

ESTHETIC DEVELOPMENTS IN UTOPIAN FICTION UNTIL THOMAS MORE

Moh'd. Raja Al-Direeni
Department of English
Kuwait University

(ABSTRACT)

The concern of this paper centers around utopian fiction. Particularly its esthetic aspects and the developments in its narrative techniques.

This paper is the first part of an extensive research devoted mostly and mainly to the tracing of the developments in the artistry of utopian fiction. Themes in this fiction are touched upon only in so far as they have a bearing on artistic matters. At the same time, a bird's eye view of the changes in the total cultural perspective (or **Weltanschauung**) of the various ages is offered at various stages in the paper.

Due to the space limitations and other considerations this research has been divided into many parts. The first part consists in this paper which deals with the developments in the esthetics of utopian fiction from the beginnings in Homer to Thomas More's **Utopia** (1516). The other forthcoming parts will follow these developments in English Utopian fiction after Thomas More's **Utopia** until George Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949).

This paper consists of four divisions : the first is the "Introduction"; the second, "Classical Beginnings"; the third is devoted to Thomas More's **Utopia**; the fourth is the "Conclusion".

..... if it [**Utopia**] were intended as a serious treatise it would be very confused indeed. On my view, however, it appears confused only so long as we are trying to get out of it what it never intended to give. It becomes intelligible and delightful as soon as we take it for what it is --

a holiday work, a spontaneous overflow of intellectual high spirits, a revel of debate, paradox, comedy and (above all) of invention which starts many hares and kills none.

C.S. Lewis, "A Play of Wit",
in (Nelson, 1968:68)

Introduction :

Utopian literature is as old as literature of any kind. Of course the term "Utopia" and its derivatives have not been known before 1516 when Thomas More published his famous **Utopia**. But the literature which has thematic and esthetic qualities now called **utopian** exists in classical (Greek and Roman) as well as modern literatures. Negley and Patrick (1952:252) assert that "utopianism, explicit or implicit, is discoverable almost everywhere in literature". They also claim that "in ancient Greek literature, for example, works utopian or semi-utopian in tendency occur in romances, biographies, voyage accounts, philosophical dialogues, and treatises". This claim of Negley and Patrick is fully demonstrated by John Ferguson's **Utopias of the Classical World** (1975). Ferguson gives a thorough account of utopian works or utopian fragments of literary works, beginning with Homer's account of Phaacia in **The Odyssey** in the eighth century B.C. and ending with St. Augustine's **The City of God** in the fifth century A.D. (1) Ferguson's approach is mostly thematic rather than esthetic.

The concern of this paper centres around utopian fiction, particularly its esthetic aspects and the developments in its narrative techniques. These developments receive some sporadic mention by Ferguson (e.g. in pages 104 - 108 and 124 - 129). But, so far, the best though by no means thorough treatment of the esthetics of utopian fiction are found in Richard Gerber's **Utopian Fantasy** (1955 : 81 - 132) and in Robert Elliott's **Shape of Utopia** (1970 : 3 - 24; 102 - 127). Arthur Pollard (1970 : 32 ff) points to some of the satirical techniques of utopia. In the "Introduction" to his translation of More's **Utopia** (1974 : 7 - 103; 6 - 21). Paul Turner gives some account of the esthetics of More's **Utopia** and of some developments in the narrative techniques. The esthetics of Swift's **Gulliver's Travels** receive special attention from a variety of critics. (2) Other individual utopian works such as Bacon's **New Atlantis**, Butler's **Erewhon**, William Morris's **News from Nowhere**, Huxley's **Brave New World** and Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, receive more or less similar attention. (3)

Nevertheless, the fact still remains that something is still lacking and desirable in these studies. For one thing, none of them is devoted solely to the esthetics of utopian fiction. Attention in these studies seems incapable of ridding itself of the attraction of utopian themes and motifs. The interest in

the artistry and technicalities of utopian fiction is usually subordinated to, overshadowed and blurred by, or intewoven into the interest in ideas and ideals. It is not to be denied that form and content are, like body and soul, dialectically interrelated, and that the esthetics of utopian fiction cannot be wholly divorced from its philosophical, sociological, economic and other themes. It is not illegitimate, however, to study each as if it were an independent entity without actually losing sight of the fact that it is only one part or aspect of an organic indivisible whole. The findings of such a procedure in academic or scientific research are not without important value.

Another drawback in the available studies of the esthetics of utopian fiction is that each one of them is in some way or other bracketed by limitations that narrow its scope and scale, and thus bar it from the achievement of comprehensiveness and thoroughness. Gerber's work (1955), for example, is confined to the "English utopian fiction since the end of the nineteenth century". Elliott's **Shape of Utopia** (1970) is oriented mostly towards the affinities and affiliations between utopia and satire. Other critics and researchers restrict themselves each to an individual, rather isolated, utopian work. Again, their technique of limiting or bracketing is not without advantages and has often led to invaluable insights. But it has its disadvantages as well. It often produces a fragmented view of things and misleads into imperfect, if not faulty, conclusions.

A third drawback is often embodied in the misconceived assumption that utopian fiction has its starting point in Thomas More's **Utopia**, and that the artistry of this literary genre began to develop afterwards. Little reference is made to the esthetics of utopian fiction before Thomas More. Granted that Thomas More invented the term "utopia", and that his **Utopia** popularised the genre of the utopian travel romance, but this genre had already been an established tradition in almost everything but the epithet "utopian" for about eighteen centuries before More. And More himself was intimately familiar with this fact. He even translated into Latin, in cooperation with his friend and well-known humanist scholar Erasmus, some of the satirical works of Lucian, the Greek author of the utopian travel romance entitled **A True Story**. (4)

In the light of these remarks this research takes its cue from C.S. Lewis' view of **Utopia** as "a play of wit", "a holiday work", "a book whose real place is not in the history of political thought so much as in that of fiction and satire" (Nelson, 1968 : 66 - 69). This research is devoted mostly and mainly to the tracing and following up of the developments in the artistry of utopian fiction. Themes in this fiction are touched upon only in so far as they have a bearing on artistic matters. At the same time, a bird's-eye view of the changes in the total cultural perspective (or **Weltanschauung**) of the

various ages is offered at various stages in the paper. This is done on the assumption that developments in art usually synchronize with changes in cultural perspective.

