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Utopian Laughter: Lucian and Thomas More

> To be sure, man's life is a business
> which does not deserve to be taken seriously;
> yet we cannot help being in earnest with it.
> —Plato *Laws* 803b

> La marque profonde d'une nouveauté
> c'est son pouvoir rétroactif.
> —Michel Butor

At a time when More's *Utopia* is attentively studied as a masterpiece while Lucian remains largely an unknown quantity, it is a curious fact that in More's lifetime he was probably more widely read as the translator of Lucian than the author of *Utopia*. By 1535 his translations of Lucian had appeared in fourteen editions compared to only six editions of *Utopia*. Whether More or Erasmus first conceived the idea of publishing a collection of Latin translations of Lucian, the result of their efforts was to help initiate a fascination with his work that made him one of the most widely read Greek authors in sixteenth-century Europe. By 1550 there were about 270 printings of Lucian in circulation, including more than 60 editions of the Greek text.[1] In view of the fact that More's literary reputation in the Tudor period was in part a product of his involvement with Lucian early in his career, it would be surprising to find that Lucian was of only incidental relevance to More's later work. Yet, oddly enough, the recognition of Lucian's special importance for the study of More, and for *Utopia* in particular, has been slow in coming. Lucian is dismissed in a single paragraph in the preface to the Yale *Utopia* as "finding a possible echo only in a touch here or there."[2] In spite of the attempts of some critics to correct this view,[3] a thorough re-evaluation of More's relation to Lucian appeared only with Alistair Fox's brilliant study of More's intellectual development in which he argues that More's "encounter with Lucian was absolutely crucial to the development of his mature vision and its literary and philosophical consequences were long lasting."[4]

One of the virtues of Fox's study is to have demonstrated significant continuities between the structure of irony in *Utopia* and that which distinguishes certain texts of Lucian that More chose to translate. What is apt to be overlooked from this perspective are the different functions that humor and irony typically perform in their works and how thor-

oughly More transforms his Lucianic starting points. I wish to emphasize here the way in which More's own interests shaped his response to Lucian as it is reflected in *Utopia* in his selective adaptation of Lucianic themes and techniques carefully purged of qualities unsuited to his own very different purposes. In this respect the relationship between More and Lucian may serve as an interesting model of the kind of dialectical reversals which Renaissance authors often imposed on the classical material that has traditionally been thought to have "influenced" them.

This may sound as if Lucian is being given an exaggerated importance, but he was taken very seriously, perhaps too seriously, in the sixteenth century: His name quickly became a term of abuse in religious controversies and "Lucianism" became synonymous with a particularly virulent form of disbelief, associated not merely with an absence of faith but with a kind of skepticism informed by ridicule for the credulity of the faithful.[5] It is no wonder that the young More felt moved to write a letter (to Ruthall) explaining the value of Lucian for Christian readers. But the value of reading which Lucian? The witty, versatile sophist of the age of the Antonines bears only modest resemblance to the Reformation's atheist and still less to the allegorized Lucian of the fifteenth century.[6] More was publishing his translations of Lucian and his *Utopia* just as Lucian's mediaeval image was being reformulated in the light of the newly available Greek texts, but before the diabolical Lucian of the controversialists had become fixed in the minds of many readers. The original Lucian is worth recalling here if we are to appreciate the complexity of his appeal for More or what More made of his Lucianic inheritance.

As a professional sophist Lucian was the practitioner of the now forgotten art of oratory as entertainment (λόγος ἐπιδεικτικός), a kind of literary divertissement extremely popular among Greeks in the Empire, which Lucian transformed from a mode of artful ephemera into a means for parodic reflection on the preoccupations of contemporary Hellenic culture. Developing his own peculiar forms for this purpose,[7] he forged a wry, critical response to defining feature of Greek culture in the Roman Empire: its self-conscious classicism. In certain respects Lucian's stance vis-à-vis his own culture is not unlike More's own: a consummate traditionalist who has mastered the idioms of an ancient language, literary Attic then over five hundred years old, and who used his agile command of his culture's most authoritative traditions to mount a playful reappraisal of their contemporary significance. In their own ways both authors are interested in probing the durability

of idealized cultural traditions in which they themselves are steeped, indeed, of which they are products. The crucial difference is that where Lucian habitually weds formal traditionalism to an instinctive skepticism as to the value of the traditional attitudes and ideologies he reproduces, More's traditionalism is much more than a matter of form. Nevertheless, the broad similarities in their cultural contexts and interests must have contributed to Lucian's appeal for More by providing a "classical" precedent for such characteristically humanist predilections as the delight in rhetorical technique for its own sake (cf. More's translation of and reply to Lucian's *Tyrannicida*), the interest in developing a linguistic style based on classical models but not rigidly imitative,[8] and, above all, the use of an acknowledged canon of classical authors as a constant frame of reference (cf. Hythlodaeus' habitual quoting of Plato). Each of these tendencies distinguishes Lucian from authors of the classical and archaic periods (Homer to Aristotle) and made his work more accessible and germane to humanists like More who also worked in the shadow of prestigious cultural traditions.

But of course the primary source of Lucian's appeal for More was his quizzical satiric method, the complex virtues of which are hinted at somewhat confusingly in the letter to Ruthall. Only oversimplified notions of Lucian's method could be used to set up the artificial interpretative dichotomies that would require us, for example, to choose between a Lucianic reading of *Utopia* as a kind of jeu d'esprit and one which views the work as a serious treatment of its themes.[9] For this is to misconstrue, or simply to overlook, the seriocomic character of Lucian's texts and to ignore the explicit reasons More gives for translating him. In the opening sentence of the letter to Ruthall More accurately characterizes Lucian's ambivalent qualities in classical Horatian terms: "Si quisquam fuit unquam vir doctissime, qui Horatianum praeceptum impleverit, voluptatemque cum utilitate coniunxerit, hoc ego certo Lucianum in primis puto praestitisse" (p. 2). Surprisingly, he then proceeds in the body of the letter to foist a one-sidedly didactic emphasis on particular works, even when it entails manifestly misreading them as illustrations of familiar Christian pieties. If modern critics have often missed the seriousness of Lucian's humor, here More errs in the opposite direction. His suggestion of a dryly comic Horatian manner in his opening sentences is contradicted by the reductive, univocally didactic meanings that he attributes to his chosen texts. The letter thus suggests both the seriousness More accorded Lucian and the peculiar difficulties that imitating the sophist would pose for him, given that his

own conception of the proper role of literature was far more unambiguously didactic than any that actually guided Lucian's practice.

