dont Shakespeare se fait l'écho. En stimulant la sympathie imaginative de leur audience, ces œuvres ouvrent la voie vers un sens de la communauté qui repose sur la loi naturelle.

Mots-clé : Thomas More, Utopie, Shakespeare, Le Roi Lear, La Tempête, loi naturelle.

Usando esencialmente métodos teatrales, creando un país imaginario, y estableciendo una tensión moral mediante la interacción de personajes en un reino de ideas complejas, Tomás Moro lleva al lector a participar activamente en la *Utopía*. Más tarde, Shakespeare desarrollará alguna de las ideas introducidas en esta obra. En *King Lear* el autor es sensible a problemas sociales y legales similares, mientras que en *The Tempest* –que como *Utopía* está inspirada por los recientes descubrimientos de nuevas tierras– se inventa un nuevo mundo. Usando dimensiones geórgicas o pastorales, ambos autores exploran los temas de la naturaleza y la educación. Si bien los ideales cristianos subyacen, Moro ubica su mundo ficticio fuera de la Cristiandad, introduciendo de forma explícita los primeros al tiempo que su obra alcanza su fin, una técnica que Shakespeare parece reproducir. Estas obras estimulan la simpatía imaginativa en la audiencia y de este modo abren el camino a un sentido de comunidad muy en consonancia con la ley natural.

Palabras Clave: Tomás Moro, *Utopía*, Shakespeare, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, Ley Natural.

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By using essentially dramatic methods, by creating an imaginary country, by setting up moral tension through use of characters who interact in a realm of complex ideas, Thomas More draws the reader into active participation in his *Utopia*. Nearly a hundred years later, social problems similar to those discussed in *Utopia* exercised Shakespeare, who had previously turned a highly dramatic prose work of More's into his *Richard III*. In some of his later plays Shakespeare carries forward many of the ideas and methods introduced in *Utopia*. He responds in *King Lear* to social problems similar to those discussed in *Utopia*, and in *The Tempest*, inspired like More by recent discoveries of new lands, he invents a strange world which challenges those who reach it through danger to make of it productive soil. Using georgic or pastoral dimensions, both authors explore the nature/nurture theme.

While implying Christian ideals, More sets his fictive world outside Christianity, introducing it explicitly only as the work reaches its conclusion – a technique Shakespeare echoes. By stimulating imaginative sympathy in the reader or audience, these three works open the way to a sense of community which accords with natural law.²

Historical documents and literature witness the social problems which frightened and worried people. Concerns about poverty, tyranny, and war were as pressing in the early seventeenth century when Shakespeare was writing as they had been in the early sixteenth when Thomas More grappled with them. Increasing monarchical power led to fear of power's abuse. The effects of enclosure, which drove poor tenants out to starve as arable land was appropriated for the greater profit of the rich, led to great disturbance. A worse sort of enclosure had created this situation in the first place: enclosure in the self, destructive individualism. The pride and greed which were the manifestations of this self-enclosure appeared so inextricably interwoven with human nature that it seemed doubtful any means existed of curing or controlling them. Natural law, based on reason, should work against the irrational urge to subject others or seize more than one needs. But how able are we to perceive natural law? And what would lead us to obey it even if we knew it? Positive law should curb injustice, but power can pervert the law to make it serve private interests.

One potential solution, which both Henry VIII and James I pursued, was to enforce rigorous penalties against those whom poverty led to transgress the laws and those who protested against injustice. This failed to stop disorder and theft. New laws could be made: a legislation boom under Henry VIII concerned mostly matters of property. Although when More wrote *Utopia*, government regulations were in place for dealing with the enclosure crisis,³ they did not solve it; it continued through the century and led to serious uprisings in 1596 and 1607. Was the solution to make even more drastic institutional

² I acknowledge a general debt on the subject of natural law to R. S. White, *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature*, Cambridge UP, 1996.

³ David Bevington, "The Dialogue in *Utopia*: Two Sides to the Question" in *Studies in Philology* 58.3, July 1961, p. 503.

changes? Or might there be another way: to practise on human nature with the assumption that it was reachable and could be improved, to clarify and purify the very sources of law and social order, opening the way to a sense of community in accord with the notion of human brotherhood assumed by natural law?

