

# RENAISSANCE VISIONS OF PARADISE: ANCIENT RELIGIOUS SOURCES OF THOMAS MORE'S *THE BEST STATE OF A COMMONWEALTH AND THE NEW ISLAND OF UTOPIA*

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Utopian literature is largely the result of the crash of several intellectual trends of the European Renaissance: exaltation of the individual conscience vs. the omniscient guide of the mediaeval Catholic Church, the rise of the spirit of religious and scientific enquiry, the shift of the viewpoint from the otherworldly to the worldly, the glad acceptance of the great challenges of geographical discoveries..., summarily the self-emancipation of the individual from the bondage of institutions.

The kind of utopian thought that gave way to some of the great literary monuments of the Renaissance<sup>1</sup> essentially consists in a form of *anamnesis*: it attempts the recovery of buried and/or latent memories, both individual and collective. The tool that the utopian writer best uses in this operation is his own fantasy and his ability to anticipate and partake, through literary formulae, in those dreams of his generation that are, in essence, shared –at least in the realm of hypothesis and in the collective unconscious– by all times and all generations<sup>2</sup>;

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1 Some utopian texts written during the Renaissance were widely read by their authors' contemporaries and exercised great influence on later literature; among these, see: Thomas More, *Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reipublicae statu, deque noua Insula Utopia*, (Louvain, Belgium: Arte Theodorice Martini, 1516). Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, (London: William Ponsonbie, 1590). Joseph Hall, *Mundus Alter et Idem*, (London: H. Lownes, 1605). William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 1611. Ben Jonson, *The Fortunate Isles and Their Union*, (N.p., 1624). Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis, A Worke Unfinished*, (London: J.H. for W. Lee, 1627). Francis Godwin, *The Man in the Moone*, (printed 1808-1813; London: White & Cochrane, 1638). Campanella's *Civitas Solis* (c. 1630), Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) and Harrington's *Oceana* (1656) are three more titles that depart from More's most famous utopian tract.

2 About the definition of utopian literature I will be working with, see my paper "Towards a definition of English utopian literature", delivered at the *I Congreso de Lengua y Literatura Anglo-Norteamericana*, Ciudad Real, University of Castilla-La Mancha, 1993 (In press): "In order to be, utopia must always keep itself encapsulated within the dialectics good place/no place ("eutopia"/"ou-topia"), beginning and end, already and not yet. Utopia and History, in short, must forever fight" (p. 6).

these dreams often call back to a primordial time 'when mankind dwelt in this world without strife'; and they often anticipate a better future which cannot come into being without man's appropriate intervention in the concrete building of his own history (anti-Providentialism). Never before or after the Renaissance did the myth of Paradise take such a precise, rational and, at the same time, complex shape.

In this paper, I intend to briefly trace some of the antecedents, memories and models Thomas More worked on in his vision of the ideal commonwealth. More's *Utopia* remains the text against which all works that claim to be utopian are judged; he invented the term and created the rhetoric, linguistic and cultural framework of what would eventually become a literary genre importance of which, for any correct understanding of the history of English literature, cannot be overestimated.

#### **The Judaeo-Christian tradition: Paradise, The Messianic Kingdom, The Millennium and The Apocalypse**

The philological revolution of renaissance humanism affected pagan and religious sources alike. This is the age of the great scripture translations and commentaries of More's best friend, Desiderius Erasmus. From its very outset, Humanism was concerned with Christianity as much as with classical learning. More's description of his imaginary commonwealth in terms approximating perfection, according to the canons of his time, was as Christian and as "classic" as it could reasonably be, without spoiling the narrative consistency of the text. The search for the earthly Paradise –and, consequently, for the blissful isles where it was supposed to be located– was by no means merely symbolic for the explorers of the Renaissance. The utopian writers, on their part, were exploring the possibility of establishing a paradise-like state in this world, through the correct use of reason. The following pages succinctly explore the genesis of this myth; in the light of the cultural history of the earthly paradise, its possible influence on More's design of the ideal commonwealth constitutes more than a plausible hypothesis<sup>3</sup>.