Due to space limitations and other considerations this research has been divided into many parts or papers. The first part consists in this paper which deals with the developments in the esthetics of utopian fiction from the beginnings in Homer to Thomas More's **Utopia** (1516). The other forthcoming parts follow these developments in English after Thomas More's **Utopia** until George Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-four** (1949).

Classical Beginnings:

Ferguson (1975 : 9 - 15) places these beginning in Homer's **The Illad** and **The Odyssey**. In **The Illad** Homer exhalts the "blameless" Ethiopians, while in **The Odyssey** he gives one account of a "Cacotopia" and another of a "Eutopia". (5) The "Cacotopia" is the country of the Cyclopes which has a fertile and beautiful nature but extremely individualistic, anti-social, lawless, lazy, primitive people (Ferguson, 1975 : 13). The "Eutopia", on the other hand, is the country of the Phaeicians, which has a happy weather, a fertile land, a skilful, industrious, and courteous people, and a benevolent and paternalistic government under the ideal and wise King Alcinous (Ferguson, 1975 : 13 - 14).

Ferguson (1975 : 14) says that "The idealization of a primitive nature-people as early as **The Illad** is worth noting; **it is a formative element later**".(6) He also quotes Volcker's intelligent comment:

The Ethiopians are with Homer a general name for the most remote people he knew of The epithet "blameless" rests perhaps on.... a confused notion of the innocence and justice of semi-savage nations that are but little known, which has in all ages been cherished, when an opposite opinion, a belief in their utter wildness and ferocity, has not yet been formed.

(Ferguson, 1975 : 12)

In what ways, we may ask, has the Homeric "idealisation of a primitive nature-people" become a formative element later? The answer could be that it was formative thematically as well as artistically. First, it gave support to the myth of the "noble savage" which implies, among other things, that civilization is a process of more complexity, more degeneration and less happiness. It also stresses the myth of the Fall. In literature it gave rise to escapist (arcadian or pastoral) utopias, where people live in an everlasting holiday, on the fruits of a miraculously bountiful nature, and under the care of benevolent gods. A natural reaction to this was the rise of the myth of

progress which supports the case of civilization. In literature this belief in progress leads to the emergence of social utopias which glorify "reason" and emphasise man's capability for better planning and more effective performance. Secondly, innocent, just, healthy and communistic primitive societies were usually located in the remotest places possible. Arrival to those places involved travel, sea-travel in particular and especially in the case of the sea-faring Greeks. Artistically, this led to the rise of the sea-travel technique and of the traveller-observer-narrator tradition in utopian romances.

This tradition is demonstrated by Homer's account in **The Odyssey** of Odysseus' encounters first with the Cyclopes' "Cacotopia" (Book 9) and later with the Phaecian "Eutopia" (Books 6 - 8). This latter encounter is described by Ferguson (1975 : 14) as "the first utopia in European literature". It should be added, however, that Homer was not primarily interested in introducing a utopia. His major concern was to follow up his narrative of the adventures of Odysseus on his way back from the Trojan war to his home-island Ithaca. The Phaecian episode is only incidental. Nevertheless, it comprises the beginning of what was to become traditional techniques in utopian fiction: locating utopian or dystopian societies in geographic locations which are unfamiliar, remote or hard to reach; the sea-voyage to and from the utopian country; and the traveller-observer-narrator.

We find these techniques practiced later by such Greek utopian writers as Euhemerus, Iambulus and Lucian (Ferguson, 1975: 104 - 108; 124 - 129; 174 - 176).

Euhemerus of Messene lived in Athens at the beginning of the third century B.C. He wrote a romantic utopian story called **The Sacred Inscription**, in which he claimed that the narrator was instructed by Cassander (ruler of Athens at that time) to undertake a number of distant journeys. On one of these the narrator set sail from Yemen and travelled southwards. After several days he came to a group of islands, the largest of which was called Panchaia or the Sacred Isle. The nature of this country is parallel to that of Homer's Phaecia and has some echoes of Plato's Atlantis which is also called the Sacred Isle. The human society of Panchaia is described in terms of class structure, cosmopolitanism, economic life, trade and religion.

In his summary of Euhemerus' **The Sacred Inscription**, Ferguson emphasises the remoteness of the utopian Panchaia, but he says little about the journey to and back from Panchaia and next to nothing about the narrator-observer-traveller. Ferguson is concerned almost exclusively with the thematic aspects of this utopia, but he ends his discussion by asserting that Euhemerus "Utopianism passed through Iambulus to More and

Campanella and many later writers" (Ferguson, 1975 : 108). We take it that Ferguson means the passing to future writers of literary techniques rather than utopian themes. As for themes, future utopian romancers could go to masters better known and more celebrated than Euhemerus.

Iambulus's utopia is more satisfactory in relation to the technical points. Iambulus was a merchant. In his utopian story he claims that he was captured by brigands in Arabia and kidnapped from the brigands by some Negroes who used him and his companion for the purification of their own land. He and his companion were placed in a boat with six months provision, and set to sail southwards till they reached a happy island with kindly inhabitants. Iambulus and his companion were told that if they reached the island safely the Negroes would enjoy peace and prosperity for six hundred years, but if they turned back in cowardice they would bring disaster on the whole Negro nation and be punished accordingly (Ferguson, 1975 : 124).

After four months of sailing through stormy seas Iambulus and his companion reached the happy Island of the Sun and were given a warm and kindly welcome by the inhabitants whom Iambulus calls the Children of the Sun. The travellers lived there in blessedness for seven years. In the end they were ejected "seemingly because they had not attained to the perfection of the islanders and might become a corrupting influence. After four months they were shipwrecked on the shores of India. The companion was drowned. Iambulus reached Palibothra where he found a king.... who gave him safe-conduct" (Ferguson, 1975 : 125).