Could man be educated? In the prelapsarian world, nature was perfect and everything held in common. It was constantly debated whether man could use his wit to improve nature - made imperfect by the fall - or whether he degraded nature by trying to adapt it. The pastoral or georgic tradition echoes this debate about the primacy and relationship of art and nature, and is thus inextricable from the theme of education. Images of land cultivation and animal husbandry extend to the cultivation of man. The Utopians, once conquered, become civilized - or cultivated - and by engineering feats and agricultural expertise make fruitful a barren and forbidding landscape. Similarly, Prospero tames his island, and Lear discovers the principles of social order in an intractable wilderness.⁴

Utopia, *King Lear*, and *The Tempest* are all works which educate and deal overtly with education as a theme. In *Utopia*, education is focal, universal, lifelong. *King Lear* concerns the education of rulers, with a man who has lived far into old age proving still capable of learning. *The Tempest* treats education not only of a ruler but also of Miranda, whose natural gifts and high birth render her educable, and the savage Caliban, whose ability to learn is more limited.⁵ Among Utopians, learned people are the rulers. Prospero too is a scholar, ruling a duchy distinguished in liberal arts, yet he allows his power to be usurped because concentration on study has led him to neglect responsibility for vigilance. So that he may learn, he is transported to another world.

Utopia and *The Tempest* both allude to *The Aeneid*, recalling Aeneas's god-directed journey from his lost homeland to seek a new world. Like Aeneas, mankind, ejected from its original home, seeks a place to start afresh. In literature the ideal or alternative world was a commonplace

⁴ For Lear's pastoral elements see Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art*, Princeton UP, 1974, p. 302-316.

⁵ On the theme of education in *The Tempest* see Frank Kermode's introduction to William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Arden Edition, Methuen, 1966.

by the time voyages of discovery offered a prospect of finding such worlds in reality. What did explorers like Thomas More's brother-in-law John Rastell hope to find?⁶ Land to acquire and colonize, monsters and savages whose brutish life offset the achievements of European civilization (showing that attempts to improve on fallen nature by the use of intellect were effective); or ideal societies, where people lived in a state of nature more sanely and happily than in our "civilized" world (showing that attempts to improve on nature were futile and misguided). Most important from the point of view of education, travel brings both perspective on our own society through distance from it and the opportunity to see people using different methods for ordering society.

It is for such benefits that More and Shakespeare take us to strange places. What we experience first in arriving at a new place is often discomfort. The approach to Utopia looks forbidding. There are dangerous rocks, the appearance of desert and stagnation about the scenery. The land is not naturally fruitful, the inhabitants were originally savage. Can this forbidding material somehow be moulded into a place where we willingly would waste our time? Prospero's island, too, is approached with danger and difficulty, by way of shipwreck. Lear's heath, the only place where the elements of social relations can be examined, is reached through a storm. But from an initial experience of disorder and wilderness, all three works point toward order, harmony, and growth. One of the evils to be cured by the perspective of travel is inequality in distribution: of goods, of justice, of advice. The treatment More and Shakespeare accord to the subject of distribution demonstrates that art can assist nature. In the Dialogue on Council More has Hythlodai introduce the problem of vagrancy stemming from land enclosure, the greed of the few causing farmers to be ejected from their homes,

When they have used up their resources in wandering for a short time, all that remains is to steal and be hanged - justly,

⁶ See Alfred A. Cave, "Thomas More and the New World" in *Albion* 23.2, Summer 1991, p. 209-229, for mediaeval and early Renaissance ideas of the world and its inhabitants.

no doubt - or to take to the road and beg. But then they are thrown into prison for being vagrants, for going about idle because no one will give them work, though they most avidly seek it.⁷

Side by side with such wretched poverty is the ostentatious wealth of the exploiters. Hythloday suggests introducing laws to correct these inequities. Later he shows how the Utopians avoid such problems by extending the idea of distribution to the populace by rotating people, sending extra family members to other houses, extra numbers to colonise new lands. Sharing agricultural labour means everyone is in work. These no doubt impractical suggestions force the reader to apply his mind to realistic solutions. No solution had been found in England by the time Shakespeare portrayed in *King Lear* the vagrant poverty Hythloday described.

