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THOMAS MORE CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

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R.S. Sylvester's Keynote Address of 22 June at Georgetown University.

I hope I may be pardoned if I extend a general rather than a detailedly specific « thank you » to all the institutions and individuals who join together here in Washington this week to commemorate and celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Thomas More. The first page of your symposium program fully indicates where our support has come from -- and I shall confine myself this evening to expressing our gratitude to the National Endowment for the Humanities for making this event financially possible.

1977 and 1978 have indeed been the years of Thomas More and we should, I believe, see our symposium as a kind of American climax to the succession of lectures, conferences, special seminars and all the other celebrations that have marked and will mark our commemorative activities. I can myself, I think, lay claim (at least until challenged) to have started the ball rolling in a talk delivered on January 6 of last year to a group known, curiously enough, as the « Ladies Aid Society » of New Haven, Connecticut. In February 1977, Fordham University held its two day conference, the proceedings of which have now been published in a special issue of the periodical *Thought*. From then on the celebrations have continued unabated, reaching a European peak at the six-day Angers Conference of April 1977, where, under the devoted directorship of Father Germain Marc'hadour, the editor of *Moreana*, some forty papers were presented. It strikes me as altogether appropriate that the close linkage which obtains between American and European More studies is in a sense symbolized by the fact that Germain will also be leading our own closing session on this coming Sunday. For twenty years and more this man, known personally to so many of you, has been not only an organizer but a very galvanizer of Morean activities. I can pay no better tribute to him here than to quote More's words about Erasmus in 1515 : « His greatest pleasure is to praise absent friends to friends present. Since he is greatly loved by so many men, and that too in different parts of the world, because of his learning and most charming character, he tries earnestly to bind all men together with that same affection which all have for him alone. »

Nor will our commemorations be concluded when our symposium here in Washington ends. When the record breaking (87, 000) More Exhibition opened at the National Portrait Gallery in London, a former student of mine wrote me that « London was mad for Thomas » -- and it now looks as if this « madness » (a special *Encomium Moriae)* will extend throughout 1978. Australia and Japan have scheduled full programs for this summer and fall and new American conferences continue to be scheduled, with the final one, of which I have recently received word, planned as a special session of the Modern Language Association meeting at New York in late December. Our « man for all seasons » seems to be becoming a man for all times and climes. Men and women express their devotion to and interest in him in a complex variety of ways. Thomas More is not, most assuredly, an ivory-tower kind of figure, the private preserve of pedantic skull-drudgery. Even though he may not be counted by some, to recall G.K. Chesterton's prediction of 1929, as « the greatest Englishman, » he has nevertheless come to appeal as lawyer, scholar, saint, martyr to conscience, statesman, diplomat and social planner, family man -- what have you -- to a very broad range of modern society. Our program here, to which I shall turn in a moment, will be attempting to delineate some of the reasons for both the breadth and depth of his greatness.

But before I try to spread our banquet before you (« Go now and provide a feast for men of such dainty palate, of such varied taste, and of such unforgetful and grateful natures, » More says ironically as he sends *Utopia* to Peter Giles), I should like to add here one personal note of thanks and one renewed appeal. Many of you have supported, with hard cash, the fund drive that the Thomas More Project launched last January. Our effort to insure the future of our work, that is, the completion of the Yale Edition of More's works by 1985-86, will continue through July 1 of next year. You will find more details in your information packets. Here I shall only say, on behalf of our Editorial and Advisory Committees, « thank you, » so very much, for your past and future aid.