Internal textual evidence shows that Iambulus' utopia was most probably written between 250 and 225 B.C. It has much fantasy, but mingled with its fantasy there is a core of fact. Iambulus himself was a real person and was perhaps a merchant who had travelled widely. The adventure story shows an advance in geographical knowledge since Euhemerus. The description of the Island of the Sun reflects a vague knowledge of Ceylon and the Borneo islands. The important points, as far as technique is concerned, are the following. First, the elements of adventure are clearer and better, though not quite convincingly, motivated and accounted for. Second, the journeys forth and back are of equal duration. Third, the duration of the traveller's stay in utopia is more definitely specified. Fourth, authentic elements mingle with fantasy. Fifth, the narrator is the traveller himself, and the story of the journey is, therefore, narrated in the first person singular. Thematically, Iambulus' Island of the Sun owes much to the utopias of Euhemerus, Homer, and the Stoics. Ferguson (1975 : 126 - 12) claims that "It is a priori likely that a Utopian writer of this period would be familiar with the Cynic and Stoic Utopias. Certainly we receive the impression from Lucian that later generations regarded utopian writing as something of a Stoic speciality." (7)

Lucian lived in the second century A.D. His **A True Story** is not an utopia, but rather a parody of utopias, especially those of Euhemerus and Iambulus. He uses their own narrative techniques (travel, traveller-narrator, plot, exaggerations, mingling facts with fantasies, etc.) in order to mock, by a variety of satirical devices, their visions of happy societies in never-never-lands. The very title of his story is satirical; it claims, in the method of utopian romancers (Euhemerus and Iambulus) and philosophers (Plato) veracity and truthfulness for things false and fictional. Says Lucian (1905, vol. 2 : 137)

Many other writers have adopted the same plan, professing to relate their own travels, and describing monstrous beasts, savages, and strange ways of life...

When I come across a writer of this sort, I do not so much mind his lying; I am only surprised at his expecting to escape detection.

And so he begins his story by insinuating that he is truthful at least in admitting that he is a liar. In many ways Lucian's **A True Story** may be considered a prefiguring of More's **Utopia** and Swift's **Gulliver's Travels** which were to come into being centuries later.

In **A True Story** Lucian and his group set sail, run into a storm and arrive at an island. After some adventures they visit some islands in the air, (8) and are met by the Vulture Cavalrymen riding on large three-headed vultures. Everything there is of unusual size; a flea is as large as twelve elephants. (9) While there they war with the inhabitants of the sun (thus Lucian mocks Iambulus' Children of the Sun). They also visit the moon and its inhabitants. Later in the story they sail to a group of five islands. Here they land on the Isle of the Blest and are permitted to stay for seven months. In the end, despite protestations, the visitors are ejected, and after further adventures comes the final shipwreck. (10)

It is worth noticing here that developments in the voyage tradition in the utopian fictions mentioned so far (those of Homer, Euhemerus, Iambulus and Lucian) reflect parallel developments in the cultural, commercial and political perspectives and world views of the ages that produced them. The sea voyages in Homer's epics are limited to the Mediterranean Sea, especially the eastern half. To Homer and his contemporaries at the beginning of the first Millennium B.C. the world meant the Mediterranean countries. They had only vague, confused and rather legendary or mythical notions of the other parts of the world. The course of the voyage was often affected by mythical influence. Storms, winds, shipwrecks and the like were often ascribed to the anger or displeasure of the gods. The purpose of the journey was homecoming from a war abroad.

The fate of the traveller was to a great extent decided by the gods. Utopia

itself (the island of the Phaeacians) was a reflection of the ideals (political, economic, sociological and otherwise) of Homer's time; it was an ideal city-state, isolated from the world, favoured by nature, ruled by a wise king who loved and was beloved by his active, skilful, law-abiding and god-fearing people.

Euhemerus and Iambulus came in the wake of Alexander's conquests and the rise of short-lived Greek empire. Knowledge of the world had expanded to include Persia, Babylonia, Arabia, India, South East Asia and Negroid Africa. Trade also had expanded and traders travelled in a much larger world. Cultural interests went deeper and wider. Political ideals transcended the city-state and the national state and there were among Stoic philosophers dreams of a world-wide state ruling over citizens from all races, tongues and nations, dreams of universal brotherhood among all men. The traveller of Euhemerus's story is not a war hero on a homecoming journey, but rather a philosopher seeking knowledge abroad. His journeys took him very far east and south, to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. His utopia (Panchaia) has a cosmopolitan community and its trade is international. Says Ferguson (1975 : 106): "This is an impressive testimony of Alexander's work, for Euhemerus here takes it up and goes beyond it"

Iambulus' utopia is even more advanced in terms of knowledge of the world, of cosmopolitanism, and of psychological and sociological understanding of life. Although his traveller is a trader, not a philosopher, his utopia reflects even wider knowledge of geography and of the various cultures of the world (Persian, Babylonia, Egyptian, Arabian, etc.)

Lucian lived at a time (second century A.D.) when "the humane order and harmonious authority of Rome had turned Utopia into reality" (Ferguson, 1975 : 174). Rome at that time was a world-state, in many ways the embodiment of Stoic ideals of universal brotherhood, cosmopolitanism and the rule of the law under firm, wise and ideal rulers. The period was idealized by Edward Gibbon:

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. (11)

Like most thinkers and writers of this period, Lucian seems to have been satisfied with the general state of human affairs, and was somehow convinced that, as far as practicalities are concerned, the order of existence in his time was as good as human beings could possibly make it. In the manner of conservatives he eyed extremists and utopian dreamers as meddlers and trouble-makers who would disturb the happy balance

rather than improve upon it, and who should be mocked and scorned rather than admired and adored. His **A True Story** mocks Plato, Stoic idealists, Euhemerus and Iambulus. Says Ferguson (1975 : 176): "... the important point is that he has shrewdly hit the real weakness of Iambulus' picture, the element of fantasy therein. Political theory which ignores the hard facts of material existence is in the last resort sterile, and wishful thinking is no substitute for the working out of a sound economic structure".

It was not possible for Rome to remain as the embodiment of the utopian dream. Change, corruption, degeneration and disintegration crept into the economic, social and political body of the Roman Empire. It was not possible to stop the downhill tread of Rome, its decline and fall. In 410 A.D. Rome fell to Alaric. People all over the world were horror-stricken. The general attitude was represented by the heart-breaking question: "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?".