The Judaeo-Christian visions of Paradise, the Messianic Kingdom, the Millennium and the Apocalypse constitute a fundamental layer on which utopian thinkers worked their narratives and the readers of utopias have probably

<sup>3</sup> Paradise had also been an influence on St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, which is in turn another source of More's *Utopia*. I have explored the relationship of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* to More's *Utopia* in a paper entitled "The medieval background of Th. More's *Utopia*", delivered at the 1992 International Conference of SELIM (León: University of León, in press).

unconsciously relied on them in their interpretations and feelings about utopian literature. Whereas the Greek influence on utopian narratives ("Arcadia", "The Golden Age of Chronos", "Elysium"... and especially Plato's Republic) is no doubt obvious and of primary importance for the study of its major texts, that kind of imagination has not had the type of solid, continuing, evolving presence in western culture that the above myths have<sup>4</sup>.

Probably the first Golden Age of mankind that we know of –an age classically depicted as one full of happiness when man lived in this world in harmony– has to be traced back to Sumerian literature of the fourth millennium B.C. It is contained in an epic poem entitled "Enmerkar and the Land of Aratta", and describes "a once-upon-a-time state of peace and security and ends with man's fall from this blissful state"<sup>5</sup>.

The biblical story of Paradise was first written some time during the ninth century B.C. Together with the nostalgia for the lost paradise, the Jews built up

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. S.B. Liljegren, *Studies on the Origin and Early Tradition of English Utopian Fiction*, (Uppsala-Copenhagen: Uppsala University-English Institute, 1961), p. 71: "[...] what has been earlier written about the influence of, e.g., Plato on More, is not satisfactory. In my opinion, we must, in the case of More, distinguish between definite influence, and the inspiration occasioned by the existence of events and books and ideas obvious to More and his contemporaries. [...] That More devotes some space to Greek studies in his *Utopia* is [...] no surprise. But a particularized influence is not involved, in my opinion".

About Paradise, the Messianic Kingdom, the Millennium and the Apocalypse, see: Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 33-63. See also Mircea Eliade, "Paradise and Utopia: Mythical Geography and Eschatology", in Frank E. Manuel (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 260-280. Richard Heinberg, *Memories and Visions of Paradise*, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989), p. 3-256. Isaac J. Pardo, *Fuegos bajo el Agua. (La invención de utopía)*, (Caracas: Fundación "La Casa de Bello", 1983), 802 p.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Sannuel Noah Kramer, *History Begins in Sumer*, (Rpt. 1959; New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 222. "Once upon a time, there was no snake, there was no scorpion, / There was no hyena, there was no lion, / There was no wild dog, no wolf, / There was no fear, no terror, / Man had no rival [...]". See also: E.N. Genovese, "Paradise and Golden Age: Ancient Origins of the Heavenly Utopia", in *The Utopian Vision. Seven Essays on the Quincentennial of St. Thomas More*, ed. by E.D.S. Sullivan, (San Diego: San Diego State U.P., 1983), p. 9-28. Departing from the study of the Sumerian tablet quoted above, this author attempts "to trace a confluence of traditions of the first, eternal and ultimate utopia-paradise. The evidence will show that neither is our Judaized concept of Paradise unique, nor is our Christianized concept merely eschatological. In sum, we shall see how our paradise tradition arises in Mesopotamia and combines with the Indo-European cyclic golden age myth to produce a prevalent belief in heavenly reward after death, all of which forms the basis for man's centuries of utopian dreams". Cfr. *Op. cit.*, p. 10. However, more recent research –including the Manuels– emphasizes the uniqueness and originality of the Biblical history of Paradise, or The Garden of Eden with respect to the descriptions of a Golden Age in epic literatures of the cultures of the Tigris-Euphrates valley between the fourth and second millennium B.C.

the first doctrinal corpus that included the hope –expressed, of course, in a metaphorical way– that the day would come when human afflictions and hardships would turn into abundance, peace and prosperity. This hope slowly materialized, within the span of a few centuries, in a complex process that can be thought to present at least three distinctive phases:

1. From the Fall, and subsequent expulsion from Paradise, until David, through Moses –who leads the Jewish people out of the Egyptian slavery towards the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, which neither he nor we, as readers, are allowed to enter at the end of *Exodus*; hope during this period is based upon the symbol of the serpent in *Genesis* whose head is crushed by the heel of its victim.
2. Three hundred years of prophecies, since Amos, shape the Jewish Messianic hope, a hope that included the idea of a Redeptor. This supernatural being was conceived with ever increasing precision as a ruler, a legislator and spiritual guide very much like Moses –and like King Utopos– depicted as a just and victorious king. The emphasis at this stage is on a kingdom of equity and justice, without tyrants, without hardships, and without wars (*Isa.* 55:13; *Jer.* 33:6, 33:16; *Ezek.* 28:24; *Ps.* 85:11-14). Jerusalem is a jewel-city, undoubtedly a model for Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, (*Ezek.* 28:25-26, 36:35; *Jer.* 33:9; *Isa.* 54:11-12, etc.), and famine will disappear, (*Isa.* 51:3, *Ezek.* 36:35, etc.). Thus, the triumph of the redeemed people would definitely start as a political and economic one<sup>6</sup>.
3. What I will call the third phase brings about a radical metamorphosis of both the concept of Messiah and the Messianic expectation in general. Emphasis is diverted –after the Babylonian captivity– from the material welfare of the Messianic Kingdom towards more spiritual matters, and a surprising image arises from the previous ones which presents a humble king, riding on an ass, but who will, however, dictate his law to the nations, (*Zech.* 9:9; *Ps.* 45:9-10; *II Isa.* 42:1-4, 49:1-2, 50:5-6 and 52). Actually, the figure of a humiliated redeptor had already been formed in the East well before Christ's birth, though Jewish and Christian exegesis obviously differ in their interpretations of this figure as respectively referring to Israel and Christ, or to both.

6 For an accurate and suggestive summary of utopian trends in this phase, see Ann Hughes, "Jewish utopian visions from the Canonical, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha", Paper delivered at the 1990 Meeting of the American Society for Utopian Studies, Lexington, KE., University of Louisville, 1990; (unpublished paper kindly sent to me by its author), 5 p.

After the final messianic messages of the prophetic literature, (Malachi), (these topics seem to disappear from the Scriptures and they will be absent from them for about three centuries; the Jews seemed to have given up their hope of a new paradise on earth that never seemed to come. Daniel will begin a trend within the prophetic literature (around 160 B.C.): the Apocalypse or Revelation. 'These Revelations are not the subtle result of divine inspiration, but rather derive from violent raptures in which the visionary is taken to Heaven so that he may learn about occult secrets, about the past and, above all, about the future, with special attention paid to the description of the end of the world. This is the way in which the Messianic hope and the end-of-times came to be one single theme.

The apocalyptic genre –which, as Frank Kermode suggests<sup>7</sup>, is the model for all fictions– uses a technique of prophecy a posteriori, usually beginning with a dream, and with a result that is full of obscure symbols, excruciating metaphors, and plenty of ambiguity that becomes well the nature of the dream vision that produces it<sup>8</sup>.

Millenarianism, as we conceive it today –the most pervasive element in utopian literature and science fiction of all times–, is definitely a development of the messianic expectation of a human being, the Deliverer<sup>9</sup>. Of course, there is a Jewish and a Christian Millennium, the former being essentially the same as the Messianic Kingdom; and, of course, it exercises different degrees of influence on western literatures in the different periods. It is generally agreed

7 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1968).

8 The largest part of the summary on the apocalyptic imagination, in the longer version of this paper is taken from the following two sources: -John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. (An introduction to the Jewish matrix of Christianity)*, (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 280 p. - H.H. Rowley, *The Rlevance of Apocalyptic. A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation*, 2nd ed., (Rpt. 1963; London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), 240 p.