The general title for our symposium -- « Thomas More : The Man and his Age » -- is quite clearly something of a catch-all. Under that broad rubric we have tried to bring together in our six major sessions some of the salient features of More studies as they stand in 1978. I hope we shall not disappoint you. If this afternoon's opening round is any indication of what is to come (and I think it is), then there is no reason that our banquet should be lacking in substantive courses. We have begun with « More and the Humanist tradition », taking « humanist » in its widest Renaissance sense (so ably presented by Professor Trinkaus) in order, as it were, to set the man firmly in his intellectual and social milieu. In emphasizing More's humanism at the outset, we do not wish necessarily to signal, if I may be permitted one final quotation from Chesterton, that « the best friend of the Renaissance was killed as the worst enemy of the Reformation. » Yet we do mean, against this broad background, to confront the apparent contrast, which many have found, between More the polemicist and More the humanist author of *Utopia*. These are the topics that Professors Martz and Herbrüggen will be introducing tomorrow at our Folger sessions.

On Saturday we shall move from form and style (though More's humanism leads to much more than a superficial view of such matters), to what the historians among us might like to refer to as « more substantive matters. » With Professor Schoeck we take up the relatively neglected matter of More and the Law and then move to John Guy's presentation of the new Public Record Office material that he will be dealing with in his forthcoming biography. Finally, on Sunday, the private and public man, it is our hope, will be brought together by Father Marc'hadour as he develops his view of More's spirituality by casting him as the Christian knight, both « Sir Thomas » and « St. Thomas » compounded in one complex personality. I trust that all of you will not take these broad categories under which we have laid out our program as in any way rigid or self-limiting. Feel free, please, to mingle with each other, not only personally during the time-gaps we have allowed between sessions and at lunches, but also to mingle intellectualy as one topic for open discussion leads to the next. Don't hesitate to introduce yourselves to each other ; make new friends, renew old friendships. We shan't, perhaps, have such an opportunity again until another 500th anniversary rolls around in the year 2035.

Shall we manage, during our lectures and discussions here, to take something of the measure of Thomas More, the man both in and out of his age, a man truly, as my subtitle suggests, for all ages ? One hopes so, surely, but there are no guarantees. There has been, particularly in the present century, an enormous amount of study given to him -- his handwriting has been analyzed, his medical problems treated (that « pain in his breast » of which he spoke when he sent his epitaph to Erasmus in June 1533) ; and now various psychological and psychoanalytical studies are also beginning to appear, not to mention the « structuralist » readings of *Utopia* that have been produced by Louis Marin and his school. The

mystery More so often presented to his contempories, both in his public image (« Why can't you be like the rest of us, Master More ? ») and with his own family (« What he meant thereby I then wist not, » says Roper, when More told him as he left Lambeth, « I thank our Lord the field is won ») ; -- that mystery still surrounds the man, puzzling, confounding us at times, yet leading us on to try to delve ever deeper into his multifaceted nature.

I can take up here this evening only a few topics that can perhaps offer us themes for further discussion. And I must, perforce, speak as a literary scholar, for it is the author More that I know best. To be emphasized, first of all, is More's wit and humor, his shrewd, sharp and ironic view of both himself and others, never more clearly evident than in his words to Margaret commenting on Thomas Audley's interpretation of the Platonic story of the wise men and the fools :

> « Howbeit, daughter Roper, whom my lord [Audley] taketh here for the wise men and whom he meaneth to be fools I cannot very well guess ; I cannot well read such riddles. For as Davus sayeth in Terence, 'Non sum Oedipus,' I may say, you wot well, 'Non sum Oedipus, sed Morus,' which name of mine what it signifieth in Greek, I need not tell you. But I trust my lord reckoneth me among the fools, and so reckon I myself, as my name is in Greek. And I find, I thank God, causes not a few wherefore I so should in very deed. » (*Rogers,* p. 519).

The link here, not only with *The Praise of Folly,* but with St. Paul's « folly of Christ » (1 Corinthians, 1 : 21-25), is unmistakable. Foolishness is wisdom, wisdom foolishness. So run the central paradoxes which must condition our response to the man in his works.