Contemporary Pagans claimed that Christianity with its moonshine talk of turning the other cheek was responsible for this disaster; that it had undermined the military power of Rome and rendered Rome vulnerable. To Augustine this was adding insult to injury. To refute these and other faulty pagan claims and to support the cause of Christianity Augustine wrote **The City of God : Against the Pagans**, or, for short, **The City of God**. It took him fifteen years from inception to completion. The first half of **The City of God** (Books 1 - 10) invalidates two major pagan claims : that worldly prosperity depends on practicing pagan polytheism (Books 1-5); and that polytheistic worship and sacrifices are an investment against life beyond the grave (Books 6 - 10). The second half of **The City of God** (Books 11 - 22) compares and contrasts the city of the world and the city of God, their origins in Cain and Abel (Books 11 - 14), their historical progress (Books 15 - 18), and their proper ends (Books 19 - 22). St. Augustine does not call for the destruction of the city of the world in order to erect the city of God, but rather expounds the dialectical relations between the two cities, the one an inevitable flesh-and-blood reality, the other a mental reality, an utopian vision that should ever be present and active as a corrective against the processes of degeneration and decay in the city of the world. Like Plato's ideal city, the city of God is not meant to be taken as a blue-print; it is rather a pattern laid up in heaven for mankind, for those who have eyes to see, and seeing, practice its principles only (**The Republic**: Book IX).

Thematically, Augustine's **The City of God** is indebted to Plato, Cicero, Plotinus and such Stoics as Marcus Aurelius, as well as the early fathers of the Church. (12) But our concern is with the artistic structure of **The City of God**, since this structure echoes the traditional satirical-utopian structure in most of the early utopian romances and treatises. In Plato's **The Republic** Socrates refutes one misconception after another concerning

the subjects of justice, of the state as its embodiment, and of education as a means of attaining and maintaining the ideal state, etc. In other words, he begins with the wrong, refutes it, dismisses it and thus clears the ground for declaring and expounding what, in his opinion, is right. This device of moving from the negative to the positive has more or less become a tradition in utopian narratives and satires as well, only with few subtle differences. Robert C. Elliott (1970 : 22) gives a succinct statement on this matter:

Satire and Utopia seem naturally compatible if we think of the formal verse satire, usually characterized by two main elements : the predominating negative part which attacks folly or vice, and the understated positive part, which establishes a norm... against which folly and vice are judged. The literary utopia, on the other hand, reverses these proportions of negative and positive.... Even without overt attack on contemporary society, Utopia wears a Janus-face. The portrayal of an ideal commonwealth has a double function: it establishes a standard, a goal; and by virtue of its existence alone it casts a critical light at present constitutions and institutions.

This negative-positive, or satirical-utopian device of arranging the elements of the utopian narrative or treatise is later to be seen in Thomas More's **Utopia** and in Swift's **Gulliver's Travels**, of course with certain ingenious variations.

Another literary device is to turn a social gathering into an occasion from which springs the image of an utopia. This is practiced by Homer, Plato, and Thomas More. In Homer's **The Odyssey** (book 8, p. 138) King Alcinous, at the end of the farewell banquet, addresses his so-far unknown guest in the following manner:

And now I call upon you for a true account of your wanderings. To what parts of the inhabited world did they take you? What lovely cities did you see; what people in them? Did you meet hostile tribes and lawless savages, or did you fall with some friendly and god fearing folk?....

On a similar occasion, small talk and idle gossip gradually and almost imperceptibly turn into a lively discussion among Socrates and his friends (including Glaucon, Cephalos the host, Polemarchos, Thrasymachos and others). This discussion begets **The Republic**. Later social gatherings, with Socrates and his friends present, produce Plato's **The Timaeus** and **The Critias**, called after the names of the principal narrators. The former gives a philosophic account of the origin of the cosmic system and of its development until the rise of the human race. The latter aims at giving an account of the conflict between two kinds of utopia : one is Atlantis which

had bountiful nature and scientific achievement, the other is ancient Athens, a utopia of social solidarity and moral excellence. (13) Similarly, Thomas More's **Utopia** is the outcome of a social gathering in Antwerp, which brought together Thomas More, his young friend Peter Gilles, and Raphael Hytholday. Here again small talk is skilfully turned into a serious conversation which ends in More addressing his guest in the following manner:

More: In that case, my dear Raphael, for goodness' sake tell us some more about the island in question. Don't try to be too concise — give us a detailed account of it from every point of view, geographical, sociological, political, legal ... (More, 1974 : 68).

A literary device which is worth noticing is that which may be called the theory-to-application (or the abstract-to-concrete) movement in the progress of a literary utopia. This can be clearly demonstrated if we view Plato's utopian works (**The Republic**, **Timaeus** and **Cratylus**) as parts of one whole, with **The Republic** standing for the theoretical hypothesis and the remaining two works representing a dramatic actualisation of that hypothesis. (14) This device can also be discerned, though less clearly, in Thomas More's **Utopia**.

Thomas More's Utopia:

In any study of the esthetics of Utopian fiction, More's **Utopia** is worthy of a very special place. For one thing, it has given this literary genre the name it has become known by ever since 1516. Besides, it has solidified the conventions of the genre and has given its form and substance universal appeal and permanent popularity. Third, it has become a germinal work; imitations, in one way or another, of **Utopia** are almost countless. Nevertheless, **Utopia** remains the utopian romance par excellence. It is mostly dealt with for its substance, as a "comment on and reaction to the political, social, and economic scene of the day" (Nelson, 1968 : 8), or for its constitution, its political program, and other serious matters. To be fruitful and constructive, this thematic approach to **Utopia** must be complemented and illuminated by a sound approach to the technical aspects of the work. Otherwise, it would lead to confused and confusing controversies. In C.S. Lewis's view (Nelson, 1968 : 68), **Utopia** "becomes intelligible and delightful as soon as we take it for what it is", not a serious treatise, but a work of art, a "holiday work". Nelson (1968 : 7 - 8) asserts that **Utopia** "came as the culmination of a literary rather than a political career, after More had exercised himself in such typically humanist activities as the writing of Latin epigrams, translation from the Greek (especially from the satirist-humorist Lucian), and historiography".

