

DOGMA AND THE LIMITS OF HETEROGLOSSIA  
IN SIR THOMAS MORE'S  
*DIALOGUE CONCERNING HERESIES* (1528)

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While the very genre of Humanistic Colloquium is supposed to give voice to antagonistic perspectives, its situation as a genre placed in the interstices between fiction and reality brings strong pressure to the articulation of the speakers' interaction. In the case of Sir Thomas More's *Dialogue upon Heresies*, commissioned by Cuthbert Tunstall as a polemical response to the growth of Lutheranism in Britain (and published in 1529, the same year in which More rose to the position of Lord Chancellor) the opposition that is drawn between the theology of the Reformation and the Erasmian notion of *Milia Christi* is particularly representative of this problem. The text is built upon a strong monological framework (the Catholic Church); the dialogue acknowledges the existence of other voices in the contemporary theological debate (the voices of Luther and his followers) but it carefully demarcates the plurality of the debate so as to prevent their direct participation in it. The concerns and doubts of the honest Christian are expressed by the character of the Messenger in More's dialogue, but only so far as they border the limits of Catholic doctrine, and in order to be dismantled by a combination of socratic and scholastic rhetoric and a vigorous use of exempla. This does not imply that the dialogue operates monologically. On the contrary, I would suggest that it operates precisely in order to prevent a true plurality of perspectives. More's text goes beyond this simple dialectical frame and seems to reach a meta-dialogic level by having some of his exempla told in the form of dialogues. Such a multi-layered exchange of voices is required in order to explore the most difficult theological aspects of "heresy" while preserving a sense of distance, but it is especially necessary in order to legitimise the notion of consensus in the interpretive tradition of Church, and in its approach to the Vulgate: no individual can have a direct, individual understanding of scripture without basing him/herself on the communal, authorised interpretation of the sacred text. What the dialogue excludes is, for More, just as important as what it silences. For it is on the basis of these exclusions and silences that the controlled heteroglossia of the humanistic debate can be allowed to develop in the context of the spread of Lutheranism in Britain.

The very title of Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* must have called attention in the moment of its first edition, in 1528: while the very concept of "Dialogue", if understood in the Erasmian sense, seemed to promise a relaxed and tolerant exchange in the *sermo humilis*, the subject concerned was perhaps the

most controversial, and even dangerous, that could be treated in the England of the late 1520s. There had already been a solemn burning of heretic (Lutheran) books in Oxford, at the start of the year, following the same pattern of the 1526 burnings; and the official campaign against anti-Catholic publications had increased systematically since the start of the decade. To what extent could the very genre of the *Dialogue* open itself at this point, or allow within its fabric, the viewpoints or perspectives of the Lutherans? It is precisely in the answer to this question that the interest of the *Dialogue* as a piece of rhetoric rests, even for early twenty-first century specialists: for it is the very dialectical structure of the Erasmian *Colloquium*, and its capacity for giving voice to contrasting viewpoints (in Bakhtinian terms: its heteroglossia), that is at stake here.

This essay will be centered on a specific moment in the development of English and European humanism; a moment when the flexibility and capacity for integration of the humanist *ethos* is questioned by the growing awareness of a major crisis inside of Christianity itself. My intention here is to consider Thomas More's *A Dialogue Upon Heresies* not only as showcasing the last phase of Henrician anti-Lutheranism, but as the main textual exponent of the growing tension between European Humanism and the Reformation at the end of the 1520s, and as a text that effectively signals the end of the Erasmian dream of eccumenical reconciliation between the different Christian factions, both in the English context and in European culture. The interest of this relatively obscure piece of More's canon lies not only in its value as a historical document, but mostly in the fact that it exemplifies the effective exclusion of the new theological voices from the project of the *Militia Christi*, the limitation of its heteroglossia and the strengthening of the notion of Catholic dogma as a precondition for the very existence of dialogue.