If we read More carefully we can see him developing and testing various aspects of his talented nature. In *Utopia,* for example, I often feel, as the characters are introduced in Book I, that each of them embodies an aspect of or a tendency in More's rich personality. Cuthbert Tunstal, first of all, the typical royal servant, admirably efficient, never radically questioning the status quo as long as he lived (1559) -- the system and the institutions to which he had sworn allegiance ; Peter Giles, like More involved in city government, a man of « prudent simplicity, » More tells us, his character summed up by the serpent and the dove as depicted on the title-page and colophon of the 1518 editions, open-hearted, loyal, and without guile ; Cardinal Morton, Lord Chancellor, an ideal figure, an older More, who also liked to make trial of his suitors in order to see « what presence of mind they might manifest » under pressure. Skilled in

the ways of the world, fooled by no one, Morton shows himself as quite willing to tolerate a little foolery in his court and to be open to social experiment. Balanced against this trio in the dramatic dialogue, the play within a play, of Book I are three other figures, anti-types to Tunstal, Giles, and Morton : the lawyer, intolerant, reactionary, conservative, as if More were deliberately dramatizing the worst features of his own profession and himself ; the friar, equally intolerant, perverting the ideals of his order (we recall how More was attracted to a religious vocation) through his illiterate zeal ; and finally, the court parasite, or *morio,* who bears More's name and whose attempts to play the part of jester usually end up with himself becoming the butt of his own jokes.

And then, of course, we have Raphael Hythlodaeus and Thomas Morus themselves, whom I shan't treat here for they will be figuring strongly in tomorrow's discussions. Enough has been said, I trust, to indicate that More's penchant for role-playing, for the creation of dramatic characters and scenes, is a hallmark of his own personality and of his style. Throughout his works -- and his life -- he is constantly striving to let his powerful poetic imagination (« a poet even in his prose, » says Erasmus) articulate and structure his most deeply felt moral and political insights. This never becomes, with More, a merely superficial stylistic display, as it did for many a would-be humanist. Rather, from his earliest extant works on, he weaves his « feigning in advance, » as Margaret will later call it, into the patterns of life itself, acquiring thereby a reputation for something like prophecy that created a kind of secular awe in his early biographers, Roper and Harpsfield. « And at another time, » says Roper, he (More) asked Margaret how Queen Anne did. 'In faith, father,' quoth she, 'never better.' 'Never better, Meg !' quoth he. 'alas, Meg, alas ! It pitieth me to remember into what misery, poor soul, she shall shortly come.' »

We may not want to call this prophecy (and More himself would no doubt have shuddered at the thought), but there are far too many scenes like this in More's life and works for us to ignore them. If, as saint, his « miracles » seem completely natural (the sudden inspiration, for example, that an enema would cure Margaret's fever, or the « miracle » of the birth of a baby so tenderly related in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies),* they nevertheless alert us once again to the paradoxes in this man who would never either accept or reject neither more nor less than God and his own conscience had allowed to him. This is why More is so concerned during his imprisonment with what he calls « the framing of his conscience » -- and the structural metaphor of building, shaping, testing carries there, for him, both a poetic and a moral valency.

There are, I believe, at least three main aspects to this role-playing process in More's thought, and each of them leads, with various subdivisions that can be marked out, to the development of a particular style. First, the rational, relatively mildly tempered discourse of *Utopia* itself, humanistic, balanced, detached, a style that is self-analytic at the same time that it struggles to maintain its experimental qualities, the style of the best of the Latin poems, of the *Letter to Dorp,* of the major portion of the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies.* Secondly, there is what I would call More's declamatory, or perhaps apocalyptic mode. No cautious, insight-provoking tone here, but rather a crushing flood of language that can descend to rant and rise to vitriolic denunciation. This is the style of his reply to Lucian's *Tyrannicida,* of the *Letter to a Monk,* of the *Responsio ad Lutherum,* and, of course, for many of the vernacular polemical works. In its full fury, as in the following passage from Book III of the *Confutation,* its magnificent diatribe has daunted many sensibilities and led them to wonder where sainthood has gone :