As an artist, More was characterised by his friend Erasmus as a great man who took great delight in jokes which are not lacking in learning and wit. Turner (More, 1974 : 8) quotes Erasmus as saying that More had "from earliest childhood such a passion for jokes, that one might almost suppose he had been born for them" (**Erasmi Epistolae**, IV, Oxford, 1922, p. 16). Also, in dedicating his work **Praise of Folly** (1508) to his friend More, Erasmus says : "... no one would think so well of this *jeu d'esprit* of mine as you, because you always take such delight in jokes of this kind, that is, ... those which are not lacking in learning and wit" (Erasmus, 1971 : 56).

Learning and wit are key words for the understanding and appreciation of the esthetics of More's **Utopia**. Nelson (1968) and Turner (1974) attest that the form and features of **Utopia** were determined by the literary tradition out of which they grew. That tradition had its roots in the classical heritage which Erasmus, More and all the humanists of the Renaissance were especially familiar with and fond of. More's learning made him familiar with the ideal states of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch (Nelson, 1968 : 8) and with the artistry of the utopian fiction or satire of Homer's **The Odyssey**, Plato's **Dialogues**, the seriocomic mode of Lucian's satires, and the travel tales of Euhemerus, Iambulus and Pliny (Nelson, 1968 : 8 - 9; Turner, 1974 : 16 - 18; Elliott, 1970 : 29 - 33).

But the universal appeal of **Utopia** lies only partially in the Classical learning it echoes or reflects. The secret of the appeal is to be looked for mainly in More's peculiar wit, in those funny, quaint or intriguing literary devices with which he handles the subject matter and the traditional literary conventions. It should be asserted here that neither the subject-matter nor the literary conventions were the invention of More. The ideal state, the traveller-observer-narrator, the sea-voyage, the accidental shipwreck on the shores of the utopian country, the long stay of the traveller-observer-narrator among the citizens of that country, the dialogues and debates he has with them, his return to the real world, the writing and publishing of his report - these and others were already established literary conventions when More wrote his **Utopia**. What is new and original in **Utopia** is More's methods of dealing with these elements, and herein lies More's wit and contribution to the art of utopian fiction.

The first and foremost aspect of this wit is More's coining of the term "utopia". Utopian fiction before More was just a brand of fiction that had no name and no distinguished identity. It could be listed under the "genre of imaginary or extraordinary journey". Gerber (1955 : 87) claims that "Every imaginary or extraordinary journey contains the seeds of utopian romance" and that "an utopia could be regarded as a development of such imaginary journeys". The important point here is that this genre of imaginary journeys remained an undignified nameless tramp among the celebrated genres of

literature until More granted it dignity and conferred upon it the name and title of Utopia. Says Elliott (1970 : 29):

... In one sense, of course, **Utopia** made its own conventions : it is the beginning, it creates its own genre. More was like Adam in the Garden of Eden : his use of the name was constitutive; he named the thing, and this is what it was.

But in another sense, this Adamic form was hardly new at all. Its structure, its use of characters, its subject, its tone - all these have much in common with the conventions of a literary genre firmly ... fixed in literary history. Utopia has the shape and the feel -- it has much of the form -- of Satire.

What is significant in the term "Utopia" is that it is a happy embodiment of the seriocomic mode of expression which has been a favourite mode with satirists of all kinds. Throughout **Utopia** More indulges in the joys and delights of this mode with the fervour and happiness of an innocently mischievous child, and with the craftsmanship of a great master. He intermingles the serious and comic (or positive and negative) elements so skilfully and mischievously as to make it almost impossible for readers and critics to separate one from the other. So adroitly does he play hide and seek with readers that they never know for certain whether he is jesting or in earnest. Says Nelson (1968 : 8):

... The combination of jest and earnest was, of course, no invention of More's, though it was consonant with his habit of telling jokes with a straight face; in both ancient and medieval times the seriocomic mode was perhaps more common than it is today. A few years before More wrote the **Utopia** Erasmus dedicated to him his **Praise of Folly** ..., an oration in which foolishness, mockery, and grave wisdom are inextricably entwined. For this work [**Utopia**], too, disentangling jest from earnest has proved very difficult for modern readers.

More's play with the seriocomic mode takes a number of intriguing forms. One form is the jocular naming of places, people and things in general. More invents a constellation of names which, once their literal meaning is understood, prove to be contradictory with their surface purport. Thus "Utopia" is claimed to be the name of a real country whereas its literal meaning is "no place"; Hytholday, the name of, according to More's claims, the wise and wide-travelled narrator, means "talker of nonsense"; Ademus, the name of the King of Utopia, means "King without people"; Anyder, the name of a river in Utopia, means "waterless river"; the Parliament there is called "Lietalk". Combined with repeated assertions that the country and people and things carrying these names are real, this jocular naming

becomes hilariously delightful and, as far as ascertaining the real intentions and attitudes of the author is concerned, extremely misleading. Arthur Pollard (1970 : 37) says of Swift's **Gulliver's Travels**, the "signposts are too subtly painted or, more serious still, ... they are in the wrong places". This statement applies to More's **Utopia** as well, because all the names in it are, as far as the author's intentions are concerned, misleading signposts.

A second form of More's play with the seriocomic mode can be called the upside-down device (Nelson, 1968 : 8). This consists in the transvaluation of traditional and firmly established values, and finally coming up with startling inverted judgments. Thus silver, gold and jewels which in the real world are highly valued become in Utopia objects of ridicule and scorn. They are used for punishing slaves, humiliating criminals or amusing children (More, 1974 : 86 - 88). This view is explained first by exposition and then by a dramatic illustration (the story of the three Flatulentile diplomats visiting Utopia, which provides a delightful anecdote). Another example of this upside-down device is to be found in the utopians' habit of exhibiting the prospective bride and bridegroom quite naked to one another in order to give each a concrete evidence that the other has no physical deformity hidden under the wrappings (More, 1974 : 103 - 104).