Let us consider, in the first place, the way in which European humanism had tried to assimilate the onset of the Reformation before More, and, specifically, the role that the genre of the *Colloquium* had had in that process: it is necessary to see the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* as the final link in a chain of humanistic dialogues that had tried, since 1524, to come to terms with the new theological voices. The first text that must be considered in this tradition is Erasmus's *Inquisition into Faith*, published four years before More's *Dialogue*, in the second edition of the *Colloquia* (1524). Erasmus had only been able to write it from his voluntary retreat in Basilea, where he had fled in 1523 to escape the pressures put on him by the Catholic hierarchy and by the emperor Charles V, who sought to enlist him in their open campaign against the Reformation. The *Inquisition*, being the only piece in the collection that was centered on the subject of religious anathema, presents a conversation between Aulus, an orthodox Christian, and Barbatius, upon whom excommunication has fallen. Aulus questions Barbatius on his beliefs, and, to his surprise, notices his absolute agreement with all of them:

- AUL.: Do you believe in Almighty God, who created heaven and earth?  
 BAR.: And whatever is contained in heaven and earth, including the angelic minds.  
 AUL.: When you say "God," what do you mean?

- BAR.: I mean a mind existing in eternity, having neither beginning nor end, than which nothing can be greater, wiser, or better.
- AUL.: Most reverently expressed.
- AUL.: You seek nothing, then, fear nothing, and love nothing save God alone?
- BAR.: If I revere, love, or fear anything save him, I revere, love, and fear it for his sake, referring all to his glory, always giving thanks to him, whether good or evil befalls me, whether life or death be decreed for me.
- AUL.: Certainly your answers are admirable. (Erasmus 1989: 212-222)

This representation of a common understanding of the Gospels between Catholic and Lutheran Christians is at the origin of the historical process that it will be part of my intention to investigate here. Barbatius's answers are "admirable indeed" and, we could add, remarkably orthodox, coming from someone who has been identified as a heretic by the authorities of the Church. As always in Erasmus, theological speculation is discarded in favour of sincere devotion; the key factor that unifies the positions of both believers is not allegiance to obscure matters of dogma, but rather the belief in the essential importance of the existence of God, the sacrifice of Christ and in the belief in the resurrection of the flesh. The brief dialogue concludes, as might have been expected, with a feast; a lunch between Christians that culminates a relaxed exchange. The dialogue has not confronted different voices, but has rather based all its effect in the recognition of an essential homogeneity underlying any honest approach to Christian doctrine. There is a conspicuous absence of debate among the speakers, as Aulus keeps jumping from one question towards the other ("What do you think of the communion of the saints?", "Do you believe in the resurrection of the flesh?"), each of which is answered by Autarchus in a brief speech, in which the essential, traditional contents of Christian doctrine is exposed. The ironic intention of this structure (in its regular pattern of *questiones* followed by rigorous, satisfactory definitions) must have been immediately apparent to the reader back then in a way that is lost on most twentieth-century readers; the expected confrontation between Catholic and Lutheran has adopted, in fact, the form of the most rigorous and orthodox method of indoctrination: the Catechism. And the Catechistic tone employed throughout appears to be most bitterly ironic when the reader considers that the truth of Christianity comes here from the mouth of one who has been termed "heretic" by the official church. But if Erasmus's text is serenely optimistic in its hopes for a common understanding between Christians, it is visibly written in the context of an institutional campaign against Protestants such as Barbatius; a conflict that was already making impossible the very notion of Christian unity that had been imagined in the *Inquisition into Faith*.

At this point, Luther had already developed his own theological system, and he would prove the following year, through the failure of the exchange between himself and Erasmus, that the difference in religious languages was not only an artificial political problem but a theological reality. In 1525, Erasmus finally sought to mediate actively in the conflict between the various Christian factions, but Luther's exhaustive, aggressive response to his treatise *De Libero Arbitrio* brought about the end of his hopes for a reconciliation: it was now clear that the