One way the excess of the greedy few displays itself, Hythloday observes to Cardinal Morton, is in incongruously ostentatious dress. A balance must be struck between what people must wear to appear civilized and what makes them look ridiculous. Hythloday's account of Utopian society satirizes sumptuous dress: the richly-dressed foreign ambassadors look absurd to the plainly-dressed Utopians. Similarly *The Tempest* makes fun of superfluous elegance, with Stephano and Trinculo diverted from their usurpation by the sight of rich clothes. *King Lear* too approaches the subject first by humour, in Kent's flyting against Oswald: "That such a slave as this should wear a sword, / Who wears no honesty,"⁸ then by minutely examining need and superfluity: neither nature nor warmth requires *gorgeous* clothing. How much is too much? "Allow not nature more than nature needs, / Man's life is cheap as beast's" (2.2.455-456). Poor Tom has no clothes, owes no creature anything, and leads his father to think "a man a worm" (4.1.35). A man needs more than this. To owe can actually be a good thing, suggesting social connections, a mutually sustaining society, leading to reciprocity. Ultimately the old tenant farmer, arguably the poorest character in the

play, is prepared to risk his life to bring an abused nobleman "The best 'pparel that I have" (4.1.52).

As with clothing so with goods: where there is superfluity we need to redistribute, "So distribution should undo excess / And each man have enough" (*King Lear*, 4.1.73-74). The Utopians when they produce too much food distribute the excess. It is we who do not, who may have to suffer ourselves before the need to share is borne in on us. More has Hythloday, speaking in unusually impassioned manner, compare the Utopians' humane and rational distribution to the behaviour of rich Europeans who, during famine, hoarded grain which, if distributed, could have fed the entire populace. His criticism prefigures Queen Elizabeth's censure of rich grain hoarders in 1596.

The concept of distribution fails when extended from commerce to human relations, in which rules of trading, buying, selling, are no help. Utopia, where commerce is unknown, is free from such rules. It is toward such freedom from commercial habits of thought, from a vain and destructive attempt to measure love, that *King Lear* moves. Utopians eschew contracts: the bond on which they rely is made by natural law. Lear, instead of trusting this bond of nature, seeks to force his daughters to enter into a contractual relationship, translating the natural bond into terms of positive law. The play gives ample evidence of how such laws can be warped and broken for personal interest. Once love is subjected to bargaining, the concept of measuring it is pursued to absurdity by reducing the argument over Lear's retainers to a sort of auction: "Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty, / And thou art twice her love" (2.2.448-49). We move from there to the vital question of true need: "What need one?" (2.2.460). This sort of measurement is ultimately unproductive in the area of human relations.

Justice needs to be distributed as well as goods, and as with goods the basis of this distribution must lie in people's concern for each other. Execution of the law can be cruel. Thomas More has Hythloday protest against the excessive penalties for theft and vagrancy. Cornwall will not act against Gloucester "Without the form of justice" (3.7.25). Around the time *King Lear* was written the number of capital crimes was increased, and in 1607 King James proclaimed that uprisings against enclosure were to be punished without compassion. If laws and bonds

⁷ My translation from the Latin text in Thomas More, *CW* 4/66.

⁸ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 2.2.70-71 Arden Edition, R. A. Foakes, ed., Thomson Learning, 1997. All references are from this edition.

can be harsh and lead to cruelty, they can also be tempered with kindness - a word meaning both naturalness and humaneness, the pity, the love, the compassion which is characteristic of humanity: it is in the nature of humanity to be kind. Without kindness, man is a beast of prey, and "man's work" includes killing one's fellow man.