If we compare More's characterization of Lucian in the letter with the texts themselves we can observe a clear discrepancy between what he ostensibly thinks Lucian is saying and what Lucian does in fact say or suggest in the relevant works. More clearly wishes to present Lucian as speaking in a voice more consonant with his own. His Lucian is sympathetic to such characteristically Christian values as asceticism, reserving his satiric humor for those who corrupt and confuse traditions (pp. 2/20–4/6). But for Lucian the idealists and dogmatists of Hellenic traditions, whether advocating Cynic asceticism (*Cynicus*), Stoic philosophy (*Hermotimus*), or the aristocratic cult of athletics (*Anacharsis*), are the proper targets for satiric scrutiny: they reflect the tendency toward complacency with whatever is sanctioned by tradition that is the hallmark of a classicizing culture. Thus his *Cynicus*, which More describes in the letter as praising Christian simplicity, temperance, and frugality and denouncing luxury, is actually an ironic presentation of Cynic asceticism through the comic persona of its disreputable advocate: the Cynic street preacher, dressed in rags and eager to harangue unsuspecting passersby.

The work is cast as a dialogue in which an anonymous Cynic takes advantage of a chance encounter to undertake the philosophical instruction of Lykinos, a common authorial persona for Lucian, in the virtues of the rude Cynic way of life and the folly of a world that fails to acknowledge the Cynic's truth. But while the philosopher dominates the dialogue verbally and succeeds in reducing Lykinos to silence before he is through, his attempted apology for Cynicism turns into mischievous self-caricature: it begins with a parodic rendition of Socratic method (1–4) and culminates in an unintentionally ludicrous encomium of the Cynic ethos, full of faulty and nonsensical reasoning (e.g., 11), comically unapt analogies (e.g., 12), and examples that subvert what they are meant to prove (e.g., 16). The comic qualities of the Cynic's performance can perhaps best be seen in his treatment of the heroes, Heracles and Theseus, whom he seems to admire less for the moral qualities traditionally attributed to them than because they look and dress like Cynics — witness the beard and bare feet (13–14). Indeed, the greatness of the heroic age lies not in the heroes' virtuous conduct but in their steadfast refusal to shave: "not a single one of them would sit still for a razor any more than a lion would" (14), he observes with understandable excitement.

The comic tendency to confuse the literal details of physical appearance with the moral qualities they are supposed to signify characterizes the Cynics in Lucian.[10] Hence the topic of dress recurs repeatedly in the course of the philosopher's diatribe, which both begins and ends with ludicrous rationalizations of the familiar Cynic garb: If a lyreplayer or piper or tragic actor is entitled to his own uniform, shouldn't the good man, i.e., the Cynic, also be distinguished by his dress? asks the philosopher rhetorically (16). But the comparison to entertainers conveys more than he intends: the Cynics too are popular performers of a kind who have chosen their eccentric role as much out of enthusiasm for its outlandish style as from philosophical insight. While the Cynic also peppers his harangue with some legitimate points, the humorous effect of his illogicality accumulates until it would be difficult for any reader to take him very seriously. By the time he concludes his peroration by comparing himself to the gods — their statues show them without shirts and shoes — it is clear why Lykinos need make no reply. Nothing is more Lucianic than this ironic use of a confidently didactic voice.

Thus, the satire of the *Cynicus* is not, as More suggests, directed primarily against "enervata . . . luxuria" (p. 4/3), but neither are its sources of humor limited to the wayward reasoning of the philosopher. The humor is primarily a function of the particular type of dialogue developed by Lucian that serves to dramatize the comic inability of either speaker to grasp fully the other's point of view because of their absorption in distinct universes of discourse. The Cynic is so engrossed in the evangelical language of his sect that he seems scarcely aware that in conceding Lykinos' single argument — that it is Cynic self-deprivation that is *contra naturam* — he has abandoned the central premise of his own position (5–6). Unfazed by this possibility, the philosopher rushes on to his next point, while Lykinos listens patiently, scarcely able to get a word in edgewise. This is less the record of an argument than of how an attempted conversion is foiled by an uncooperative interlocutor. Thus the characteristic procedures of Platonic dialogue, the systematic refutations and the search for a philosophical method that will compel agreement, are purposefully eschewed by Lucian. For the focus of Lucianic dialogue is the humor of conceptual incongruity itself, which Platonic techniques seek to dispel by reducing the comic multiplicity of perspectives to the true and the false.

The role of humor in the *Cynicus* is thus representative of a series of dialogues, including the *Anacharsis* and *Hermotimus*, in which an ideal-

izing *alazon* figure, closely identified with some respected cultural tradition, takes it upon himself to enlighten a benighted *eiron* and in the process reveals not only his own confusion but that latent in the tradition he advocates. The purity — or extremity — of the *alazon's* position is used to accentuate the underlying conceptual clash which is the dialogue's *Schwerpunkt*. Thus the Cynic shares with his counterparts in other dialogues a penchant for overgeneralization and oversimplification which fuels his righteous indignation at the world. The point is not that in reducing the complexity of the dialogue to the simple functions of praising virtue and ridiculing vice More interpreted Lucian simplistically, but that this reluctance to acknowledge openly the skeptical assumptions and subversive tendencies so essential to Lucian's humor is symptomatic of More's reception and adaptation of his work.[11]