> And Christ would not send such fond fellows [like Tyndale] as would be so shameless without any miracle showed to bid all the world believe them upon their bare word. [These « reformers » use holy scripture to justify their] jesting and railing against God and all good men, against all good works, against all religion, fasting, prayer, devotion, saints, ceremonies, and sacraments, and to set forth vice in boldness of faith, and to praise lechery in friars and nuns, and call it matrimony ; and thus make mocks of holy scripture solemnly, with such open, shameless, abominable blasphemy, that if the zeal of God were among men as it should be, such railing ribalds should at every such exposition have an hot iron thrust through their blasphemous tongues.

When More writes in this declamatory mode, he speaks as the public defender, the voice of the establishment, justifying his language as a way of fighting fire with fire. Both the obscenity and the vulgarity of such prose, as he tells us in the prefaces to the *Responsio* and the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies,* are characteristic of the tracts of Luther and Tyndale whom it is his duty, as official spokesman, to answer. We touch here on More's earthy, London cockney side, « Chaucerian More, » the teller of dirty jokes in the *Four Last Things,* the adapter of Aretino in a bawdy passage in the *Apology,* scatological if need be, no worse nor no better (are we sure ?) than the opponents he is endeavoring to confound.

But I treat already too closely on Professor Martz's territory for tomorrow. More's polemical mode, the second category of his style as I have been describing it, is modeled, so he tells us, on the rages of the church fathers (Jerome against Jovinian, Augustine versus Pelagius) ; the

« imitation » here parallels his use of Tacitus, Cicero or Plato in the humanistic works, and it always involves, wherever it appears, an intense personal commitment that seems to overwhelm all other rhetorical considerations. I say « seems to » deliberately, for I feel that this style, seen in its full context, is just as deliberately elected in this so very self-conscious man, as the final, religious roles which he tries on for himself in his devotional works. More's polemical prose needs further study and it is now beginning to receive it as the texts become available.

In both his humanistic and in his polemical modes, More tends to write, more or less, *in propria persona.* He uses his own name, or, at the least, he indicates that, however partial his depiction of himself, he is not concerned to deny that the prose is indeed his own. But the paradoxes return as we see him developing his devotional prose (my third category) in his later and last works, the *Treatise on the Passion,* the *Dialogue of Comfort,* and the *De Tristitia Christi.* Here we meet not so much a new More as a new spiritual writer who has managed somehow to transcend and combine the best features of his earlier manners. In the *Treatise* he speaks as an explicator of the scriptures, methodic, non-polemical, almost anonymous. So too, *A Dialogue of Comfort* is indeed a dialogue, the best More ever wrote, but it is « Antony and Vincent, » not « Thomas Morus » or « Chancellor More, » who conduct the discourse. And then, in the *De Tristitia,* the consummating imitation -- that of Christ Himself -- is dramatized for us. One can trace, in these great works, a growing objectivity, a denial of personality rather than an exfoliation of it, as agonized concerns become concerned anxieties and personal hesitancies are assimilated into traditional patterns of meditation. Never, for More, were life and literature more closely related to each other than they are in the Tower Works ; and yet never did he write from such a publicly available, universally Christian stance.

This new style -- if one can, properly speaking, call it that, for More had been practicing at it since at least as early as the *Four Last Things* of 1522 -- is marked by a widely ranging ability to adopt whatever rhetorical strategy that the particular situation seems to call for. At times, one can trace the patterns as they develop, for example in the great prison metaphor of the *Dialogue of Comfort* (III, 19-20). Vincent, as this section begins, is rather ignorant about prisons, perhaps because, as old Antony wryly suggests, he 'visits poor prisoners seld,' thus losing much good that comes to a man's soul from such a personal, Christian act. Then Antony starts to « put his cases, » attempting to show that both king in his castle and beggar on the highway are prisoners both. But Vincent, who has