More's handling of the sea-voyage also conforms to the seriocomic mode. Unlike previous utopian stories, **Utopia** is not written and published by the traveller-observer-narrator himself. Hytholday didn't even request that his oral report be written down. Nor did Thomas More ask for Hytholday's permission to do so (More, 1974 : 31). In fact, **Utopia** is a second-hand report of the sea-voyage, the arrival to, stay in, and return from Utopia. But in the manner of Lucian, More offers a fictional story as a true account. To support this claim More uses the methods of Iambulus, and thus grafts the fictitious travels of Hytholday on to the historical travels of Amerigo Vespucci. Further support is given by the ironic device of mock-precision, especially in trivial matters such as the length of the bridge across the river Nowater. Here More asserts that he is extremely anxious to get his facts right and that he'd much rather be thought honest than clever (More, 1974 : 30). But when the serious problem concerning the exact geographical location of Utopia arises More resorts to downright clowning. In his letter to Peter Gilles, More (1974 : 30 - 31) says : "... we never thought of asking, and he never thought of telling us whereabouts in the New World Utopia is". "You see", writes Peter Gilles, "just as Raphael was touching on the subject, a servant came up to More and whispered something in his ear. And ... at the critical moment one of his colleagues started coughing rather loudly... so that the rest of Raphael's sentence was completely inaudible" (More, 1974 : 34).

More's treatment of the traveller-observer-narrator is even more subtle in

its combination of jesting and seriousness. This seriocomic combination is seen in the full name of Raphael Hytholday. Turner says (More, 1974 : 8) that

Raphael is Hebrew for 'God has healed'... So the name is quite appropriate for a character who tries to open people's eyes to the causes of social evils, and the sources of prosperity.

Raphael, then, is the serious element in the full name. It receives confirmation and corroboration from Peter Gilles' account of him (More, 1974 : 38) : "...there's not a man alive today who can tell you so many stories about strange countries and their inhabitants as he can". When *persona* More says that he thought the man to be a sailor Peter corrects him by saying that Raphael is not an ordinary careless professional sailor, but

... he's really more like Ulysses, or even Plato. You see, our friend Raphael... is quite a scholar. He knows a fair amount of Latin and a tremendous lot of Greek. He's concentrated on Greek, because he's mainly interested in philosophy.... He wanted to see the world, so he left his brothers to manage his property in Portugal... and joined up with Amerigo Vespucci.

The comic element in the full name is represented by the last name, Hytholday, which means "talker of nonsense". This would provide intelligent readers with amusement and perhaps secure their sympathetic attention for the serious social and moral message this philosopher conveys. On the other hand, this is a technique which would provide author More with protection. Turner (More, 1974 : 10) says that this "protective technique"

was designed not only to entertain, but also to create a context in which More could say what he liked, without laying himself open to too much criticism. It enabled him, in an age when rash expressions of opinion were apt to land one in the Tower, to disclaim responsibility for any view that could be considered subversive. This was quite in keeping with his apparent habit of dodging about behind a smoke-screen of humour.

But Raphael Hytholday is not as Turner seems to suggest, just a protective smoke-screen, nor is he always the author More in disguise. For there are occasions in **Utopia** when the author More is torn between two attitudes, that of the uncompromising idealist or man of principles, and that of the discreet realist or prudential man of action. Raphael Hytholday represents only the former, the idealist who never budges from his principles and who would remain only God's servant. The latter is represented by *persona* More, the realist who would try to strike a balance between the realities of this fallen world without sacrificing his principles,

and thus be "The King's good servant but God's first". It is to be noticed that **Utopia** consists of two books. The second book was written first, in 1515, and was devoted to the description of the country Utopia and its society. Here Raphael Hytholday is the traditional traveller-observer-narrator of utopian fiction. The first book was written a year later. It seems to have come as an afterthought. Here Raphael Hytholday is given a new dimension, that of the Cynic philosopher, Menippus who, in Lucian's **A True Story**, plays the role of traveller. But in the first book of **Utopia** Raphael becomes a major contestant in a debate concerning three contemporary issues: the domestic policy, the foreign policy in contemporary England, and author More's contemporary personal problem of whether he, as a self-respecting Christian and philosopher, should accept service at the English Court.

David M. Bevington gives a superb discussion of this debate in an article entitled "The Dialogue in **Utopia** : Two sides to the Question" (1961) (15). Bevington sees that "**Utopia** has lent itself to such divergence of opinion" because of its "dialogue" in which Hytholday and *persona* More present two fundamental and sometimes opposed views on the questions debated. Critics are therefore divided into three groups. First, those who believe that *persona* More represents author More and that "Hytholday is a dangerous public enemy whose dogmas are explicated only to be exploded". (16) Second, those who assert that Hytholday is the mouthpiece of author More, while *persona* More is only a protective device that would relieve author More of the responsibility for Hytholday's radical political philosophy. (17) The third group is generally of the opinion that "More's personal attitude is manifested absolutely and unconditionally in neither *persona* More or Hytholday, but in both" (Surtz, 1957 : 182) (18).

Bevington himself belongs to this third group of critics. To explain and justify his views, Bevington distinguishes three kinds of literary dialogue: the polemical dialogue used for purposes of refutation and for demonstrating the superiority of one idea over another; dramatic dialogue where characters speak as representatives of many divisions of humanity and where it would be unwise to identify the author with anyone of the characters; and the balanced, two-sided dialogue which is parallel to the proceedings of a court trial (Nelson, 1958 : 78 - 79). Being a lawyer and judge, More was by training, profession and temperament "inclined to grant any worthy cause a hearing and to arrive at the truth of the matter by the legal process of approaching every issue from two opposing viewpoints". The upshot of Bevington's discussion of the debate concerning whether or not a philosopher should serve at Court, is that both Hytholday and *persona* More represent two seemingly irreconcilable aspects of author More's mind in the years 1515 - 1516. Thomas More had at that time to make a personal decision concerning Henry VIII's request for his [More's] wise counsel, and

More projected his internal debate with himself on the fictional dialogue in Book I of **Utopia** between Hythoday and *persona* More. Both refuse Peter Gilles suggestion that service at Court brings personal gain; they also agree that this service would rather entail personal loss and discomfort, and that notwithstanding, it is worth undergoing, if self-sacrifice would produce public benefit. Concerning this "if" they differ: Hythoday absolutely denies the possibility of public benefit; *persona* More takes a cautious but hopeful attitude, and declares that it is possible, though extremely dangerous, to be at the same time a counsellor of state and a man of principle. To Thomas More, it was dangerous indeed. It cost him his life.