More translated three other works by Lucian: the *Tyrannicida*, a fictive exercise in forensic oratory, the *Philopseudes*,[12] a collection of magic tales presented as a satire on superstitious philosophers, and the *Menippus*. Of these the *Menippus* bears most directly on *Utopia* both in its use of the idea that life is like a play and in its Menippean inquiry into the best way of life. Once again, More's characterization of the work in his introductory letter as a rebuke to "the jugglery of magicians or the silly fictions of poets or the fruitless contentions of philosophers" (p. 5/9–11) seems oddly circumscribed. In the *Menippus or the Descent into Hades* Lucian dons the mask of another kind of Cynic, the famous Cynic jester Menippus of Gadara (3rd cent. B.C.), and translates the epic journey to Hades, traditionally attributed to Heracles, Odysseus, Orpheus, or Pythagoras, among others, into a parodic quest for philosophical enlightenment. Just as the dialectical humor of the *Cynicus* derives from its juxtaposition of incompatible perspectives on Cynic asceticism, so much of the humor of Menippus' tales (in the *Menippus* and *Icaromenippus*) is created by viewing the familiar world of archaic myth through the alien lens of Cynic discourse. The clash of divergent traditions forms the basis of the comedy as we move precariously among shifting levels of style and seriousness.

Menippus' description of the circumstances that provoked his mi sion to Hades consciously parodies the ideals of the civilization *paideia*:[13] For his very conventional education (*paideia*) yields a co cally deviant product. Like everyone else, Menippus began his trai in letters with a study of the old poets. As a boy, he grew up hearin the deeds of the gods and heroes, their loves and hates, their rapes crimes of violence, the banishing of fathers and the marrying of sis

— and was naturally eager to imitate his betters (3). He was understandably disconcerted to discover as an adult that the law forbade just such conduct. This unexpected contradiction sent him off to the philosophers for clarification, "out of the smoke into the fire" (4). For he soon found that not only did the philosophers disagree on every known question but their practice often contradicted their own doctrines. Menippus' experience of confusion in the face of this bewildering disagreement among traditional authorities playfully recapitulates the quandary of contemporary Pyrrhonean skeptics, who argued that the conflicting variety of plausible theories and respected traditions concerning the most important subjects makes the suspension of judgment (ἐποχή) the only rational response.[14] Instead of suspending judgment, however, Menippus decides to cut the Gordian knot of skepticism by magical means: he entreats a Chaldean sorcerer, Mithrobarzanes, to transport him to Hades to consult Teiresias on the best way of life for man.

If Menippus' journey across the Acherusian plain does not succeed in resolving his epistemic dilemma, at least it prepares him for the Theban's answer. For Menippus discovers that the most significant distinctions between men on earth are inverted or effaced below. The rich, deprived of more, suffer more. The celebrated heroes and heroines of ancient Greece are reduced to indistinguishable skeletons. Wealth, fame, knowledge, and power appear from Hades as illusions of perspective. Hence only the Cynics, Menippus and Diogenes, find reason to laugh at "the incongruous contrast between the eager fret of life and its final nothingness"[15] in the underworld.

Menippus expresses his sense of discovery by developing one of Lucian's favorite conceits,[16] the dramatic simile of life (16). Men, he says, now appeared to him to be players in a pageant directed by Chance (τύχη). Their personal attributes and social roles are distributed at random. But the players mistakenly identify themselves with their roles and hence become indignant when they must exchange parts at the whim of Chance. Nor are they pleased when the pageant ends, and each must doff his costume with his body to be restored to a state of perfect equality with his fellow players. In their oblivion to the conditions of the play, men are like tragic actors who forget that they must play whatever role the script requires and, then, give up their solemn masks and lofty buskins to revert from the mythical stature of an emnon to the anonymity of Satyrus, son of Theogiton. When, his tour of the underworld, Menippus finally meets Teiresias, the

seer's advice is the moral corollary of the dramatic simile. He recommends an ironic stance toward the world, not a suspension of judgment perhaps, but a suspension of seriousness: "Set your mind on the present, laugh at most things and take nothing seriously" (ὅπως τὸ παρὸν εὖ θέμενος παραδράμῃς γελῶν τὰ πολλὰ καὶ περὶ μηδὲν ἐσπουδακώς 21).

Thus the *Menippus* reflects some of the salient qualities of Lucianic seriocomedy: most importantly, the ironic use of comic masks for the purpose of unmasking a world that pretends to know what should be taken seriously. The quality of the humor originates in skepticism and a very Greek recognition of an almost willfully arbitrary force controlling the action (τύχη), which in turn sanctions Cynic irony toward those who persist too single-mindedly in their zealous devotion to an ideal, whether philosophical or traditional. As an antidote to despair in the face of the haphazard nature of the "play," the satirist offers only ironic detachment and Menippean laughter at the gratuitous seriousness of the human players. This stance is expressed even in the mock-serious tone of the narrative, which seems to reflect Teiresias' advice in taking nothing seriously, not even itself: With a wry Cynic grin Menippus, the clownish anti-philosopher, delights to find the "faith" of his sect confirmed by the wisest of the Greeks. For if, as Teiresias says, there is no reason to take anything seriously *sub specie Averni*, then that too does not matter. The best kind of life, therefore, is that least burdened by illusory notions of seriousness, the life, not of heroes and philosophers, but of the ordinary man (ὁ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν ἄριστος βίος 21).

It is hard to imagine an attitude less Menippean than the kind of serious idealism and admantine moral commitment naturally associated with More. As in Nietzsche's fascination with Plato, there is something of the attraction of opposites at work in More's enthusiasm for Lucian. Nevertheless, if we approach *Utopia* through the translations of Lucian, we are immediately struck by their affinity both in style and structure. More has combined the satiric strategies of the *Cynicus* and *Menippus* into a more complex and political form: the tale of an exotic, mythical journey which serves to establish a critical perspective on familiar topics (*Menippus*) is used to make possible the ironic juxtaposition of fragmentary truths in book I (*Cynicus*). The outlandish journey and ironic dialogue are of course characteristically Lucianic devices for establishing satiric perspectives. But no less Lucianic is the peculiar texture of *Utopia*, which continually unsettles the reader's

sense of the emerging significance of the text by weaving unpredictably between highly serious and pointedly ludicrous or ironic material. It serves to provoke the reader into considering how seriously any particular element is, or should be, intended. It thus invites him to enter into the realistic elaboration of the fantasy, as Giles did in creating a Utopian alphabet, thereby acknowledging that he understood both the seriousness and the limits of the game.