Outwardly imposed legislation does not cure social evils. Nor is it possible to institute an ideal society, and the ruler who sequesters himself in his study in an attempt to become a philosopher becomes not Plato's ideal ruler but a neglectful one, "For if our virtues / Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike / As if we had them not," as the Duke says in *Measure for Measure*.⁹ To keep a ruler from the extremes of neglectfulness and tyranny, yet another manifestation of distribution comes into play - "Lending our minds out," as Fra Lippo Lippi would say - in providing counsel. Counsel, which is built into the Utopian government structure, may make things less bad; and this may be the best we can hope for on earth:

. . . [T]here is another type of philosophy, more suited to civil life, which knows its stage, and, accommodating itself to the play in hand, performs its part so as to fit in gracefully and appropriately. . . . Otherwise it is as if during a comedy of Plautus, when the servants are fooling about, you were to come in costumed as a philosopher and launch into the passage from *Octavia* where Seneca disputes with Nero; would it not be better to play a walk-on role than, by reciting a strange speech, to turn the play into a tragicomedy? You would make a mess of the production by mixing in something incongruous, even if your offering were better. And so whatever play is in hand, do it as best you can and don't disrupt the whole because something different comes into your head, no matter how much cleverer it is. So in the state, in the counsels of princes. If you cannot root out wrong opinions or cure received abuses as you believe from your soul you should, still don't desert the commonwealth. In a storm you don't abandon ship because you can't control the winds. And there is no point trying to introduce new,

unfamiliar ideas when you know they will carry no weight with those of the opposite persuasion, unless you go at it obliquely and make every effort to handle things tactfully. And what you cannot turn to good, at least try to make less bad. For it is impossible that all should be well unless all people are good - which I don't expect to be the case for some years. (my trans. from *CW* 4/98-100)

An approach to making things less bad might be to lead people to discover in themselves the basic elements of justice (*justitia*) and fairness (*aequitas*) by stimulating their emotions and imagination, and so to teach them the sensitivity and flexibility which will enable them to appear in the right play at the right time. A political or philosophical theorist might try exemplary methods, presenting a picture of a perfect state. But utopia or dystopia is all too easy for a reader to walk away from, for he is only an observer, not a participant. More is more subtle than that.

He had recently made a trial run at political theory in an exemplum, his *History of King Richard III*. There he affects the reader through dramatic and emotional involvement with the "audience" present at the events he depicts.¹⁰ He never finished this essay, perhaps because he sensed danger in presenting the example of a tyrant to a king who might soon become one. How can we provide advice safely? There are great risks: "The entrance, with shoals here and rocks there, is fearfully dangerous. . . . Only the natives know where the channels are, so no stranger can penetrate the gulf without a Utopian guide" (my trans. *CW* 4/110). We might, if we disobey the experts, as the nobles in *The Tempest* are inclined to do, run our ship of state onto the rocks.

Even if we avoid danger our advice may be rejected, as Hythloday's is by Morton and More's by Hythloday. Both *Utopia* and *King Lear* consider the position of the counsellor when no one will listen to him: the huge effort with no apparent result, the frustration of at best seeming to make no impression, at worst risking one's life. More has his *Morus persona* advise the counsellor to stay at his post and try to minimize the damage. Kent in *King Lear* is exactly this sort of counsellor, speaking out against tyranny, staying with his wrong-headed

⁹ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 1.1.33-35, Arden Edition, J. W. Lever, ed., Methuen, 1976.

¹⁰ See Arthur Noel Kincaid, "The Dramatic Structure of Sir Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*" in *Studies in English Literature* 12.2, Spring 1972, p. 223-242.

king to try to limit damage. More's counsellor is compared to an actor, going along with the play. Kent is an actor, literally adopting a role. Peter Milward suggests that Kent is one of a group of counsellor-figures, including Gonzalo in *The Tempest*, for whom Shakespeare used More as a model.¹¹ Like Kent, Gonzalo stays with a king who does wrong in supporting Prospero's overthrow, but minimizes the damage by helping Prospero and Miranda escape. Kent and Gonzalo take risks and make personal sacrifices; More ultimately made the supreme sacrifice. But that was well into the future.