complexity of Lutheran theology (his negation of the traditional concept of free will, but also his questioning of transubstantiation and his positions concerning priesthood) went far beyond the minor difference in perspective sketched by Erasmus in the *Inquisition into Faith*. This year also marked the end of Erasmus's attempts to mediate in the confrontation between Lutheranism and the Empire: his subsequent writings (most especially the letters written during 1526) show his increasing scepticism before a political context that was quickly complicating the untroubled regeneration of Christian practice he had imagined in the past. In his final letter to Luther in 1526, Erasmus accuses him of having brought dialogue to an end with his continual attacks on the church and on himself: "You are a man, as you write, of violent temperament, and you take pleasure in this remarkable argument...(Others) attack you personally and attack you with insults, while my diatribe was a courteous disputation" (Huizinga 1984: 241). What Erasmus had earlier imagined as dialogue, and had actually tried as "courteous disputation" was quickly turning in the political arena into an "argument"; the ideal exchange proposed two years earlier by the *Inquisitio* was progressively becoming impossible. The final alliance between the Papacy and the empire against the Lutheran states would not come after the invasion of Rome by the imperial troops in 1525, after a long dispute over the control of the city-state of Milan. Still, the excesses and the violence of the invasion, that was immediately known as the Sack of Rome, required the public exoneration of the Emperor, and it was in this context that the imperial secretary and notorious Erasmist, Alfonso de Valdés, wrote his *Dialogue on the Events that Occurred in Rome* (*Diálogo de las Cosas Acaecidas en Roma*), a text that sought to strengthen the moral legitimacy of the Empire after the Sack, and to insist in its determined opposition to the spread of the Reformation. This is yet another link, then, in the chain of dialogues leading to Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*.

In contrast with Erasmus's *Inquisition into Faith*, Alfonso de Valdés's dialogue identifies two different kinds of deviation from Catholicism; one occurring inside of the structure of the church (and which is the main subject of the dialogue; see Bataillon 1951: 369-382), and another, the Lutheran apostasy, occurring outside of it. The two speakers in the text are Arcidiano, a horrified Roman cleric who witnessed the Sack of his city, and Latancio, a defender of Imperial policy, who tries to convince Arcidiano (and, implicitly, the reader) of the exclusive responsibility of the corrupt Catholic hierarchy in the disaster. The existence and the strength of Lutheranism, however, are repeatedly acknowledged in the *Diálogo de las Cosas Acaecidas en Roma*. Arcidiano is quick to point out the specific role of the German soldiers in the defilement of the sacrament brought about by the imperial troops, even though he is immediately forced to admit that the Spanish soldiers were not slow in their blasphemous behaviour; and he suggests the inadequacy of employing non-Catholic soldiers in the Imperial troops. The threat of Lutheranism, and the suggestion of its harbouring a worse kind of corruption than the one brought about by the Catholic Church, are invoked at several moments; they are even mentioned by Latancio as being the worst result of the Pope's irresponsibility, but they are never openly discussed or given

room in the dialogue. Characteristically, once the subject has been introduced, Latancio forces Arcidiano to admit that the very existence of Lutheranism is the direct result of the Pope's oversight and irresponsibility. When, at the beginning of the second part, Latancio lists the causes that have made the Sack of Rome inevitable, he interprets the messages of both Erasmus and Luther as historical warnings to the institutional framework of the Church:

LATANCIO: Among several and many good teachers and preachers that God has sent to us in past times, he sent in our days that excellent man Erasmus of Rotterdam, who very eloquently, and with great care and modesty, in several of the works he has composed, has exposed the vice and deceit of the Roman court, and of ecclesiastic men...And since none of this was taken into account by you, God desired to have you convert by other means, and he suffered that monk Martin Luther to rise; a man who not only lost all shame in declaring their vices, but who took many nations from obedience to their prelates.

ARCIDIANO: That's correct. But that monk not only spoke against us, but also against God, in several heresies that he has written.

LATANCIO: That is true; but if you had put a remedy to the evils he criticized at first, and had not provoked him with your excommunications, perhaps he would never have lost his sense nor written the various heresies that he wrote afterwards, and those he is writing now, nor would there have been such a loss of bodies and souls as there has been in Germany (Valdés 1992:137-138).

