

FUNICULUS TRIPLEX
MARGARET ROPER AND THOMAS MORE

The scene of Margaret's parting kiss and squeeze on Tower Wharf (1 July 1535) is justly famous. It has inspired artists, among them a Frenchman, Antoine Karon or Caron, whose painting, preserved at the Musée Royal of Blois, was exhibited in the National Portrait Gallery from November 1977 to March 1978. ¹ William Roper is at his most vivid and detailed, whether he witnessed the scene, or heard it from others, for instance his brother-in-law John More, who also sought his father's blessing that day :

When Sir Thomas More came from Westminster to the Towerward again, his daughter, my wife, desirous to see her father, whom she thought she should never see in this world after, and also to have his final blessing, gave attendance about the Tower wharf, where she knew he should pass by, before he could enter into the Tower, there tarrying for his coming home. As soon as she saw him, after his blessing on her knees reverently received, she hasting towards him and, without consideration or care of herself, pressing in among the midst of the throng and company of the guard that with halberds and bills went round about him, hastily ran to him, and there openly, in the sight of them all, embraced him, took him about the neck, and kissed him. Who, well liking her most natural and dear daughterly affection towards him, gave her his fatherly blessing and many godly words of comfort besides. From whom after she was departed, she, not satisfied with the former sight of him, and like one that had forgotten herself, being all ravished with the entire love of her dear father, having respect neither to herself, nor to the press of the people and multitude that were there about him, suddenly turned back again, ran to him as before, took him about the neck, and divers times together most lovingly kissed him ; and at last, with a full heavy heart, was fain to depart from him -- the beholding whereof was to many of them that were present thereat so lamentable that it made them for very sorrow thereof to mourn and weep. ²

Whether deliberately or not, Roper makes Margaret behave to Sir Thomas as Sir Thomas had behaved to Sir John, both in their public marks of reverence, and in the vehement expression of their tender love :

Whensoever he passed through Westminster Hall to his place in the Chancery by the Court of the King's Bench, if his father, one of the judges thereof, had been sat ere he came, he would go into the same Court, and there reverently kneeling down in the sight of them all, duly ask his father's blessing ... And for the better declaration of his natural affection towards his

father, he not only, while he lay on his deathbed according to his duty oftentimes with comfortable words most kindly came to visit him, but also, at his departure out of the world, with tears taking him about the neck, most lovingly kissed and embraced him, commending him into the merciful hands of Almighty God, and so departed from him. (*Roper*, 43/11 to 44/7)

Though the two scenes are fifty pages apart in Roper's memoir, they share not only gestures -- kneeling, blessing, kissing, embracing --, but also some key-words : « depart », « reverently », and whole phrases : « taking about the neck ... most lovingly kissed him. » Sir John had died in 1530, presumably at Chelsea where he resided during sessions of Parliament and King's Bench. Let us return to Roper's narrative of his father-in-law's last week :

So remained Sir Thomas More in the Tower more than a sevennight after his judgment. From whence, the day before he suffered, he sent his shirt of hair (not willing to have it seen) to my wife, his dearly beloved daughter, and a letter written with a coal, contained in the foresaid book of his works, plainly expressing the fervent desire he had to suffer on the morrow, in these words following : « I cumber you, good Margaret, much, but I would be sorry if it should be any longer than tomorrow, for tomorrow is St Thomas Even, and the Utas of St Peter, and therefore tomorrow long I to go to God : it were a day very meet and convenient for me, etc. I never likeD your manner towards me better than when you kissed me last, for I like when daughterly love and dear charity hath no leisure to look to worldly courtesy. » (*Roper*, 99/21 to 100/2)

Roper had already mentioned the « book of his works », namely *The English Works* ; the folio edition may have been just completed when he was writing his memoir (Rastell's dedication is dated 30 April 1557). But this is the only time, I think, that he quotes from it, and he does so with remarkable fidelity, only changing « love » to « like », presumably an oversight,³ which does not alter the message even if it detracts somewhat from the writer's characteristic « vehemence ». More's letter reads :

I never liked your manner toward me better than when you kissed me last : for I love when daughterly love and dear charity hath no leisure to look to worldly courtesy (*EW*, p. 1458A).

This is printed on the very last page of *The English Works*. It may be that Roper copied it from a manuscript, perhaps even from the autograph, which he must have seen in July 1535 ; indeed it was perhaps the printer who changed « like » to « love »⁴. Roper's mention of « the foresaid book » gives the impression that he used it. In her critical edition of *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, E.F. Rogers also repeats « love » twice (p. 564/22). The sentence is a fine nugget which no worthy biographer neglects. Stapleton duly translated it for his Latin public :

Nunquam mihi magis placuisti, quam quum postrema vice osculata me es. Multum enim delector, quum dilectio filialis et pura caritas hujus mundi ceremonias non expectat.⁵

John too had stood waiting to receive his father's blessing, and being the heir, thus rendered a significant homage to the « traitor », who took care to single out the gesture :

I pray you at tyme convenient recommend me to my good son John More. I liked well his natural fashion (*Rogers*, 564/31)

A « natural child », *pious natus*, seeks his father's (and mother's) blessing and kneels for it, even in non-Christian *Utopia*, where children « fall at their parents' feet » to seek pardon⁶. England had retained the patriarchal habit of parental blessing, more than some other countries of Christendom. But Margaret's conduct goes far beyond this « natural fashion ». Stapleton, who knew some of the witnesses, tells us that the other Margaret, née Giggs, John Clement's wife, also went up to the prisoner for a kiss and a squeeze. His narrative of Meg's conduct rather more elaborate than Roper's, derives actually from Reginald Pole's *De Unitate*.