Here in *Utopia* he explores whether or not to become a royal counsellor. Though of immediate personal application, this question has sufficient universal significance for him to share it. His internal debate about accepting court office creates characters who represent the arguments for and against: one (Morus) advising caution and diplomacy, one (Hythloday) charging in, then, when apparently rejected, bristling and withdrawing. Yet the distinctions between these two characters are very complex. Hythloday seems to be the idealist, Morus the realist, yet Morus seems optimistic about the position of counsellor and Hythloday the one with the jaundiced view. Morus appears the more conservative, yet Hythloday seems more rigid. But if he is indeed less rigid, Morus is unbending in his attempt to persuade Hythloday to take court office, though it is abundantly clear Hythloday is temperamentally unsuited to that role. Though Hythloday is resistant to persuasion, he finds a way around the problem, goes at it indirectly, just as Morus would advise, and approaches the task of contributing to the counsels of kings by counselling two budding counsellors. The answer to the big implied question of whether court office is the only way to serve the state is thus built into the work. A temptation is to imagine that because the character called "More" recommends it, he is right and Hythloday wrong to resist. But we can see how disastrous it would be for someone of Hythloday's temperament to appear at court. That "Courtier" is not Hythloday's role is evident from the way he is portrayed, even going so far as to insult Morus. What he does is share

¹¹ Peter Milward, "The Morean Counsellor in Shakespeare's Last Plays" in *Moreana* 27.103, Sept. 1990, p. 31.

the information he has gleaned from his travel and experience about alternative methods of ordering states. His virtues thus *have* gone forth of him. As for Thomas More, if he decides not to accept court appointment, his virtues have nevertheless gone forth in the writing of *Utopia*.

This creation of complex characters who argue about a subject is the dramatic technique of *prosopopoeia*, in which budding lawyers were instructed. The dialogue form, the clarity and complexity of characters stimulate the reader's interest and engagement in the moral tensions generated. Also, as James Steintrager points out, More is more realistic than Plato in *The Republic*, for "Utopia is presented as a real place, not the product of a conversation about the meaning of justice."¹² The initial setting is a real one, encroaching on our space, the situation is real, the location real, two of the characters are real, the time frame is very exact, the fictional Hythloday's memories seem real, for he relates a conversation with the real Cardinal Morton. The social and political problems addressed were real ones - some of them still are. The bench even has turf on it. All this conditions our temporary acceptance of Utopia as a real place.

The second book is less vivid, mediated through a narrator and containing no characters. Here the reader is involved and stretched through the challenge of ironies and paradoxes. The dialogue between opposing character types and ideas in Book I has conditioned us to argue and question. More is stimulating our minds and emotions, not telling us how to live, not giving instructions in government. Often a proposition is presented which we find untenable: we accept it first as "fact," then react against it, argue with it. More has set up the irony against Hythloday, so that we do not side in all respects with his praise of Utopia. When, for example, the Utopians' war for colonization is placed side by side with their equitable distribution of resources, we need only look back to Book I to see that war for colonization was an immoral action which Hythloday would like to persuade rulers to

¹² James Steintrager, "Plato and Utopia" in *Social Research* 36:3, Autumn 1969, p. 367.

eschew. These subtle ironies work by indirection, the technique Morus advised.

There is some identification of both Morus and Hythloday with the fool: Morus by his name's literal signification and Raphael Hythlodæus, messenger of God and speaker of nonsense. Hythloday, with his long cloak, rushing in where angels fear to tread, suggests the traditional image of the fool with one foot on solid ground, the other in the air as he steps off a cliff without looking, his cloak billowing out behind him. Interestingly, Shakespeare too, in *King Lear*, makes a fool a royal counsellor, one who works through indirection - through riddles, rhymes, allusions.

At the conclusion of his "libellus," More fleetingly, wistfully and as an afterthought muses that despite its many absurdities, there are some features of Utopia he would like to see implemented in his own country, but that this is more a wish than a hope. He has taken himself and his readers into a territory where, for a while, some wishes become realities and play themselves out, and the cross-currents of thought he has stimulated within and between us during our visit have better equipped us to deal with the real world in which he leaves us and to which he will now turn. "Engaged by the wit as well as the subject of the discussion, a reader might well respond with his own ideas for an improved commonwealth," remarks Lee Cullen Khanna.¹³

Flexibility of mind allows us to put ourselves in another's place. Knowing oneself - which leads to understanding of others - is an essential characteristic of the counsellor as of the ruler, and it is an important theme in these three works. Lear, who had "ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.294-95), begins his learning process by feeling his own infirmity and thus making allowances for others' health (e.g., "maybe he is not well", 2.2.294). By exposing himself to the elements, he learns pity for the poor:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,

Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just. (3.4.28-36)

This leads him deeper, to revolve in a mind now unhinged and thereby liberated, the basic principles of justice and law enforcement. We are all equally guilty. If we all condemn because of that, we fall into Puritan rigidity. At the opposite extreme is the view that no one is guilty - "None does offend" (4.6.164). There are two senses in which this can be argued: one is Edmund's outlook that unfettered appetite is the truest guide and cruelty is acceptable because natural. In the other sense, if all are guilty all are potentially forgivable, can be rehabilitated and restored. This insight forms the basis of the mercy which tempers justice. As Lear at last awakens, feeling vulnerable, he has become so accustomed to thinking in terms of others that he does so automatically, this time setting himself up as an object lesson: "I should ev'n die with pity / To see another thus" (5.1.53-54). It is now up to us, who are the others seeing him thus, to respond with pity.

Another technique for putting us in the place of others is use of the spectator. In *Utopia* the Morus character mediates between us and Hythloday's narrative. Like us, he has learned something by the end of it, has taken something away. Similarly Edgar, whose experience we share of education by vicarious suffering, mediates between us and others' experience. "Set me where you stand," says Gloucester to Edgar at Dover (4.6.24). And Edgar leads him through an imaginary fall to spiritual renewal. Ariel guides Prospero in this technique of substitution, saying that if he were to witness his enemies' remorse, his "affections would become tender. . . . Mine would sir, were I human." Prospero delays one metric beat, on which hinges the whole direction of the play:

And mine shall
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
(One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,

¹³ Lee Cullen Khanna, "Utopia: the Case for Open-Mindedness in the Commonwealth" in *Moreana* 8:31/32, 1971, p. 104.

Passion as they) be kindlier moved than thou art? (5.1.18-24)¹⁴

This ability to feel compassion is what it is to be human. It guides his judicial decision: to forgive, not to punish but rather to exercise vigilance and control.

Recognizing the danger in which we all stand of imperfection and error, Utopia too controls criminals and provides for their rehabilitation. This is the ethic which *The Tempest* reaches: Prospero has struggled to the moment in which all his enemies are at his *mercy* (4.2.263), then accepts – with another cliffhanging pause at the line ending – that "The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance" (5.1.27-28). *King Lear* progresses from the statement to which all arguments about justice are reduced, "None does offend," to a reordering of the state with rewards and punishments assigned according to desert. Nowhere is an ideal state or a world of perfect people envisaged. Nowhere does any of these works tell us how to order society. The greatness and sweep of them all lies in their inclusiveness. *Utopia* includes both clear-sighted awareness of human imperfection and trust in human capacity for improvement. In *Lear*, opposites balance and collide: the impulse toward order and harmony with the impulse toward chaos and decay; two views of "nature," good and evil. *The Tempest*, where the island society has wood to be carried and fear of rape and rebellion, hints at an ideal world where nature produces spontaneously and magistrates are unknown, but this picture contains – like Utopia – impossible contradictions: the optimistic vision of both a "brave new world" with beautiful people and the wary "'Tis new to thee" (5.1.184), responding to awareness of the ugly intentions concealed within some of these beautiful forms. Eden is suggested in the worlds apart of *Utopia* and *The Tempest*, in *King Lear* through the loyalty of Cordelia, with a reference which recalls simultaneously Adam and Eve and Goneril and Regan: "Thou hast one daughter / Who redeems nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought her to" (4.6.201-203).

¹⁴All quotations from *The Tempest* are from William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Arden Edition, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Though perfection never arrives, we are shown clear guidelines toward it.