The word and language of Lutheranism are rigorously excluded from the dialogue, but they fit in seamlessly with the providential world-view that is delineated in it. The subsequent phenomena of Erasmism and Lutheranism are perceived as indicative of a historical situation, but it is necessary to observe that, while they both are presented as symptoms of the decadence of Catholicism, they are still perceived as antithetical: Erasmus was "sent" by God, while Luther was simply "allowed to arise", causing the loss of many German souls; the rise of this new heresy is the direct result of the mistakes of the church and the ultimate proof of its present corruption. For Alfonso de Valdés, the Erasmian warnings against the corruption of the Church had "been sent by God" to prevent the moral downfall that brought about the Sack of Rome; Lutheranism, on the contrary, is the most dramatic result of such a degeneration. In 1528, the Emperor would finally be crowned in Rome by the Pope himself; the alliance between church and empire that Alfonso de Valdés had imagined and worked for had become a reality, and one that would soon become far more belligerent against the Lutheran states. But at this point, the humanist dialogue had already registered, and staged, that growing distanciation, and to appreciate adequately its stylistic and ideological implications within the genre of the *colloquium*, we must turn to the discussion of Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1528).

By 1528, when More began working on the *Dialogue*, Erasmus's own distance from the Reformation had also grown: he was now not unwilling to let military repression be used against it; he had referred to the spread of Lutheranism in Britain as an "epidemic", and had suggested that it was to be more easily contained because it "depends entirely on the will of one man": Henry VIII, of course (Allen et al. 1958: 56). At this point both Erasmus and Charles V had

good reason to believe that Britain would remain as a bastion of Catholicism: Henry himself, being the emperor's brother-in-law, had taken good care, up to that moment, to keep the problems in his marriage to Catherine of Aragon far from any religious considerations. Moreover, the trade between Antwerp and London had been reduced because of the spread of Lutheranism in Holland; and the first proclamation against books containing heresies would be issued in 1528. It is in this context that cardinal Tunstal requested More to write the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. This was the second time that More confronted Lutheranism in an open debate: after all, the text of the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, signed by Henry VIII in 1521 and addressed to Luther, had been largely the work of More himself. But in this new occasion, More was to adopt the far more didactic form of the dialogue, written in the vernacular language: this was not only a work of theological controversy, but one which aimed to reach beyond the limits of the learned audience of the humanists, towards those who had lately become tempted by the new religious fashions; a work addressed to the younger scholars who might fall under the influence of heresy in one of the main universities. The dialogue is supposedly addressed by "Morus," More's own persona, to a friend of his who has sent him a secret Messenger; this Messenger is a young scholar who has become fascinated by the new forms of religious thought; one of the many that, at this point, have been influenced by the Lutheran forces at the University, or who have been impressed by William Tyndale's theological works. The dialogue occurs between "Morus" and this messenger; thus opposing, from the start, age and an extensive humanistic training to a candid perspective and a relative lack of scholarship.

The situational paradigm that is being reproduced here is far from the image of the conversation between equals (as that between Barbatius and Aulus in Erasmus's *Colloquia* or even, despite their differences, that between Latancio and Arcediano in Valdés's *Diálogo*): dialogue is here a didactic exchange, very much in the Socratic tradition, between a young disciple and a mentor, and, consequently, by the end of the dialogue, the Messenger has adopted most of More's positions and rectified his own initial mistakes. The transition from a position that is sympathetic to Reformed thought towards one of orthodox Catholicism is also a process of intellectual disciplining: the Messenger has to become a reader in the tradition of the *studia humanitatis*, learning to place the text in their proper context, to interpret it correctly and to conflate it with the tradition of Patristic thought. The scholarly interpretation of the Bible has to be conflated with the whole body of the *consensus fidelium*: and that consensus has not been reached only by scholarship, but by the inspiration that must be found behind the ancient traditions of the Church. It is above all this individualistic pride, this belief in an unmediated interaction between self and sacred text (the solitary encounter with *sola scriptura*, without the support of gloss or interpretation), that Morus works hard to disallow.