non turbæ tantum se immiscet, patrem visura aut ei valedictura, sed pectore plusquam virili, et acerrimis amoris stimulis incitata, per mediam populi turbam, perque satellitum arma semet iniecit, et ad parentem penetravit. Quum et mulier esset, et natura cumprimis verecunda, tamen et metum et pudorem excusserat vel impotens animi dolor, vel (quod magis credo) immensa dilectionis vis. Accedens enim in carissimi patris collum ruit, et artissimo complexu aliquandiu tenuit, nihil aliud loquuta quam « Ah mi pater ! » ... Cum enim generosissima mulier, dignissima tali patre filia, secum omnes naturæ dotes afferens, omnia pietatis signa, omnia quæ in liberis jucunda esse parentibus solent, eo in loco quo vix ulli viro patere aditus videbatur, prius pæne in sinu patris hæsit quam advenientem pater

vidisset, quales doloris stimuli, quam acres patris animo esse poterant, talis praesertim patris qui, quum omnium suorum natura amantissimus esset, praecipue tamen amore Margaretam dilexerat, ... Quas vero doloris faces ei admovisse par est, quum aliquandiu in ejus complexu nihil effari valens adhaerescebat ? quas, quum inde vix avellebatur ? Quae vero tormenta jam et cruciatus animi, cum semel avulsa iterum eadem pietate percita eodem cum impetu rediit, et vi majore aegre abstrahi potuit ?

Stapleton, following Pole's rhetorical lead, places words of comfort on the father's lips, stressing his self-control and composure :

Haec ille in primo congressu. Nam quum secunda vice, postquam decem aut duodecim passus digressa, revertisset, colloque iterum inhaesisset, nihil quidem dixit, sed tacenti lacrymae erumpebant, vultu tamen a constantia nihil dimoto. (ed. cit., p. 66-67)

From *The Life of Sir Thomas More* by Thomas Stapleton, tr. P.E. Hallett (1928), ed. E.E. Reynolds (London 1966), p. 180-81, we borrow an English rendering of our Latin quotation :

She had mingled with the crowd in order to see her father and bid him farewell ; but now her love gave her more than a man's strength, and she pushed her way through the crowd, breaking through the armed guard that surrounded him until she reached his side. Although she was a lady of great delicacy and reserve, yet on this occasion her shyness and timidity were entirely forgotten in her uncontrollable grief, or, as I prefer to believe, in the immensity of her love. For she fell upon the neck of her beloved father and pressed him to her bosom in a long embrace, unable to utter a word beyond « Oh, my father » ... That a daughter so noble, so worthy of such a father, so richly endowed with all nature's gifts, should lavish every mark of affection which it can delight parents to receive from their children, should force her way to him when scarcely a man could have pressed through the crowd, should no sooner see him than clasp him in a close embrace, cannot have failed to pierce More's heart through and through with grief. Much as he loved all his children, he reserved his most special affection for Margaret. How his sorrow must have been deepened when she clung to his embrace with grief too great for words, when she would not be torn away from him ! At last she was separated from him, but again love surged up impetuously and she rushed back to his embrace, not to be torn away save with far greater difficulty than before.

This was at their first embrace. But when after having gone ten or a dozen paces she returned and a second time clung around his neck, no word was heard, for tears choked his speech. Even so his countenance betrayed no sign of any weakening in his purpose.

Stapleton uses the epithet *filialis*, as Latin could not be more specific. More seems to have coined (and Margaret to have inspired) the adjective « daughterly », which occurs in three other places of his prison letters to her (*Rogers*, 540/2 : « your daughterly loving letters », where it may be adverb, as also at the beginning of letter 211, p. 544 : « Your daughterly loving letter » ; 545, line 40 of the same letter : « your very daughterly dealing »). This last passage deserves quoting in full, because it analyses the triple bond which « binds » More and his « dearly beloved child ». You may reckon on my poor prayers, he writes,

for Christian charity and natural love and your very daughterly dealing *funiculo triplici* (*qui, ut ait scriptura, difficile rumpitur*) both bind me and strain me thereto. And of yours I put as little doubt. ⁷

G.M.

1. See the black-and-white reproduction in J.B. Trapp and H. Schulte Herbrüggen, *The King's Good Servant* (London 1977), p. 131.

2. *Roper's Life of More*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, E.E.T.S. (London 1935), 97/23 to 99/8. Further quotations from *Roper* will refer to this edition (in parenthesis with page and line). We modernize the spelling throughout.

3. Or else he may have dodged the repetition, whereas it would be like More to reiterate the stronger of the two verbs.

4. Writing to the Abbess of Stanbrook on Christmas 1907, Sydney Cockerel says he knows this passage by heart ; he quotes it as : « I never liked you better than when you kissed me last », *In a Great Tradition*, by the Benedictines of Stanbrook (London 1956), p. 221. Sir Sydney adds that he bought his *Roper*, « an old copy (1732) on March 7, 1891 ».

5. Ch. 19 of his *Vita Mori* in *Tres Thomae* (Douai 1588), p. 68 in the Frankfurt edition of 1689 (Minerva Reprint, 1964). The repetition is somewhat preserved in the alliteration on *delector/dilectio*.

6. *Utopia* edd. E.L. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, vol. 4 of *The Complete Works of St Thomas More* (Yale U.P., New Haven 1965), p. 232/20 f.

7. More weaves the Latin version of Ecclesiastes (Qohelet) 4:12 into his sentence, adding a *qui* which is needed by the syntax, duly present in EW 1449E, and wrongly omitted by Rogers.