9 See Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 1-36. See also Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1947). Since there is so little dogma and no Thomas Aquinas in Judaism, it is impossible to categorically deepen in a general account of what the Jews were supposed to believe about these questions from Daniel onwards. Thus, the above is formulated in a strictly speculative way. For an account –as close as we can get to a 'dogma' in Jewish thought of the Middle Ages– see Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles, his Ethical Writings and Mishneh Torah*, where we can find a fairly detailed account of the Jewish concept of ideal society and good, that is, holy life. See also, among a myriad of secondary sources, Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought. From Maimonides to Abravanel*, (Oxford: O.U.P., 1986), 310 p., especially its bibliographical chapter, p. 287-302.

that in English and American literature, the period which saw the vastest sway was c. 1750-1850; but, whatever their influence, all millennialists of all times are supposed to share a belief in the fact that the world is going to be transformed by the (second/first) coming of the Messiah, which will result in the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth; this state will last a thousand years, after which the Last Judgement will take place; whether the (Second) Coming of the Messiah will precede or follow that thousand years of happiness and just rule on earth is not agreed on. There is wide support in the Bible for a Millenarian belief, particularly in Daniel, in the Apocalypse of John or *Revelation*, (20:4), and in several Sibylline Oracles. The images of peace and happiness therein contained move us back to the paradisiacal imagery of *Genesis* in what is surely more than an inescapable analogy<sup>10</sup>. Obviously, Millenarianism soon developed a peculiar kind of eschatology, and there came in the believers a mixed feeling of terror and hope before an oncoming end, feared and, at the same time, desired, but anyway expected, and in the short run. These complex feelings were poured into a language which put together apocalyptic features and dreams of a happy land, of a paradise that was first supposed to be somewhere Eastward, then Eastward but accessible through a Western route, and finally, somewhere in the Newfound Land; and there they went: some only dreamed about it, but others decidedly sailed the seas in search of paradise. *IV Esdras*, added as an appendix to the *Vulgate*, provided two lines that fired a prolific fantastic geography that sent, among others, Christopher Columbus to discover and regain the paradise lost<sup>11</sup>. For him, the search for the earthly paradise was no chimera, and the discovery itself—as it happens in all utopian texts—had eschatological consequences of its own:

<sup>10</sup> "The Age or Reign of the Messiah is hence on this earth: it is a public and political State of goodness and freedom, not a matter of personal or individual salvation, or of life in the hereafter". This idea is kept very much alive in Christian millenarianism. The Council of Ephesus pronounced millenarianism a heresy in 431, and the orthodox view throughout the Middle Ages was Augustinian: which meant a denial of a new earthly millennium following the Second Coming of Christ, [...]. But we know impossible the Church found it to prevent alternative interpretations arising, mainly in the form of commentaries on the *Book of Daniel* and *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. *Revelation* in particular gave rise to the standard pattern of millenarian belief. Christ's Second Coming would be accompanied by the emergence of the Antichrist and by his victory over him. There would be a first Resurrection and a first Judgement. Then would ensue Christ's thousand-year reign of peace, joy and freedom on earth. That would be followed by a second Resurrection and a second and Last Judgement, and the final end of earthly existence. But up to the final point, Christian millenarianism shared with Jewish messianism the belief that the new providential dispensation would take place on earth". Cfr. K. Kumar, *Religion and Utopia* (Canterbury: The University of Kent at Canterbury, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> See Mircea Eliade, "Paradise and utopia: mythical geography and eschatology", in Frank E. Manuel, (ed.), *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, Op. cit., p. 262 ff. See also Pardo, *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

The great navigator accorded an eschatological significance to these geographic discoveries. The new world represented more than a new continent open to the propagation of the Gospel. The very fact of its discovery had an eschatological implication. Indeed, Columbus was persuaded that the prophecy concerning the diffusion of the Gospel throughout the world had to be realized before the end of the world—which was not far off. In his *Book of Prophecies*, Columbus affirmed that these events, namely the end of the world, would be preceded by the conquest of the new continent, the conversion of the heathen and the destruction of the Antichrist. And he assumed a capital role in this grandiose drama, at once historical and cosmic. In addressing Prince John, he exclaimed: "God made me the messenger of the new Heaven and the new Earth, of which He spoke in the Apocalypse by St. John, after having spoken of it by the mouth of Isaiah; and He showed me the spot where to find it". It was in this messianic and apocalyptic atmosphere that the transoceanic expeditions and the geographic discoveries that radically shook and transformed Western Europe took place. Throughout Europe, people believed in an imminent regeneration of the world, even though the causes and reasons for this regeneration were multiple and often contradictory<sup>12</sup>.