However, More does not confine himself to reproducing Lucian's formal structures and tonal incongruities. For the underlying concern of *Utopia* is thoroughly Menippean: it asks in the most general terms what is to be taken seriously by calling into question the moral authority of the traditional sources of political wisdom, the king and his counselors, just as Menippus' inquiry serves to cast doubt, however facetiously, on the intellectual authority of the ancient philosophical schools. For the implication of Hythlodaeus' position in the debate on councilorship in book I is that the grounds simply do not exist for taking seriously the governing authorities of Europe as they now conceive their roles. The paradigmatic society of Utopia in book II serves to make this point of view seem less paradoxical by offering a verisimilar image of authority made legitimate by its grounding in moral traditions pointedly similar to Europe's own. This overriding concern with the sources and validity of authority recalls the motives that send a perplexed Cynic to a deflationary encounter with Teiresias in Hades. Menippus' disillusioning quest for the best way of life for a man has become the idealizing sailor's discovery of the best way of life for men.

If More's relationship to Lucian frequently takes the form of analogies that reveal discrepancies as significant as the resemblances, there is also a diffuse reflection of particular works that had been among those translated by More and Erasmus. This complex evocation of the satirist, extending from the most basic concerns of the work to such idiosyncratic features as the fabrication of comic names in the manner of the *Verae historiae*, resists any simple characterization.[17] But is there a discernible pattern to the Lucianic strains of *Utopia*? If we isolate those features of the work that can arguably be considered Lucianic, either because they perform seriocomic functions or modify identifiably Lucianic procedures, and analyze them in the light of their classical antecedents, certain characteristic emphases do begin to emerge. More's use of comic tales in both books of *Utopia* and of dialogue in book I can serve to indicate the pattern.

Book I: the *festivus dialogus*

The tale of the *festivus dialogus* forms the conclusion of Hythlodaeus' remarkable account of his experiences as Cardinal Morton's guest and is used to support his contention that offering good advice at court is pointless. Hythlodaeus frames the tale in explicitly seriocomic terms, "erant enim ridicula, sed narrabo tamen. nam non erant mala, & aliquid ad hanc rem pertinebant" (p. 80/21–2), which are later echoed by Morus, ". . . ita sunt abs te dicta prudenter simul & lepide omnia" (p. 84/31 ff.). This mingling of serious and comic qualities recurs in the characterization of the central figure of the tale, Cardinal Morton, who combines good judgment with a shrewd sense of humor ("subrisit Cardinalis & approbat ioco," p. 82/13) and his self-appointed jester, the parasitic joker whose words are not merely ridiculous ("non absurda," p. 80/27), but rather earnest jests ("iam scurra serio scurarri coepit," p. 82/28). Clearly More makes such overt use of these seriocomic formulae to alert his humanist readers to the purposeful role of humor in the rhetorical strategy of book I.

The tale itself begins with one of the guests challenging the table to devise a solution for the problem of beggars comparable to those just proposed for thieves and vagrants (p. 80/22 ff.). The parasite takes up the challenge and offers his solution in the form of a joke: turn the beggars into monks and nuns. The Cardinal, whose exemplary qualities have already been lavishly praised by Hythlodaeus (p. 58/18 ff.), serves as a normative audience: he approves of the jest as such ("approbat ioco"), but the rest of the party mistakes it for a serious proposal ("caeteri etiam serio," p. 82/13). The dullness of the courtly audience, this inability to construe a jest, to respond appropriately to the parasite's ironic proposal, results almost immediately in a buffoonish quarrel. For the theologian is so delighted at the tendency of the witticism directed against monks that he decides to try his own hand at humor. But the more agile parasite quickly turns his quip against him with a play on words, and the courtly audience, mistaking the Cardinal's reticence ("eum viderent non abnuere," p. 82/21) for approval, eagerly joins in the ridicule until the friar explodes with theologically justified anger: "Nam is (neque equidem miror) tali perfusus aceto, sic indignatus est . . . minas interim terribiles citans e scriptura sacra."

The resulting exchange of abuse is distinctly Lucianic: a familiar and accepted rhetorical mode is caricatured in a series of parodic quotations from scripture to produce the comic degradation of an acknowledged voice of authority with its habit of sanctioning whatever it says by appeal to holy writ. The theologian is not merely silly, he is as learnedly silly as he is righteously indignant. The misuse of learning is central to the caricature.[18] Similarly, he is perfectly capable of enjoying a joke at the expense of his rivals, the monks, but cannot abide one which involves his kind in incongruity by collapsing so important a distinction as that between a mendicant (*mendicus*), which he admits to being, and a tramp (*erro*), which he clearly thinks beneath his dignity (p. 82/16 ff.).

In all this a reader of Lucian will be put in mind of the comic depiction of intemperate philosophers in the *Symposium or the Lapiths* in which the learned guests begin their exchange with philosophical posturing and mutual parody of rival doctrines only to conclude it by coming to blows over a piece of roasted fowl. For insofar as Hythlodaeus' tale is meant to illustrate the obstacles to serious discourse in the social milieu of the court, which is of course how he interprets it (p. 84/20 ff.), it recalls Lucian's parodic subversion of the ideal of philosophical discussion created by Plato in his *Symposium*: Lucian's contemporary philosophers are as incapable of engaging in the give and take of serious dialogue as imagined by Plato as are More's courtiers. But Hythlodaeus' tale of the disputatious friar and thick-witted companions of the Cardinal transcends this Lucianic function of satirizing the possibility for serious conversation with contemporary interlocutors. For the Cardinal's own more adept responses serve implicitly as a model of the very interpretative skills *Utopia* requires of its readers: to construe an elaborate jest, to distinguish the novel but serious elements from the facetious twists in Hythlodaeus' fantastic story.[19]