What is artistically new here is that More gives the traditional traveller-observer-narrator a new function, that of a principal debater in a panel discussion on the various aspects of some current issues. This is to a great extent similar to Plato's practice in **The Dialogues**, but with an important difference. In Plato's works most participants act as stooges to Socrates. In **Utopia** only Peter Gilles may be said to play a minor role, whereas Hythoday and *persona* More prod one another to dig deeper into the issues under debate in order to arrive at still unexplored aspects. Hythoday and *persona* More cannot arrive at full agreement because they reflect two different vantage points, the one philosophical, the other Christian. They extend the area of agreement and consequently bring the points of disagreement to the irreducible minimum. *Persona* More is bound, because of his faith that man is in a postlapsarian condition, to declare that "things will never be perfect, until human beings are perfect -- which I don't expect them to be..." (More, 1974 : 64). Also for prudential reasons *persona* More must conclude:

"... I cannot agree with everything that he [Hythoday] said, for all his undoubted learning and experience. But I freely admit that there are many features of the Utopian Republic which I should like -- though I hardly expect -- to see adopted in our states" (More, 1974 : 132).

Conclusion:

It has been pointed out that utopian fiction goes as far back as Homer. In **The Odyssey** it takes the form of an episode or a story within a story. The story of Odysseus' arrival at and stay in Phaeacia was not intended independently; it was just a brick in the large fabric of the homecoming adventures of a war hero.

Plato's **The Critias** is an unfinished utopian story intended as a visual dynamic image of the utopian hypothesis already established in **The Republic**. Thus **The Republic** and **The Critias** complement one another: the former is a theoretical hypothesis, the latter its concrete and historical

counterpart. But **The Critias** has characteristics of its own. It is fiction posing as true history. Says Socrates (Plato, 1971 : 39) "... it is a great point in its favour that it is not a fiction but true history". **The Critias** therefore has no traveller-observer-narrator and no sea voyages; it is rather a voyage in time, claiming to give a description of a utopian Athens which existed nine thousand years ago, before it was destroyed by the deluge. **The Critias** has certain artistic tricks and a subtle strain of humour particularly its own: it was orally transmitted from generation to generation down to seven generations. An Egyptian priest tells it to Solon when the latter goes to Egypt. From Solon it comes down to Dropides, then down to his son Critias, the grandfather of Plato's Critias. Critias senior is ninety years old when he tells it to grandson Critias Junior who is only ten. Critias Junior grows up into a man and a friend of Socrates. When he hears Socrates' description of the ideal society, he is reminded of Solon's account of ancient Athens, and notices, with astonishment, that Socrates' description coincides with Solon's narration (Plato, 1974 : 33 - 38). So, Critias decides to tell the story. After years, Plato writes it down.

It was Euhemerus who laid down the esthetic traditions of the utopian story proper which stands in its own right and on its own merits and demerits. The artistic pattern of **The Sacred Inscription** was later to be copied, with some variations, by most utopian romancers. The traveller-observer-narrator who relates the story of his adventures and observations in the first-person; the sea voyage; the accidental arrival to utopia; the long stay there; the ejection from utopia; the return voyage; and finally the writing and publishing of the whole story -- all these elements are found in Euhemerus work, and become established traditions thereafter.

Iambulus follows the example of Euhemerus, but his traveller-narrator is not a court official taking to sea at the order of his master, but rather a self-seeking trader who takes travel in the line of business. Iambulus' timing is more accurate, his geography wider and clearer, and his realism is more convincing. His **Island of the Sun** lives up to what Richard Gerber (1955 : 87ff) calls "the technique of fantastic realism", since it has enough convincing logic and enough objective and concrete evidence to create the illusion of reality and verisimilitude. At the same time, the realistic elements in it are sufficient to attain and maintain suspension of disbelief. Nevertheless, it has smuggled in it a substantial amount of fiction and fantasy, which, however, does not go beyond the limits of the contemporary sense of the realistic.

Lucian's **A True Story** is a good example of what Gerber (1955 : 91 - 104) designates "ironical realism", or of what may be called "mock-realism". Lucian presents purely fantastic elements and brazenly claims that his story is true, knowing beforehand that no one will take him seriously. Lucian's

mock-realism has satirical aims, namely to discredit the claims of previous utopian fictions (i.e. Plato's **The Critias**, Euhemerus' **The Sacred Inscription**, and Iambulus' **The Island of the Sun**) to truthfulness.

More's **Utopia** combines both the fantastic and the ironical realism. Fantasy it has in abundance. The utopians' attitude to gold and jewels, their religious toleration, their egalitarianism and communism, their habit of showing prospective couples naked to one another --- all these and others were fantastic things to More's contemporaries. **Utopia** also abounds in irony, such as the names which purport something and mean the opposite, the inquiry concerning the length of the bridge across the river, the question of the geographic location of Utopia, and the anecdote of the theologian who wants to go to Utopia to "foster the growth of Christianity" and to be appointed "Bishop of Utopia". Nevertheless, **Utopia** remains basically a realistic story; it is fundamentally objective, logical, and convincing.

According to Berger (1955), fantastic realism involves two artistic devices. One is called the assertive device. This is often practiced in the wording of the title or subtitle which describes the whole narrative as an "account", a "description", a "discovery" or "history". This is further supported with the introduction of a narrator, sometimes with a spurious genealogy and impressive personal history, who relates the story in the manner of an eye-witness and in the first person singular. A third assertive technique is the grafting of fictional elements on well-known historical facts. Hythoday's travels are thus incorporated into those of Amerigo Vespucci.

The second device of fantastic realism is evasion. It aims at making it difficult for inquisitive readers and critics to prove or disprove beyond doubt the reliability and truthfulness of the utopian narrative. Plato ascribes the story of **The Critias** to unreliable oral tradition. Those who had related it were either dead or too old (ninety), or were too young (ten) when they heard about it. Questionable pieces of information are therefore beyond correction, or they are explained away by virtue of the imperfection of the narrators' memory. More explains the ambiguity of Utopia's geographic location by silly accidents (a servant comes in to whisper something in More's ear, thus distracting his attention at the critical moment; and somebody starts coughing aloud, thus preventing Peter Gilles from hearing clearly what Hythoday was saying). When pressed to remove this ambiguity, he shows laudable readiness to do so, "if our friend Raphael is still safe and sound, for I've heard several different stories about him. Some say... he has died. Others that he has gone back to his own country. Others again that he has returned to Utopia" (More, 1974 : 34). As for his real intentions and attitudes, More invents or falls upon other devices of evasion, already explained.

