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Résumé de l'article

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"Real versus ideal": *Utopia* and the Early Modern Satirical Tradition

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Building on previous studies of satire in Thomas More's Utopia, *this article aims at situating More's founding text of utopian literature more firmly in the early modern satirical tradition, a tradition that gradually dissociated itself from its conventional generic definition informed by classical Roman verse* satura. *Key concerns of the analysis touch on the pedagogical function, the dialogic engagement with the reader, and the social reforming spirit that transform satire into a mode and help it incorporate the utopian mindset into its characteristic juxtaposition of blame (of a heavily flawed reality) and praise (of a desirable ideal state of existence). More's masterpiece is essential in illustrating and promoting this development of early modern satire, as references to an immediate predecessor—the* Ship of Fools *corpus—as well as a famous successor—François Rabelais—demonstrate.*

*À partir d'études de la satire dans l'*Utopie *de More, cet article cherche à ancrer plus solidement ce texte utopique dans la tradition satirique de la première modernité, tradition qui s'est graduellement dissociée de la définition générale du genre satirique basée sur la satire classique romaine. Les points principaux de l'analyse mettent en lumière la fonction pédagogique, l'engagement dialogique avec le lecteur et l'esprit de réforme sociale, qui transforment la satire en y intégrant la pensée utopique en tant que façon d'exprimer le blâme (d'une réalité sérieusement déficiente) et la louange (d'un mode hautement souhaitable d'exister). Le chef-d'œuvre de More occupe une place centrale dans ce développement de la satire des débuts de la modernité, lorsqu'il est situé dans les contextes qui le précèdent immédiatement — le corpus de la* Nef des fous *—, et le suivent glorieusement — l'œuvre de François Rabelais.*

Academic discourse has touched on a wide variety of topics in its discussions of the founding text of modern utopian literature, Thomas More's 1516 masterpiece *Utopia*, especially the author's social criticism, his political theories, and his take on humanism, or more "literary" concerns such as rhetoric, irony, or narrative techniques, concepts that inform early modern satirical discourse to a large extent.[1] What is all the more striking in this context, however, is the relative scarcity of studies of the text's satirical qualities. One could argue, of

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1. See the compact overview in my edition of reference: Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. G. M. Logan (New York and London: Norton, 2011), 157–59, hereafter cited in the text. Unless noted otherwise, all my quotations from *Utopia* will be taken from this edition. I would like to acknowledge the anonymous evaluators' helpful suggestions. They have helped me avoid a number of errors and omissions.

course, in the light of the fields of critical investigation listed above, that the satirical bent is almost taken for granted and appears too obvious to explore in depth.[2] Among the important studies that touch on satire in Thomas More's masterpiece, one has to mention the work of A. R. Heiserman, of Robert C. Elliott, of Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel, as well as of Warren W. Wooden.[3] Whereas these studies aim at defining the place of *Utopia* in the satirical tradition, first and foremost the Horatian *utile dulci mixtum*, a placement in the larger satirical context of its time is not at the forefront of their interests, despite the frequent mention of Erasmus or even the occasional reference to writers such as Rabelais.[4] This approach seems to illustrate a traditional perception of satire which was still widespread at the time: in the early sixteenth century, satire was still widely considered a separate and well-defined genre in the tradition of Roman *satura*, represented by its main models Lucilius, Horace, Persius, and Juvenal. This predominantly generic definition of satire was slow to evolve; however, toward the end of the fifteenth century we see a shift towards purpose or mode and away from genre, and the gradual shift is palpable in the aforementioned scholarly analyses. Robert C. Elliott offers a

2. Introductory remarks to at least two of the widely used modern paperback editions open with statements implying the satirical status of the text; see Logan, "*Utopia* is one of those mercurial, *jocoserious* writings that turn a new profile to every advancing generation, and respond in a different way to every set of questions addressed to them" (ix, emphasis added). See also Paul Turner's remarks in his edition of *Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2003), focusing on the two major influences for More's satire, Horace and Lucian: "[The book] professes, like Horace's *Satires*, to 'tell the truth with a laugh', or, like Lucian's *True History*, 'not merely to be witty and entertaining, but also to say something interesting'" (xi). Two notable exceptions to the scarcity of studies on More's satire are Frederic Seebohm's seminal *The Oxford Reformers: John Colet, Erasmus, and Thomas More* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1867), excerpted in Logan, 159–62; and W. Scott Blanchard, "Renaissance Prose Satire: Italy and England," in *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Ruben Quintero (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405119559_chunk_g978140511955911.