Thus there are two sources of humor in the anecdote both crucial to its rhetorical function. The first and most obvious is the tendentious caricature of court society through its intellectual representative, the theologian, who serves the cause of incongruity by violating his official role in losing his temper, quoting scripture inanely, and committing elementary grammatical errors. It is his success in provoking the theologian to betray the decorum of his office, reflected in his habitual gravity ("homo alioqui prope ad torvitatem gravis," p. 92/15–16), that qualifies the parasite as a serious jester, a court satirist. But more significant than the ridiculous theologian are the comic interpretative failings of the courtly audience: their inability to see any value in Hythlodaeus' own novel proposals in the discussion immediately preceding the *festivus dialogus* is echoed in their obtuse reception of the parasite's joke as on a par with Hythlodaeus' thinking ("caeteri etiam

serio," p. 84/13). Thus, not only does the parasite's first jest fall flat, with only the Cardinal responding appropriately, but the second (p. 84/17–20), directed at the friar, serves to incite a contest in abuse. This is an audience on whom humor is wasted: It either misses the point of a joke altogether, as in the first case, or forgets that it is a joke, as in the second. Clearly, More is warning his readers against just such dullness to the calculated ambivalence of tone that his own work notoriously achieves — perhaps in anticipation of the confused reception that would greet book II. The more explicit admonition to heed the significance of such devices as the comic names strewn throughout the work, which More felt obliged to insert, albeit in an ironic manner, in the letter to Giles appended to the Paris edition (1517),[20] confirms the seriousness of Hythlodaeus' comic digression.

Book II: the *fabula elegantissima*

Utilitarianism is often carried to comic extremes in Utopia: the use of gold for chamber pots, the premarital inspection of spouses, and the abolition of clever lawyers are comic paradoxes generated by the sheer consistency of the Utopians' utilitarian logic. To be thoroughly sensible can have unexpected advantages and anomalous side effects. More relishes the apparently peculiar features of his society precisely because they illustrate the distinctively Utopian sense of the congruous and incongruous: the predictable laughter of the European audience is a measure of their own un-Utopian rationality — and the cultural gap that separates More's fictional society from his intended audience. The vehicle for mediating between the two rhetorically is the *elegantissima fabula* of the Anemolian ambassadors.

The method of the tale is to invert the prevailing perspective of the audience in book II by which it views the utility of its own moral precepts pragmatically disposed in the rational activities of the Utopians. This is the idealizing perspective of the text by which Utopia is presented as a model. The satiric perspective, employed more frequently in book I, reverses this procedure by viewing European practice in the light of Utopian rationality. Utopia serves the purposes of the satirist or the idealist depending on which way Hythlodaeus directs our gaze. If the Utopians or their advocate look back at the doings of their European audience, the incongruous effect is invariably satiric.

The ambassadors of the Anemolians ("idle talkers")[21] are surrogate Europeans, not only in their physical isolation from Utopia (p. 154/3–4) but also in their working assumptions: If the Utopians do not wear

(*utebantur*) finery it can only be because they possess none. Anemolian notions of proper use are assumed to be universally applicable. In them *superbia*, the prerogative of power and the source of greed (p. 138/4–9), appears as a product of provincial thinking ("superbi magis quam sapientes," p. 154/6). Accordingly, they decide to dazzle the eyes of the "impoverished" Utopians by displaying in abundance precisely what their hosts are thought to lack ("miserorum oculos Utopiensium ornatus sui splendore praestringere," p. 154/7–8). They will be as gods among mortals: "apparatus elegantia deos quosdam representare" (p. 154/7).

When the Anemolians arrive in Amaurotum preening themselves on their gold and jewelry, "articles which in Utopia are used to punish slaves, to stimatize blackguards and to amuse children" (p. 155/16–17), the comic impression they make is wryly appropriate: Misinterpreting the trappings of the office, the Utopians mistake the ambassadors for fools and slaves and greet their modestly attired servants as the men in authority. The Utopian reception of the Anemolians serves as a premeditated affront to that love of magnificence ("superflua rerum ostentatione," p. 138/6) which, as an acting ambassador, More himself would have been expected to demonstrate.[22] But, like the courtiers of Cardinal Morton, who cannot tell when to take Hythlodaeus seriously, the Utopians cannot but misconstrue the "idle" intentions of their guests to make an impressive entrance — and in so doing unwittingly upstage their performance.[23] For the meaning each party sees in the Anemolians' gaudy apparel is the mirror image of the other: "Utopiensium oculis omnium . . . totus ille splendor apparatus pudendus videbatur . . ." (p. 154, 21–3).

Just as in the comic tale of book I More develops a characteristically Lucianic jest, the broad parody of a contemporary intellectual type, into an admonitory parable on the reception of his text, so the *elegantissima fabula* of book II reflects the argumentative concerns of its context on more than one level. The tale concludes the account of Utopian attitudes toward gold and silver and is obviously used to reinforce the rationale of this essential Utopian principle. Indeed, Budé argues in his letter to Thomas Lupset that the contempt for gold and silver is, along with the commuity of goods and the love of tranquility, the secret of Utopian success (p. 10/1–11). But the satiric anecdote also serves to articulate a point of much more fundamental importance to More's argument, to which the satiric affront to magnificence is almost incidental.

The humor of the *fabula* depends on juxtaposing in a single context two divergent cultural perspectives, a form of humor assiduously cultivated by Lucian, exposed as he was to the motley cultural mélange of the Roman Empire.[24] The world of the audience is thus seen from the unfamiliar point of view of an alien culture with its own peculiar set of assumptions: the audience's norm becomes through the fictive encounter the object of laughter. This perception of incongruity is a function of the very premise of More's argument in *Utopia*, which Hythlodaeus enunciates in introducing the *fabula*: Different institutions engender correspondingly different passions in the soul ("itaque haec tam diversa ab reliquis gentibus instituta, quam diversas itidem animorum affectiones pariant . . . ," p. 152/25 ff.). Thus even the imaginary existence of a Utopian perspective, at once a systematic reflection of and reproach to European norms,[25] calls into question the authority of prevailing orthodoxies, that naive Anemolian sense that any one way of seeing things could somehow be merely natural. The attribution of value, even the seemingly objective value of gold, is seen as a cultural construct, not a product of nature. This distinction is essential to the discussion of Utopian pleasures that follows and forms the basis of Utopian ethics.