Finally, it should be mentioned here that utopian fiction has been facing, since its beginning, a chronic artistic problem, namely, how to strike a balance between wit and learning, between the artistic form and didactic content, between the need to be delightful and attractive and the desire to be useful and corrective. Until Thomas More's **Utopia**, utopian fiction has been adversely affected by the preponderance of ideas over artistic elements such as plot, action, and characterisation. A writer's ingenuity and invention are given only a very narrow scope when esthetics are concerned. The fetters on imaginative handling of the material, imposed either by tradition or by the nature of the material, are too tight, often suffocating. Gerber (1955) deals with this problem at length in the third part of his book, **Utopian Fantasy**. Gerber claims that the line of development starts with "fantastic realism", moves towards "ironical realism", then "symbolical journeys", and finally towards the "utopian novel". But Elliott (1970 : 128) sees some intrinsic difficulties that block the development of utopian fiction into the utopian novel. Part of his argument is founded on the thesis that great art thrives only in barbaric life conditions, and that utopia, by its very nature, precludes the rise of great art. Says Elliott (1970 : 127):

To the degree that a literary artist helps bring about the conditions of utopia, he contributes to the death -- or at least to the severe debilitation - of his art. It is a genuine dilemma.

But this is anticipating. This paper ends with Thomas More's **Utopia** (1516). Between 1516 and 1949, many great masters were to rise and leave their stamp on the esthetics of utopian fiction. The discussion of the contributions to this field of such masters as Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Bulter, H.G. Wells, E.M. Forster, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, will be the subject of papers to follow.

NOTES

1. Oddly enough, Ferguson ignores utopian elements in Greek drama, such as the utopian and anti-utopian elements in Aristophanes' **Lysistrata** and **Ecclesiazusae**. For information on this point see Berneri (1971 : 45 - 51).
2. See Richard Gravil (ed.), **Swift : Gulliver's Travels : A Casebook** (London : Macmillan, 1974).
3. These are but few examples of such works. It is not our intention here to give a comprehensive list. Others will be mentioned as we move forward in this paper.
4. See Paul Turner (tr.), **Thomas More : Utopia** (Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 4, 17; see also Erasmus, **Praise of Folly**, trans. by Betty Radice

- and introduction by A.H.T. Levi (Penguin Books, 1975) pp. 7, 38 - 39, 58. For further information on Lucian's **A True Story** see John Ferguson, **Utopias of the Classical World** (London : Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp. 174 - 176.
5. The word "Cacotopia" means evil or bad place, whereas "Eutopia" means happy place. "Utopia" means no place. Notice that the difference between "Cacotopia" and "Eutopia" stems not from the difference in nature or in the weather, but from the difference in the social characteristics of their inhabitants.
 6. My emphasis.
 7. For detailed information about Iambulus' thematic debts to Euhemerus, Homer, the Stoics Zeno and Blossius, and to Aristotle, and also to a certain number of legends, fantasies and traveller's tales, see Ferguson, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 126 - 129.
 8. These "islands in the air" of Lucian may have inspired Swift's "flying island" in Gulliver's voyage to Laputa.
 9. Compare with the magnifying technique which was later used by Swift in Gulliver's second voyage to Brobdingnag.
 10. The information in this paragraph is all taken from Ferguson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 175.
 11. Edward Gibbon, **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire** (first published 1776), C. iii.
Domitian is the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Domitianus Augustus who died in 96 A.D. Commodus is the Roman Emperor Lucius Aelius Aurelius who succeeded to the throne in 161 A.D. So the happy period Gibbon is referring to extends from 96 to 161 A.D. This period had some great and ideal Roman emperors such as Trajan who ruled from 98 to 117 A.D., and his successor Hadrian who ruled from 117 to 138 A.D.
 12. Ferguson, **op. cit.**, pp. 183 - 188.
 13. For further information on Plato's **The Timaeus** and **The Critias** see Plato, **Timaeus and Critias**, trans. by Desmond Lee (Penguin Classics, 1971); see also A.E. Taylor, **Plato: The Man and His Work** (New York : Meridian Books, 1960) pp. 436 - 462.
 14. This view is that of Socrates himself who says that he feels that his ideal society and citizens of **The Republic** are like animals in a picture, splendid but motionless, and that "he wants to see them moving and engaging in some of the activities for which they appear to be formed". He also says he "would be glad to hear some account of that society engaging in transactions with other states.... and showing in the process all the qualities one would expect from its system of education and training" (Plato, 1971 : 31). Socrates claims that he does not have the talents for such a work, and therefore calls upon

- Critias and Timaeus who have talent and training in such matters to do it for him (Plato, 1971 : 32).
15. This article is reprinted in William Nelson, **Twentieth Century Interpretations of Utopia** (N.J., Englewood Cliffs; Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), pp. 76 - 87, under the title. "The Divided Mind".
 16. Representatives of this group are:
W.E. Campbell, **More's Utopia and His Social Teaching** (London : Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1930); H.W. Donner, **Introduction to Utopia** (London : Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1945).
 17. Champions of this group are:
Karl Kautsky, **Thomas More and His Utopia**, trans. by H. Stenning (New York: International Publishers, 1927); Russell Ames, **Citizen Thomas More and His Utopia** (N.J., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).
 18. The pioneer in this direction is Sir James MacKintosh who suggests that More regarded various aspects of his **Utopia** "with almost every possible degree of approbation and shade of assent" (quoted in J.H. Lupton, ed., **The Utopia of Sir Thomas More** (Oxford, 1895), p. XII. Other supporters of this view are:
Edward L. Surtz, S.J., **The Praise of Pleasure: Philosophy, Education, and Communism in More's Utopia** (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1957;
see also, Surtz, "Thomas More and Communism" **PMLA**, LXIV (1949), 549 - 64;
R.J. Schoeck, "More, Plutarch, and King Agis: Spartan History and the Meaning of Utopia", **PQ**, XXXV (1956), 336 - 75;
Fritz Caspari, **Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England** (Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 50-75.

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