grown considerably as a character since Book I, sees through Antony's « sophistical fantasy » ; even though, he says, he cannot find logical « answers convenient where to avoid such arguments, » he remains « convinced and concluded » rather than persuaded. 'Real life just isn't like that,' a position which wins from Antony a hearty compliment as he too recognizes the limits of rational argument (the Utopian mode) when confronted with the ultimate mystery of the problem of evil : « Well fare thine heart, good Cousin Vincent. There was in good faith no word that you spake since we talked of these matters that half so well liked me as this you speak now ». I have played the old fool in my folly, Antony goes on, adding a linguistic joke (a kind of stylistic farewell to the verbal fun and play that was so strong in *Utopia*), a joke about the priest who always pronounced *Dominus* as *Do'miinus* because, from long usage, he was ashamed to make the medial syllable short.

And now the « convincing » of « Vincent » begins in earnest. Antony shifts his stance from a spatial view to a temporal one. If all men are not confined in either castles or cells, they are nevertheless imprisoned by time, with God Himself as the « chief jailer ». Vincent sticks for a last objection, still responding literally, still not quite able to read this grand metaphor. « I don't, » he says, « see that God puts men in stocks or fastens them with fetters, or tortures them cruelly. » Antony's reply is one of the finest passages More ever wrote. Its modulations catch all the delicate ranges of humanistic prose but reinforce them with the pulsing, dynamic verbs of the polemical works :

> Is he no minstrel, cousin, that playeth not on an harp ? Maketh no man melody but he that playeth on a lute ? He may be a minstrel and make melody, ye wot well, with some other instrument ... [And thus God is not like other jailers] For he layeth one of his prisoners with an hot fever ... He wringeth them by the brows with a megrim [migraine] ; he collareth them with a quinsy ; he holteth them with a palsy ; he manacleth ... he wringeth ... he bindeth ...

The crescendo continues until the overwhelming conclusion is reached : « this general prison of this whole earth [is] a place in which the prisoners be as sore handled as they be in the tother. »

Vincent is, at last, both literally and figuratively, « overcome. » What he has yet to learn -- and this theme dominates the remainder of the *Dialogue* -- is how he himself may come to overcome so that he may 'find in his heart ... to go to the great feast that God prepareth in heaven for those who have mended their mind in time'. The « pinch in the pain » is

transcended as More dwells on the great themes of charity and love. Mere words no longer suffice, or rather, they become transformed into *the* Word itself through concrete meditation (one of the few such passages in all More's works) on Christ's agony and death. More's language itself becomes exclamatory, hortative, ejaculatory -- « Oh, good God, cousin ... A woeful death is that death in which folk shall evermore be dying and never can once be dead » ... « O, good God, » if we could only imagine the joys of heaven 'in our eyes by reading, in our ears by hearing ... in our hearts by meditation and thinking,' then what would not men do to achieve this eternal bliss ? Eye may not have seen, nor ear heard, but Vincent himself has been given a glimpse -- a point which Antony clinches home by two quotations from Revelations, each of them punning on the etymology of his nephew's name : « Vincenti dabo edere de ligno vitae : To him that overcometh, I shall give him to eat of the tree of life », and « Vincenti dabo manna absconditum, et dabo illi calculum candidum. Et in calculo nomen novum scriptum quod nemo scit nisi qui accipit : To him that overcometh will I give manna secret and hid, and I will give him a white suffrage and in his suffrage a new name written which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it ». With Antony's blessing, Vincent, now the convinced Christian, may go forth (as indeed he does) to spread the new -- and yet so old -- word « not in our language only, but in the Almain [German] tongue too. » That his plans went even further we know from the title-page in the Corpus Christi manuscript of *A Dialogue of Comfort* : « Made by an Hungarian in Latin, and Translated out of Latin into French, and out of French into English. » How much more universal can one get ?

All this -- and much more -- is *our* legacy too. Let us integrate it into our heritage as our Symposium unfolds.

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