Thus More has carefully fashioned his jokes not just to satirize inflated social types and official social codes or to vary the tone of his narrative, but as a means of conveying some of his most potentially disturbing ideas. In so doing he reflects the truth of Cicero's observation on the rhetorical resources of humor in the *De oratore*: "nullum genus est ioci, quo non ex eodem severa et gravia sumantur" (2.250). Even laughter has its utility in Utopia. But precisely because Utopia is offered as a persuasive definition of moral and social norms, divergence from which is severely punished,[26] there would be precious little cause for laughter on the island. What laughter there is, is of necessity directed at outsiders or professional jesters. So consistently "normal" and thoroughly integrated a society would have little latitude for humor, which depends on social heterogeneity and its consequence, incongruity. As Mary Douglas argues, "if there is no joke in the social structure, no other joking can appear."[27]

The Dialectical Movement of Book I

If More seems genuinely Lucianic in his deft and pointed use of humor in the two comic digressions, his adaptation of Lucianic dialogue in book I reminds us of deeper differences between the two. It is difficult,

perhaps impossible, to understand the significance of the particular form of dialectic we meet in book I without defining more precisely its relationship to the principal modes of dialogue developed in antiquity. While Plato and Cicero are often mentioned in this context,[28] on closer scrutiny their formal relevance dwindles. For in spite of Plato's considerable importance for the content of book II, the characteristic procedures of Platonic dialogue bear little resemblance to the form of book I of *Utopia*. The defining philosophical and literary feature of Platonic dialectic, the systematic process of refutation (ἔλεγχος) conducted by Socrates, is conspicuously absent. This is also true of Ciceronian dialogue, but that does not make Cicero any more relevant than Plato in this respect. For Cicero's philosophical dialogues actually make little use of the dialogue form per se. If Cicero had summarized and contrasted the views of the prevailing philosophical schools in his own voice, little that is essential would be lost. Cicero used the dialogue form skillfully but externally as a way of introducing variety and personality into his work, not because it is intrinsic to his meaning.

The structural parallels between book I of *Utopia* and Lucianic dialogue, however, are significant. Instead of Socratic interrogation we have a conversation, an exchange of views, that is not used to familiarize us with a body of doctrine, as in Cicero, but to typify the divergence of two familiar but incompatible perspectives. Like Lucian, More projects himself into the conversation as a character whose primary function is less to refute or reform than to provide a commonsensical and pragmatic counterpoint to the views of the idealist, who overtly dominates the conversation both thetorically and intellectually. More thus recreates the characteristic procedure of Lucianic dialogue in a carefully contrived contrast between two exemplary types: the more reticent, worldly, authorial persona (*eiron*) and his voluble self-appointed mentor (*alazon*).

The point of real interest, however, is what More does with his interlocutors after establishing this familiar Lucianic tension. His purpose becomes clear at the emotional climax of the argument in book I when Morus makes his only extended speech. Hythlodaeus has just concluded his argument against the efficacy of counseling kings by citing the *mira lex Macarensium*, which sets permanent limits on the Macarian king's wealth, as an example of the kind of thinking that would be unacceptable at European courts. Morus concedes that it would indeed be rejected, but argues that it is simply naive of Hythlodaeus to expect such novel ideas to find a receptive audience in the

councils of kings. He develops his own position in contrast to what he calls Hythlodaeus' *philosophia scholastica* by elaborating a conceit we have already met in Lucian, that of the world as a stage. Although Morus' stance in this passage has been described as a "Menippean pose" because of his use of the stage simile central to the *Menippus* and *Icaromenippus*,[29] note how completely More has transformed the sense of Menippus' trope: far from expressing the arbitrary nature of experience and counseling Cynic detachment from the roles foisted on us by the perverse force of contingency (τύχη), Morus exploits the idea of a play to advocate the practical value of role playing. Rather than reconciling ourselves to roles not of our own making, we are advised to adapt our self-presentation to "the play at hand" ("quaecunque fabula in manu est," p. 98/23) lest we contaminate the Plautine farce of a court with Senecan *gravitas*. The vehicle for representing Cynic alienation from the world has been adapted to a cheerfully pragmatic philosophy of action.[30]

At this point in a Lucianic dialogue we would expect the perspective articulated by the worldly *eiron* to succeed in exposing the blind spots in his interlocutor's idealism. And on a first reading of *Utopia* we might well feel that Morus' realism will act to counter the high-minded but absurdly impractical disdain of Hythlodaeus for the distasteful task of counseling kings. But this is where More surprises a reader of Lucian. For he has carefully identified Morus, the *eiron*, with a position that is indefensible given the prevalent ideology of the audience. By making Morus an advocate of *dissimulatio*, More makes possible the ensuing rhetorical peripeteia in which Raphael indignantly repundiates the ambassador's "philosophy" as a grotesque caricature of Christian teaching, which unlike his *philosophia ciuilior* makes a virtue of truth and consistency, not of adaptability: ". . . ac dissimulari usqueadeo vetuit {Christus}. ut ea quoque quae ipse in aures insusurraset suis, palam in tectis iusserit praedicari" (p. 100/20–22).[31] Of all the stands taken by Raphael, his denunciation of Morus' relativism is the most forcefully presented. In allowing the idealist to turn the tables on the proponent of moral compromise and consequentialist ethics, expressed in terms deceptively reminiscent of Menippus, More neatly reverses the characteristic movement of Lucianic dialogue. Whereas in Lucian's *Cynicus*, for example, the spokesman for common sense and moral skepticism, associated by name with the author, is used to highlight the comic inadequacies of the idealist's stance, in More it is the advocate of the world's point of view whose moral flexibility is made to appear

inadequate and the idealist who is clearly given the upper hand rhetorically. In the rest of book I, Morus listens and asks questions but is otherwise silent except for his brief objections to communism, again on practical grounds, which in turn will serve as rhetorical foil to the evident success of communism in Utopia.