Love quells savage nature:

Come unto these yellow sands
And then *take hands*.
Curt-sided when you have and kissed
The wild waves whist. (1.2.375-378; italics mine)

Prospero and Lear learn to control their passions – the prerequisite for good government. The storm, the projection of human passions, has in both cases been stilled. "Please you, draw near," Prospero asks at the end of the play (5.1.319). As soon as Lear begins to comprehend the feelings of others, the way opens for community and mutual giving between him and others of his society. From that point the taking of hands becomes a significant motif: "Give me thy arm, / Poor Tom shall lead thee" (4.1.81-82). The lunatic – whose imagination resembles that of the poet – leads us to and beyond a mortal fall which does not hurt us. The magician/artist in *The Tempest* takes his enemies and his audience through a shipwreck where there is "Not a hair perished" (1.2.217). The fool, Hythloday, the speaker of nonsense, has been the Utopian guide leading us through the dangerous straits. *Utopia*, in which we meet a society whose inhabitants treat each other with compassion, ends with a gesture of compassion, another taking of hands. Morus, realizing that Hythloday – an elderly man – must be tired after his long discourse, chooses to forego continuing the discussion: instead, he silently takes his hand and leads him in to supper.

This movement out toward others acts against the destructive aspects of individualism and points toward heavenly treasure. The Utopians call themselves farmers rather than owners of the land and define wealth as freedom from care. Their ascetic perspective is achieved by Lear, to whom possessions become "lendings," and whose final focus is above temporal concerns, on blessing and forgiveness. We need help and guidance to reach this perspective, and these three works point us toward such help. In *The Tempest* the victory of goodness is inherent in the opening: Miranda, seeing the wreck (which is not real but looks it), is moved to pity, "The very virtue of compassion"

(1.2.27). This compassion, which the ruler finds in himself near the play's conclusion, results in reordering society, with "not a hair perished". In *Lear's* world the guidelines are less obvious, for ethical absolutes and natural order seem precarious. Though society is nominally governed by law and reason, it feels easier to step outside these limits. When we do, we step into the Machiavellian/Guicciardinian jungle, where individualism and relativism dispense with natural law and threaten positive law by instituting the law of nature, in which we are pure appetite and "Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep" (4.2.50-51). Yet in this darkness, there is a lantern to guide us past dangerous rocks in Cordelia's unshakeable love.

For goodness to have immediate earthly reward is not within the scope of tragedy or life. If we want faster results, if we wish justice to be distributed here and now, it is up to us to effect this distribution, to "show the heavens more just." Amid devastating loss, this play does show goodness ultimately victorious. All the villains die. Albany chooses the right side, wins a kingdom and distributes earthly justice: "All friends shall taste / The wages of their virtue and all foes / The cup of their deservings" (5.3.301-03). Edgar, showing the Morean counsellor's flexibility in the extreme, has played a whole series of roles, adapting himself to the various changes in direction of the play in which he finds himself, having had to revise his vision of moral order over and over again, and brings an education in compassion to the coming reign, of which he will be an essential part, as equity is a vital part of justice.¹⁵ Society, having fallen apart, has re-formed with these two - who alone clearly retain trust in divine order - at its head. Cordelia cannot be revived - until the next performance. But she is no realer than Prospero's tempest or Gloucester's cliff: no one has actually been hurt. We are real but have only a single performance to get through. What will we do if the play we are in falls apart? The imaginative sympathy awakened by our vicarious experience as readers and audience should guide us in improvising our way back to harmony.

¹⁵ My reading, bolstered by the relationship of justice and equity I discuss here, is that Albany seeks *support* from Kent and Edgar ("rule" being necessary in many spheres), not that he tries to resign the crown, which would make pointless the experience Lear has suffered.

At *Utopia's* end, the movement toward social and spiritual harmony in the conduct of a state is reinforced by music:

. . . their music, whether instrumental or vocal, so imitates and expresses natural feelings - the sound so matches the thing - that whether the mood is prayerful joyous, calm, troubled, grieving or angry, the melodic form so represents the sense that it wonderfully penetrates and stimulates the spirits of the hearers. (my trans. from *CW* 4/236)

Lear reawakens after his ordeal to fresh garments and music. The effects of harmony are suggested from the start of *The Tempest*, where music calms the savagery of nature and of human grief and also acts as a guide:

This music crept by me on the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air. Thence have I followed it
(Or it hath drawn me rather) . . . (1.2.392-395).

And Prospero resumes his humanity to "heavenly music." (5.1.52).