The main aim of the *Dialogue*, therefore, is to question the notion of free interpretation of scripture; but this cannot be done without actively exemplifying the impossibility of reaching truth from the isolation of individualism. It is

especially necessary, therefore, to deconstruct the illusion of intellectual autonomy, which the dialogue identifies as the main form of pride; dialectical exchange destabilises the belief in direct, unmediated communion with God and works towards the establishment of a firm, common theological knowledge. Accordingly, the conversation carried out in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* often takes the form of a Socratic exchange, with Morus forcing his disciple, the messenger, to question the limits and basis of his own knowledge through a series of interrelated questions:

I pray you, quod I, that our lord was borne of a vyrgyn how know you?  
 Mary, quod he, by scripture.  
 Howe know you, quod I, that ye sholde bylue the scripture?  
 Mary, quod he, by fayth.  
 Why, quod I, what doth fayth tell you therin?  
 Fayth, quod he, telleth me y holy scripture is thynges of trouth wryten by the secrete techyng of God.  
 And wherby know you, quod I, that ye sholde buleue God?  
 Wherby, quod he? this is a strange questyon, Euery man quod he may well wete that.  
 That is trouth, quod I. But is there any horse or any asse that wottyth that?  
 None, quod he(...)for man hath reason and they haue none.  
 Ah, well then, quod I, reason must he nedes haue then that shal perceyve what he sholde byleue. (More 1981: 131)

Morus's relentless questions lead the Messenger to admit the impossibility of asserting his own, personal authority on the subject of religious dogma; in this case and throughout the dialogue, the very form that the exchange adopts, with the older scholar questioning, modifying and strengthening the intellectual discourse of the younger one, exemplifies the need for consensuated interpretation and for the sharing of a theological discourse. Humanistic dialogue is, in itself, one of the best forms of speculation on religious matters; against the intellectual isolation of the Lutheran subject, More emphasises the rational understanding of spiritual matters brought about by the Catholic tradition in the form of the *consensus fidelium*. This insistence on rationality is essential to the desauthorisation of Reformed theology, because the use of abstract reasoning in religious matters had been, at this point, repeatedly impugned by Luther as a form of intellectual deception and even of blasphemy. There had been in all of Luther's work during the start of the twenties (specifically in the *Freedom of a Christian* and in *De Servo Arbitrio*, his response to Erasmus) a strong mistrust of intellectual speculation, and especially of any serious attempt to explain Christian belief on rational terms. For Luther, "reason...is wedded to the pleasure of that beast which is the opinion of righteousness" (Luther 1984: 323); any attempt to explain or understand the acts of God in intellectual terms is an act of Pride, seeking to reduce transcendence to a purely human measure. For More, this rejection of theological rationalism isolates the Lutherans not only from scholasticism, but, more importantly, from the rich tradition of Patristic erudition (against which Luther and Tyndale are constantly contrasted in the text); the ultimate result of

this process will be the reduction of the believer to his/her individuality, and it is against this growing isolation of the subject that the *Dialogue* positions itself.

Such an polemical engagement, and such a constant contrast between the tenets of the Reformation and those of the Patristic tradition, cannot simply exclude the perspective of Lutheranism in the same way that Valdés's *Diálogo* had done. The debate against heresy, the active questioning of its tenets, seems to require the integration of other voices besides those of the two speakers; and it is in the difficulty of articulating this *heteroglossia*, this confrontation of different theological voices, that the dialogue truly reveals its ideological presuppositions. This is particularly visible in the fourth and longest part of the *Dialogue* (which I will be discussing in the following paragraphs), where Morus discusses the history and doctrinal contents of Lutheranism. The Fathers of the Church, for instance, are quoted *verbatim*: whole fragments from St. Jerome, and even Thomas Aquinas, who had been relatively ignored by the humanists, are integrated in the text; and these quotations are often followed by an accurate discussion of their Biblical sources and their relevance in the history of the Church. But the way in which the voices of the Protestant thinkers is woven into the dialogue is significantly different: while the Patristic texts are integrated in the dialogue as quotations; and while More himself tends to provide the adequate glossary for each of them, the voice of the Reformers rarely appears in direct reproduction from their texts; and, when it does, it is framed, interrupted and contradicted by Morus's comments. Luther's theological thought, for instance, is not discussed through direct quotations from his work, but through the listing of the key tenets of his doctrine ("Item, in the sacrament of the order he sayth that all preste and all holy orders be but a fayned invencion. Item, that every man or crysten woman is a preste. Item, that every man may consecrate the body of Cryst"... More 1981:353) briefly itemised in a list, and then directly discussed by Morus with the Messenger. The very structure of humanistic dialogue demands that none of these items may be left without a detailed, reasoned explanation; hence, the Messenger ("your frende") often demands such an explanation for More, leading to a brief commentary on them:

He techeth also that no man or woman ys bounden to kepe and observe any vowe that he had made to god of vyrgynitye or widowed, or other chastyte out of maryage, but that they maye mary at theyr liberte, their vowe not wythstanding. And how proveth he that, quod your frende?

Mary, quod I, by the brekyng of hys owme when he maryed the nunne. And now he ralyeth agaynste all chastite and sayth that yf a preste lyue chaste he is lyke to the prestys of the ydole Sibeles. (More 1981: 360)

The dialogic structure is here made to work directly against the intellectual dignity of the doctrine that is being discussed. The messenger, following the usual pattern of the humanistic dialogue, asks for the rational justification of the breaking of the vow of chastity ("how proveth he that?"); yet Morus's answer ("quod I, by the breakyng of his owne") explicitly denies the possibility of following a pattern of humanistic ratio in the discussion of the subject. From Morus's perspective, Luther's doctrine cannot be rationalised, justified in a detailed



*expositio* or contextualised in a series of examples given *per auctoritas*. The pattern of humanistic dialogue, and the messenger's various questions, seems to create the expectation of a rational understanding of Reformed theology; but such an expectation is repeatedly raised only in order to be destroyed. Instead, Morus sets up the negative example of Luther's own life as the only explanation for the heresy. It is as if the heresy itself was beyond the possibility of being explained by humanistic rhetoric; and instead, it is only the events in Luther's own life and morality that can contextualise it, especially in the aspects where they differ most from the Catholic tradition.

Throughout the *Dialogue*, the glossary and commentary of the texts that are presented as "heretic" disallow their authority: the quotations from Lutheran texts and doctrines are constantly framed by the voice of Morus, that immediately reduces their impact by pointing out their moral shortcomings and reducing their *dignitas*. When quoting, for instance, the words with which Luther alluded to himself at the conclusion of his first treatise, "this holy devout man therefore even borne to teche and preserve the gospell of God", Morus goes on to ask himself "where shold a man finde so very a vaingloryouse fole...that wold not in hymself be ashamed ...to thynke such thyngys" (More 1981: 363). The dialogue often simulates an intellectual opposition between Church fathers and Reformed theologians; but even while it is doing so, it is disallowing not only the intellectual position, but the actual dignity of the Reformers (especially through their breaking the vow of chastity):

Seeth on the one syde Saynt Cypriane, saint Hyerome, saynt Ambrose, saynt Austyne, saynt Basile, Saynt Chrysiostem, saynt Gregory, and all the vertuous and coneng doctors by row from ydeth of Christ and the tyme of his apostles till now... and seeth on the other syde none other doctours of this new secte but frere Luther and his wyfe, prest Pomerane and his wyfe, frere Huyskins and his wyfe, frere Lambert and his wyfe, pres Cardelandus and his wyfe, dan Otho, monke, and his wyfe, franktyke Colyns and more, frantyke Tyndall ye sayth all prestes monkes and freres must nedes have wyfes. (More 1981: 434)