Both the subject-matter and the audience were ready for the accounts of the utopian writers about more perfect societies and about the necessity of imagining first and 'enforcing' later a more perfect world, so that 'the time' might be fulfilled.

#### Judeo-Christian Scripture and More's vision of the ideal commonwealth. A comparative analysis

I now intend to propose a reading of Thomas More's *The Best State of a Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia*<sup>13</sup> in the light of Scriptural teaching about one of the major issues on which the utopian society must be built, according to More: the idea of a commonwealth and the related questions such as wealth, poverty, work, and the consequences of an eventual elimination of private property<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>13</sup> All quotations, when it is not stated to the contrary, are taken from *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Vol. IV, ed. by Edward Surtz, S.J. & J.H. Hexter, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. vii-cxciv, 1-629.

<sup>14</sup> In a forthcoming chapter, entitled "The idea of a commonwealth according to the Essenes and Thomas More's *Utopia*", (New York: Fordham U.P., in press), I analyze in detail Josephus', Philo's and Pliny's description of the commonwealth of the Judaic sect of the Essenes (c. 150 B.C. -66-70 A.D.) and its possible influence as a source for More's *Utopia*. For more information about Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Essenes, see my article "The life of the Essenes and Thomas More's *Utopia*", submitted to *Moreana* for its forthcoming special issue on *Utopia* (1994).

First, of course, poverty, less indigence, do not exist in More's vision. Food is plentiful and the hardships in its obtention inexistent:

Though they are more than sure how much food the city with its adjacent territory consumes, they produce far more grain and cattle than they require for their own use: they distribute the surplus among their neighbours.

(p. 117)

The Utopians devote, thanks to the effectiveness of cooperative labor, very little time to manual work, and society itself is designed so that, most of the time, most of the people may be free from any type of manual work; in this way, they can devote themselves to increase their knowledge and pleasure, which are the true sources of happiness. As in the OT visions of Paradise and the Days of the Messiah, the Utopians, under the rule delivered by their founder King Utopus<sup>15</sup>, live in a land and age of bounty, whereas their enemies suffer famine and thirst: "And people will say: This land, so recently a waste, is now like a garden of Eden, and the ruined cities once abandoned and levelled to the ground are now strongholds with people living in them" (*Ezek.* 36:35)<sup>16</sup>. Utopia had also been a waste until King Utopos separated it from the mainland and turned it an isle.

Through the description of the essential otherness of the Utopian society, More consistently builds upon the tension that exists between the contingency of the present situation, of the society he lives in, (the England of the early sixteenth century), and the superior plenitude of 'the other', (the commonwealth of Utopia); the structure of the book in two parts helps to provide that sense of estrangement that forces the reader to realize the extent of the commitment of the so-called English Christians to the principles of their religion when compared to the supposedly heathen that inhabits Utopia; the latter –through reason alone– have been capable of enacting a much more Christian ethics. The subtle qualifications of the author's conceptual positions will come along with the complex network of personalities and voices through which More speaks (Raphael Hythlodæus, the Thomas at the table in Antwerp, the third person narrator, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> There is no utopia without history, and there is no history without messianic expectation; King Utopus is, in *Utopia*, the Deliverer of the Law, the one that separated the land and turned it into an island to protect his people from evil influences from the other world. Though a symbol of man's capacity of progress, always beyond *Utopia* we have a law-giver king or legislator who set the basis for the commonwealth the traveller finally finds in his search.

<sup>16</sup> All Biblical quotations, when not stated to the contrary, are taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible. Reader's Edition*, (Rpt. 1990; New York: Doubleday, 1990).

There is no money in *Utopia*, nor do they need it, and gold is ridiculed by assigning it the humblest use of all, (chamber-pots and children toys). More's exaltation of communal life –beginning with the family–, certain rather stoic touches in his consideration of the superfluous, and social justice at large in his utopia, clearly derives from the Scriptures as he saw them finally enacted in the monacal life, towards which he felt so much inclined at certain points of his life<sup>17</sup>.