Utopia and *The Tempest* work in "real time;" *Lear* includes a longer passage of time. But none lasts until divine justice metes out rewards and punishments and God gives answers: that's too long for a play. Lack of closure in all these works forces our attention beyond them. In the system of justice Thomas More administered, equity completed and fulfilled the law. In Biblical order, Old Testament law is completed by New, a God of justice reinterpreted as a God of love. *Utopia* with its ordering of society by reason alone requires completion by the Christian revelation, to which we have access. In *King Lear* a pre-Christian society couples growth in community, harmony, and love with a clustering of New Testament references and images as it moves toward its conclusion, predicting a better order - one to which we have access but Lear did not. In *The Tempest*, where prayer "Pierces so that it assaults / Mercy itself and frees all faults" (Epilogue, 17-18), one wrongdoer, Caliban, unexpectedly ends seeking for grace - as the

Utopians (who were originally savages too but have made remarkable progress since then) are left seeking for Grace.

Literary and dramatic art acts, like music, as a guide, and operates like the virtue that all these works stress: compassion. We feel with others, we have been set briefly where someone else stands. In a work of imagination as in Utopia's shoals and rocks or Prospero's tempest or Gloucester's fall or even Cordelia's death there is "no harm done" (*Tempest* 1.2.15). Still, we should not depart unmoved, we might not depart unscathed. We depart with our emotions purified and faculties strengthened. Jonathan Dollimore remarks that "in a world where a king has to share the suffering of his subjects to 'care,' the majority will remain poor, naked . . . and wretched."¹⁶ Alvin Kernan points up the limitation of such a remark in his comment on *The Tempest*: "it affects the imaginatively competent spectator in such a way as to allow him to experience and be transformed by the illusion without having to endure being actually drowned and reborn."¹⁷ Having been through the experience vicariously, having seen feelingly, none of us should have to suffer it in reality, and none of us has an excuse for accepting poverty and wretchedness without taking arms against it, whether by writing books, directing plays, risking our lives, or distributing our goods or talents or time. Each of these three works of genius, unlike a treatise on social order, forces our attention beyond itself into the "real world" where we will go on living after we put down the book or leave the theatre, to realise our destiny and fulfil our appointed task

Not in Utopia, - subterranean fields, -
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us, - the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all
(Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 12.140-41)

¹⁶ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, 2nd ed., Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 191-92.

¹⁷ Alvin Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theatre*, Yale UP, 1995, p. 143.

Deux fabulistes fabuleux : THOMAS MORE ET JEAN DE LA FONTAINE¹

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More est un raconteur si coté que des recueils de ses bonnes histoires ont paru dans plusieurs langues. Quant à La Fontaine, ce qui le caractérise par rapport à Esope et Phèdre, c'est le soin qu'il prend du récit, parfois dialogué, porteur de la morale. Bien que séparés par une mer, une langue et un siècle et demi de distance, nos deux auteurs ont beaucoup en commun. Leur bestiaire, marqué au coin de leur génie, demeure néanmoins dans la tradition de l'Occident, dominé qu'il est par le triumvirat lion-loup-renard. Ils abordent les mêmes sujets et aboutissent à des conclusions souvent identiques. Ils sont tous deux avocats de métier. Que la note chrétienne et l'inspiration biblique soient moins présentes chez La Fontaine est dû en partie à l'esthétique du Grand Siècle, qui ne mélange pas la Parole de Dieu au discours profane. Mais il a reçu une bonne formation religieuse et même théologique par son noviciat oratorien, comme More auprès des chartreux, et il a comme lui le culte de l'amitié.

Mots-clé : Esope, parabole, proverbe, morale, amitié.

¹ Références :

La Fontaine : Fables et Oeuvres Choiesies, édition commentée par Mario Roustan (Paris : Didier, 1935), 963 pages et 317 illustrations. Pour les fables, j'indique le numéro du livre en chiffres romains, celui de la fable en chiffres arabes, et parfois celui de la ligne ; pour les autres œuvres, je donne la page et parfois la ligne.

Le sigle *CW* renvoie à *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, édition collective par l'Université de Yale (15 volumes, 1963-1997) : j'indique le numéro du volume avec la page, et parfois la ligne.

Allen désigne l'édition d'*Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi* par P.S. Allen et al., Oxford University Press, 1906-1952 : j'indique le numéro de la lettre et la ligne.