But the rhetorical attack against the Reformers goes beyond these *ad hominem* arguments, and shapes also the way in which Morus goes on to include, in his explanation of the key aspects of Lutheran doctrine, the possible responses from his theological adversaries (for other examples of similar derogatory techniques in other works by More, see Martz 1995: 23-27 and Greenblatt 1980: 84-106). When the importance of good deeds for personal salvation is discussed and Morus uses St. James as the biblical basis for his, Morus exposes the Lutheran belief in salvation through faith alone, and immediately asks himself whether "they (Luther and Tyndale) go about to sette Saynt James to schoole." In the discussion of the Wittenberg theses, Morus ventriloquises Luther himself, stating clearly that "I care not for Austayn, I care not for a hundred Cyprians, I care not for a thousand Hieromis, I care not but for Scripture alone, and it is plaine on my part..." and immediately after this impersonation, Morus adds, in his own voice: "...as if none of those old holy cunninge men had understande any scripture tyll he came" (More 1981: 367).

There is an ironic impersonation of Morus's adversaries occurring at specific moments of the *Dialogue*: the text itself seems to suggest an imaginary response from its ideological adversaries, and to stage a polemical confrontation; but that mimicking of the Reformer's voices is the only actual opposition that the *Dialogue* allows. The perspective of the Messenger himself is not that of an apostate, but the impressions received by an inexperienced young man; he reports the doctrine of the Reformers exclusively on the basis of hearsay ("I herde", "They sede", etc); the diffusion of heresy is represented here as the passive acceptance of a series of tenets that are communicated orally, without a proper accuracy for the interpretative tradition that has framed them for fifteen centuries. The whole construction of heresy seems to be built, according to this dialogue, on the combination of free interpretation and oral transmission; in itself, this combination can be seen as a parody, or an inverted image, of the Catholic *consensus fidelium*, which is built on the combination of authoritative scholarship and the consensus of the popular tradition of the believers.

It was precisely this tradition, and its institutional articulation in the Papacy, that More would give his life for in 1535, after having implemented the prosecution of Lutheranism from his position as Lord Chancellor, during the three years after the publication of the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*. The text can be thus seen as the key theoretical exposition of what More's theological position would be during the remainder of his life and activity; but if the text is seen retrospectively, and in contrast with the allusions to Lutheranism in other *Dialogues* that I have briefly discussed, it can appear as the textual representation of a rift that had been growing steadily since the first moments of the encounter between Erasmism and the Reformation. By 1528, the voice of Lutheranism had been differentiated from the various voices of Catholic humanism; it had been effectively "othered", and ultimately excluded from the genre of the *Colloquium*. While the very concept of dialogue is supposed to give voice to antagonistic perspectives, its situation as a genre placed in the interstices between fiction and reality brought, at this particular historical juncture, a strong pressure to the articulation of the speakers' interaction; the manipulation of the character's voices came to vary between parody or the direct silencing of the implied adversaries of the author. In the case of Thomas More, there is a strong monological framework (the Catholic Church) that imposes itself on the *Colloquium* from without; the text acknowledges the existence of other voices in the contemporary theological debate (the voices of Luther and of the Protestants) but it carefully demarcates the plurality of that dialogue so as to prevent their direct participation in the exchange.

The doctrinal *consensus fidelium* of Catholicism gives, then, its ideological framework to More's text; but it does so while rigorously preventing a questioning of its own dogmatic authority. The humanistic *colloquium* is built not on the basis of an ongoing interaction between dialectic and dogma, but on a subtle conditioning of dialectic by dogma, in which the latter sets up the limits of what can be uttered dialectically, but also establishes a space for the exchange to occur. The heretical languages and voices that are discussed in the dialogue are, at the same time, excluded from it: as long as heresy is mimicked or parodied, there cannot be a

direct, dialectical engagement against it; heretical voices are the subject of the dialogue, but they are not allowed to participate in it and to balance the exchange. By 1528, the evolution of humanistic dialogue, in its growing exclusion of the new theological voices, and in the variety of the strategies that it had adopted for preserving its own *monoglossia* under the façade of a polyphonic debate, had assimilated and duplicated all the pressures against heterodox theology that had occurred in the institutional church. The unproblematic monologism among honest Christians of any denomination that Erasmus had dreamed up in 1524 had already become impossible; during the following decades, Barbatius and Aulus would not be able to sit together to dinner again.

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