On the intricate question of private property More seems to deviate from the traditional concept of ownership within the Scriptures, where possession of goods and real property is taken for granted and theft is severely condemned, (*I Macc.* 15:33; *Sir.* 34:20, 46-19); personal possessions should be used for the help of those in need. However, this deviation is more apparent than substantial. The evolution of this concept departs from wealth symbolizing God's blessing, (as in *Gen.* 24:35 and 13:2; *II Chron.* 32:27-29, etc.), to communal abundance in *Exodus* and in the prophetic literature, towards increasing concerns about the negative effect of riches in the sphere of salvation. The Fathers –following Christ's hard remarks about riches in *Luke*, 19-45 & 18:24-27– had a hard time trying to explain that the human being had been created as *homo socialis*, a being designed to communicate with others and that riches were to be included in this sharing. Gold –very much like in *Utopia*– is to be equated to dirt, according to Clement of Alexandria and Tertulian, who remind us of some pagan tribes' custom of chaining their prisoners in gold. Of course, the situation was by no means simple. The Church Fathers, admiring, like More, the communal life as the theoretically more perfect state, were trying to reach a compromise that would not deprive the Church from the new members of the high middle classes that were converting in large numbers to Catholicism after Constantin's reform, while still condemning the terrible social inequalities of their time. As we shall see, More was not alien to this sense of compromise, in his complex approach to the question of wealth and private property in his *Utopia*.

Critics have suggested that More made himself defend 'private property' against Hythlodæus' opinion in Book I; but the thing is that he did not do that in his original text written in the Netherlands, (Book II); as J.H. Hexter<sup>18</sup> suggests, on his way back to England More might have had second thoughts about that matter. However, apparently, that was not the case. Actually More talks twice within the first book in defense of personal property –against Hythlodæus' account of the perfect communism of the Utopians–, but, as Hexter rightly suggests, quite surprisingly, his arguments are inappropriately weak for a mind

<sup>17</sup> More followed the regime of the Carthusian monks from 1499 to 1503.

<sup>18</sup> Hexter, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

of his class<sup>19</sup>; his biography –which tells us of his intimate repulsion against pomp and riches in general– makes us think that his arguments could only be purposely weak, so as to trick the reader into hating even more the effects of private property: "This juxtaposition [Hythloday's magnificent invective against private property and More's silly reply in its defense] at the very end, leaves the reader with a feeling of disgust against the evils of private property"<sup>20</sup>.

In his controversial account of private property, More is heir to a religious tradition of thought that has brought about the positive view about communal, shared goods as the most perfect religious state for mankind only through a complex mutation in his dialectical relationship with the world that surrounds him. In fact, the common set of Messianic expectations, and the Millenarian belief turned the first Christians communities<sup>21</sup> into entities almost completely irresponsive to the social issues. According to the *Didaché*, the Church was the only society Christians should feel themselves members of; virtually, the *civitas terrena* did not exist for those who were waiting for the Day of the Apocalypse, for the Millennium or, in general, for the end of the world, which was wrongly supposed to be at hand. By the end of the second century A.D., the average Christian still believed that the imminent future was not in an earthly city, but in the celestial one and thus continued to enforce his detachment from every attempt at a worldly structural change. From the third until the eighth century, this belief gradually changed, and then, having the supposed immediacy of the end been questioned, the Christian began to dream of building a universal empire under the name of Christ. It is in this manner that the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena* are bonded. Although the ideal continued to be the monastery, that radical separation between the Christian and his society, upon claims of a most harmful contamination (as Hythloday suggests) if he intervened in the business and institutions of power of this world, was –to say the least– far less radical. More's contribution to a new sense of compromise between hyper-providentialism and hyper-secularism, finds in *Utopia* its most accomplished formulation.

More, then, is inheritor of the Latin Fathers' tradition according to which personal riches are tolerable only when they are used for the common good<sup>22</sup>, a

tradition regarding God's property of all things, including the lives and souls of his people, that goes back to the *Exodus*, when the Lord proclaimed:

"So now, if you are really prepared to obey me and keep my covenant, you, out of all peoples, shall be my personal possession, for *the whole world is mine*" (Ex., 19:5)<sup>23</sup>.

and went through Luke, who contends, in "The parable of the rich man and Lazarus", that the Christian concept of justice and the moral gravity of man's insensibility towards poverty –exemplified in the condemnation of the rich man– had changed nothing from "Moses and the prophets"<sup>24</sup>; and the supposedly 'utopian' vision of Augustine tells us, in his *Civitas Dei*, of God dispensing all people to share food, clothes, cures, etc.