This passage is an excellent example of the complexity of More's relationship to Lucian. For it involves the adaptation both of particular elements and of formal procedures to express a crucial difference between them. A specific figure, the stage simile, is appropriated in the process of adapting a more fundamental and significant structure, the dialogue form itself. Moreover, the altered sense of the figure is instrumental to the adaptation. For it enables the decisive shift in rhetorical emphasis by which More succeeds in inverting Lucian's dialectical procedure to forge a persuasive counterexample to the persistently anti-idealist tendency of Lucianic dialogue. Hence, the idealizing Raphael ultimately triumphs, however we may wish to qualify our response to him as Hythlodaeus ("learned in nonsense") and this is profoundly un-Lucianic.[32]

Thus the comic tales in both books and the dialectical structure of book I can be seen as contrasting examples of More's revival of the seriocomic tradition. In the former More makes complex use of tendency wit without reflecting directly on specific models. The latter, however, offers an implicit response to methods and conclusions characteristic of Lucian's satiric dialogues. In both cases we see More's emphasis on the utilitarian end of the seriocomic equation, on humor as a didactic and rhetorical instrument, an emphasis which recalls the characterization of Lucian in the letter to Ruthall as much as it does Lucian himself. Yet More has clearly discarded the narrowly didactic notions of literary value he felt obliged to ascribe to Lucian ten years earlier in his introductory letter. Accordingly, Lucian is identified in *Utopia* not with the improving *utile* of Christian teachings, but with wit and elegance: "Luciani quoque facetis ac lepore capiuntur" (p. 162/2–3).

In what sense then can *Utopia* be said to represent a continuation or revival of the Lucianic tradition? Obviously the bulk of its political concerns are unrelated to anything in Lucian.[33] This in itself might seem to make the question irrelevant, but it also suggests why the nature of their relationship has proven so difficult to characterize. The techniques of humor and irony that Lucian developed in the parodic

scrutiny of the cultural ideas of ancient society are adapted by More to the service of highly specific social satire and political argument, activties which were literally utopian under the Empire. The humor is accordingly more sharply focused and unequivocal, less concerned with cultural styles than with public morals, with observing the incongruities of received ideas than in purging them in contradictions: amused skepticism gives way to advocacy of the ideal. A rebirth of the zanier, more anarchic tendencies in Lucian's humor, the comic subversion of official culture, the irreverent skepticism for the most ancient and venerated traditions, would not appear in its authentic sixteenth-century mode until the emergence of Gargantua from his mother's ear.[34]

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Notes

1. For the data on the availability of texts, see C. R. Thompson, *The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St. Thomas More* (Ithaca 1940), 203. The *editio princeps* of the complete Lucian was in 1496. For Lucian's image, see C. Robinson, "The Reputation of Lucian in Sixteenth-Century France," *French Studies* 29 (1975) 385–397.

2. p. clxii. References to the letter to Ruthall and *Utopia* are to vols. 3.1 and 4 of the Yale editions, respectively. References to Lucian are to M. D. Macleod's *OCT* editions of *Libelli* 1–68. My discussion assumes a general familiarity with Freud's analysis of tendentious wit in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* and Bergson's essay on the comic, "Laughter."

3. Cf. T. S. Dorsch, "Sir Thomas More and Lucian: An Interpretation of Utopia," *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen u. Literaturen* 203 (1966–67) 345–363; W. W. Wooden, "Thomas More and Lucian: A Study in Satiric Influence and Technique," *University of Mississippi Studies in English* 13 (1972) 43–57; D. Duncan, *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* (Cambridge 1979) chaps. 1–3; G. M. Logan's recent study, *The Meaning of More's 'Utopia'* (Princeton 1983), makes only passing reference to Lucian.

4. A. Fox, *Thomas More: History and Providence* (Oxford 1982) 35.

5. Cf. L. Lefebvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. B. Gottlieb (Cambridge 1982) 75, 91–92, 136; cf. also Robinson (above, n. 1).

6. Cf. C. Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (Chapel Hill 1979) 95 ff.

7. Including satiric biographies, mythological and "Platonic" dialogues, epistles, lectures, and novellae collections. The basic work on the literature of

this period is B. P. Reardon's *Courants littéraires grecs des II et III siècles après J–C* (Paris 1971). For the sophistic movement, see 99–154. Also of fundamental importance is E. L. Bowie's "The Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic," *Past and Present* 46 (1970) 1–41.

8. Cf. the observations of M. Delcourt quoted by R. Monsuez in "Le Latin de Thomas More dans 'Utopia'," *Caliban* 3 (1966) 35: "C'est dans le choix des mots que sa coquettrie se donne carrière. Il va chercher chez Plaute ou chez Ennius une expression archaique, chez Pline un terme technique, dans la langue chrétienne une façon de dire détournée de son sens ancien. Le mot le plus rare est toujours celui qu'il préfère." The clever use of archaic words and constructions was highly regarded by Lucian and his contemporaries. Lucian satirizes inept imitators of the fashion in his *Lexiphanes*.

9. Cf. Robinson (above, n. 6) 130–131: "In the case of *Utopia*, the issue at stake in asking the question 'Is it Lucianic, and if so in what sense?' is the basic one of whether to read the work in a serious sense or not." Cf. also Dorsch (above, n. 3).

10. Cf. Bergson's "general law": "Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned" ("Laughter," p. 93, in *Comedy*, ed. W. Sypher [Baltimore 1980]).

11. Fox's more serious reading of the *Cynicus* and *Menippus* (above, n. 4: 35–44) may accurately describe what they meant to More, but at the expense of ignoring their essentially comic focus. Asceticism is not treated as a serious philosophical option by Lucian as it clearly was for More. Rather it was a cultural style ripe for satiric caricature.

12. Structurally the *Philopseudeis* ("Those fond of lies") may be significant for *Utopia*, however, because it used a frame to distance the authorial persona from the body of the work, a series of fantastic tales told in the first person by contemporary philosophers. After listening to the philosophers ("fond of wisdom") detail their supernatural experiences, even Lykinos seems to be wavering in his skepticism, or at least ready to concede a covert enjoyment of their "lies." Among the tales recounted here is the first extant version of "the sorcerer's apprentice."