### Conclusion

The all-embracing myth of paradise –as I have tried to outline in the above pages– epitomizes well the ideological substratum and the conceptual identity of More's utopia. His dream of a better –though not yet perfect– society implies a vision of the world and of the human soul that moves back along history to a prelapsarian humanity. In terms of formative causation, utopian literature –according to More's definition– suggests that his subtle, even subliminal, use of the myth of paradise reflects, as R.W. Wescott<sup>25</sup> rightly suggests, in terms of Platonic gnoseology, our collective memories of a former existence in Paradise as well as an often silent hope that we shall some day return to a paradisaic state, where there will no longer be pain or hunger, sorrow or violence, where even the memories and recollections of past hardships, even of coeternal pain and punishment will be erased in an eternal present. More's imagination, like anyone else's cannot invent *ex nihilo*; thus, Utopia springs from memory and essentially requires re-creation, re-view, re-enactment of a past that will join the future, when there no longer be past but only sempiternal present. But man's worldly existence is in time and space and it is in this world that he must prepare and try to anticipate the world that is to come.

This kind of discourse had to be born in the Renaissance. Its look back to the classics, in search of a philosophy of man and of history on man's own

<sup>23</sup> See also, in this line of thought: Ex. 22:21; Job. 24:2-12; Ps. 22:26; Prov. 6:11; Am. 4:1.

<sup>24</sup> Luk. 16:19-31.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. R.W. Wescott's foreword to R. Heinberg's *Memories and Visions of Paradise. Exploring the Universal Myth of a Lost Golden Age*, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989), p. xxi-xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 36-39.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> More had widely read the Latin Fathers and knew about the way of life of the early Christian groups and especially about the prescriptions of the Benedictine rule. Cfr. Hexter, *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Epistle to the Parthians*. For a complete survey of the Fathers' teachings in this respect, see Pardo, *Op. cit.*, p. 337-392.

terms, from the standpoint of man's own abilities, was bound to produce a radical desire of transformation. Thomas More's *Utopia*, with its subliminal version of the myth of paradise, perfectly joined together the viewpoint of history and the viewpoint of metaphor, the allegory and the satire, the irrational outopia of perfection on this earth and the eutopia that must guide human behavior in this world.

## "MORE'S *UTOPIA*" OR "UTOPIA'S *UTOPIA*?": HOW TO HANDLE TEXTUAL AND GENERIC DOUBLING

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This is about differences between interpretations of a book and interpretations of the same book when read from the perspective of the genre it "belongs" to. Of course this is not unusual: texts belong to different genres, and genres themselves are explained in many different, even contradictory, ways. However, some ingredients make More's *Utopia* a special case:

- First, there should be a stronger connection between text and kind: not only because More wrote the foundational work, "the real thing" in utopias, but also because the literary kind has inherited the name of the text.
- Second, *the name of the genre* seems to give some extra information about the contents of its members, and emphasize some of its dimensions.
- Third, *the place of this class of books in literature* (or as literature) is special. These texts have been typically placed far from the centre of literature, as 'boundary works' (Morson; 1981;75), as exotic as the countries they portray.

Some major theoretical problems are involved here, such as the articulation of 'extraliterary' and 'literary' knowledge, and also the articulation of critical and generic information. It is precisely by addressing these very big issues that I will deal with the interpretive doubling of More's *Utopia*, in the conviction that explicit examination of the particular interpreting and classifying interests of critics (and thus of the limits of their observations) has been insufficient<sup>1</sup>.

Let us start with the interpretive history of More's *Utopia*. George Logan made the point economically when he described *Utopia* as "designedly enigmatic" (1983,3). He went on by specifying the quality of the difficulty of the book, and by distinguishing two causes of uncertainty:

<sup>1</sup> See Dan Ben-Amos, "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres" (1969). Morson follows him when he insists that "genre does not belong to texts alone, but to the interaction between texts and a classifier" (1981, viii).