13. For this concept, see Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 1.2 (1983) 1–12.

14. Cf. Sextus Empiricus' survey of the conflicting traditions concerning the existence of gods: *Adv. Phys.* 1.49–1.94. For an outline of Pyrrhonism, see S.E., p. 1.

15. S. Leacock, *Humor and Humanity* (N.Y. 1938) 219–220.

16. Cf. *Icaromenippus* 17.

17. The editors of the Yale edition cite the *Menippus, Icaromenippus, Verae Historiae, Cynicus, Alexander, Nigrinus*, and *Saturnalia* as relevant to particular passages (see the index s.v. Lucian) and the list could be extended (see pp. 16 ff. and n. 23 inf.). But the most important parallels involve the adaptation of procedures rather than allusions, sometimes faint or incidental, to particular works.

18. Cf. Bergson: "For exaggeration [in caricature] to be comic, it must not appear as an aim, but rather as a means that the artist is using in order to make manifest to our eyes the distortions which he sees in embryo. It is this process of distortion that is of moment and interest" (p. 78).

19. That Cardinal Morton is the perfect interlocutor for Hythlodaeus does not contradict the intended sense of Hythlodaeus' example (*pace* Fox, above n. 4, pp. 62 ff.), as is sometimes argued, but confirms it: the Cardinal is obviously not meant to represent a typical courtier but the exception that proves the rule. The comic butts of the tale, on the hand, are used to demonstrate the petty one-upmanship and failure of judgment typical of court life in Hythlodaeus' view. Hence, his harsh judgment (284/29–30) is in fact consistent with his example.

20. p. 250/11 ff. Cf. 44/4–8; cf. also E. Surtz, "More's 'Apologia pro Utopia sua'," *Modern Language Quarterly* 19 (1958) 319–324. More had to defend his use of humor against misinterpretation throughout his life: *The Apologye*, ed. A. I. Taft (London 1930) 194, cited by Surtz, cxlix.

21. ἀνεμώλιος ("windy, empty, idle, vain") is a Homeric adjective from ἄνεμος ("wind"), which is used primarily of words, but also of men and weapons. Odysseus dismisses Agamemnon's charge that he prefers feasting to fighting as "ταῦτ' ἀνεμώλια" ("idle words"): *Il.* 4.355. Cf. Lucian, *De Astrologia* 2.

22. Erasmus (or Giles) acknowledges More's self-satire in this passage: In his marginal note, which is the only one in Greek other than that referring to the dramatic simile in book I (p. 98), he uses an accusative of exclamation (borrowed from Latin) to address, not the reader as in most notes, but More himself: ὦ τεχνίτην. The epithet connotes not merely craftsmanship but sly cunning (cf. Lucian, *D. Mort.* 13.5). Cf. More's dream in which he is a Utopian prince receiving the meretriciously attired ambassadors from other nations: note to 154/8 (p. 430).

23. Cf. S. J. Greenblatt's analysis of the anamorphic techniques in *Utopia* and Holbein's "The Ambassadors," *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago 1980) chap. 1. It is precisely in this manipulation of perspectives for the sake of incongruity that More's humor reminds one most of Lucian.

24. The use of divergent cultural perspectives takes many forms in his work. The *Nigrinus* is mentioned in the note to 152/28 (p. 430) as the possible "original" for the *fabula* with its contrast between philosophical Athens and decadent Rome. But the contrast of two cities in the *Nigrinus* lacks the sense of incongruity that characterizes the juxtaposition of Athenian and Scythian perspectives in the *Anacharsis* and is the source of the humor in the *fabula*.

M. M. Bakhtin suggests quite plausibly that Lucian's unprecedented sense of cultural peculiarities, his un-Greek sense of the oddity of Greek traditions, stems from his polylingual background in Samosata, Syria, on the edge of the Empire, where the native language was Aramaic, the official language Latin, and the language of culture Greek: *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin 1981) 84.

25. Insofar as Utopia is a reflection of European society meant to highlight

the distortions of its model, it is a caricature in Bergson's sense (above, n. 18), but one in which exaggeration achieves its end as much by contrast as by imitation.

26. The punishments for adultery, for example, include slavery and death: 190/7–20.

27. "The social control of cognition: some factors in joke perception," *Man* n.s. 3.3 (1968) 366. Cf. Surtz: "The whole atmosphere, if taken seriously, is stifling in its respectability. The human nature of even a saint would revolt against its priggish conventions. Utopian behavior is here contrary to all human experience" (cliii).

28. E.g., Surtz: "The dialogue form of Book I is an obvious Platonic contribution to the *Utopia*" (clvii).

29. Cf. Fox, 44, 64; cf. also note to p. 98/12 (p. 372).

30. This is all the more striking in view of the fact that elsewhere More used the dramatic simile in much the same sense as Lucian: see Greenblatt (above, n. 23) 26–27.

31. One of the meanings of *dissimulatio*, a cognate of *dissimulo*, is of course "irony." It is fitting that More has the *eiron* mount an explicit argument in support of his own rhetorical mode as the most advantageous *modus operandi* only to have it rejected as un-Christian. Cf. *OLD*, x.v. dissimulatio 2: "ea dissimulatione quam Graeci *eironeian* vocant," Luc. 15.

32. Cf. Fox, pp. 64–65: "The most perturbing irony in book I is that however wrong Hythlodaeus is in some respects, he is nonetheless ultimately right. . . . Since More chose to act according to [Morus'] pragmatic philosophy for the next 16 years, it comes as a shock to find that Hythlodaeus' repudiation of it is not refuted."

33. Cf., however, B. Baldwin, "Lucian as Social Satirist," *CQ* 11 (1961) 199–208.

34. Cf. Scaevola de Sainte Marthe, *Scaevolae Sammartharum Gallorum doctrine illustrium . . . elogia* (1598), cited by Robinson (above, n. 1) 393: "[Rabelais] preferred to emulate Lucian, following whose example he created in his native tongue things which are entirely trivial but such as to captivate a reader, however erudite he may be, and to submerge him in unbelievable pleasure." By confusing the comic with the trivial Scaevola comes up with the paradox of engrossing triviality.