3. A. R. Heiserman, "Satire in the *Utopia*," *PMLA* 78 (1963): 163–74; Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Warren W. Wooden, "Anti-Scholastic Satire in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 8.2 (1977): 29–45.

4. Manuel and Manuel, 134–35, where the critics locate the resemblance between *Utopia*, the *Moriae Encomium*, and *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in the "temper of the works," proceeding to a few comments on the paradox that informs two Rabelaisian utopias, the Abbey of Thelema and Panurge's "City of Debtors" at the beginning of the *Third Book*.

judicious take: "Utopia has the shape and the feel—it has much of the form—of satire. It is useful to think of it as a prose version with variations of the formal verse satire composed by Horace, Persius, and Juvenal."[5] Such an evolution is most likely due to the emergence or reemergence of other important forms of satirical expression, especially the Menippean variant popularized by Lucian of Samosatus, who served as an illustration of cynical *parrhesia*.[6] The Greek cynic proved particularly influential for the development of early modern satire in general and Thomas More's understanding of the form in particular. It is noteworthy that between 1470 and 1600 we count some 330 editions and translations of Lucian's *Works* published in Europe, not least the partial Latin translations by Erasmus and More preceding their respective masterpieces, *Praise of Folly* and *Utopia*. As the Manuels insist at the very beginning of their monumental study, utopias adhered to "traditional literary devices that More himself had received from Lucian of Samosata."[7] The epistemological confusion surrounding satire was about to reach its height, precipitating a shift from clearly defined genre to a more fluid mode, hence the attempt at establishing a sketch of a literary contextualization of satire in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries within the narrow confines of this article. This approach might ultimately lead to further, more thorough studies of the contemporary impact and role of More's satire, but the present sketch aims to yield an initial crop of fruitful insights into the nature of the text in general as well as some of the major points of scholarly discussion, such as the question of whether More's utopian construct was meant to be a serious attempt at promoting an ideal, attainable model society or whether, on the contrary, it was all merely a joke.

The early modern period has often been called the golden age of satire. New perspectives open up in all realms of human existence and the ensuing

5. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia*, 29.

6. Elliot writes, "The satirist has always maintained that he must blurt out the truth, whatever the cost" (*The Shape of Utopia*, 38). For the various influences on Renaissance satire and this more eclectic satirical mixture that defines the Renaissance incarnations of the form, see my "From *Satura* to *Satyre*: François Rabelais and the Renaissance Appropriation of a Genre," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67.2 (2014): 377–424, 377–89. For the impact of the Satyr-play, see Françoise Lavocat, *La syrinx au bûcher. Pan et les satyres à la Renaissance et à l'âge baroque* (Geneva: Droz, 2005), 234–90. For cynicism, see Michèle Clément, *Le Cynisme à la Renaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 2005) and Hugh Roberts, *Dogs' Tales: Representations of Ancient Cynicism in French Renaissance Texts* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

7. Manual and Manuel, 1. See, above all, Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate et le lucianisme en France au XVIᵉ siècle. Athéisme et polémique* (Geneva: Droz, 1988).

sweeping changes are manifest in More's conception of an alternative social, political, and religious order. It is in this respect that More's vision promotes the corrective action that is at the heart of satirical discourse. Indeed, early modern satire in particular addresses many of the issues that have been linked to More's *Utopia*: first and foremost the opposition between the real and the ideal, a dichotomy that Friedrich Schiller placed prominently at the heart of satirical hermeneutics;[8] second, the related topos of the *mundus inversus* that can be traced to the influential Lucianic model; finally, rhetorical models of discourse alternating between praise and blame, or moralizing and entertaining approaches in the wake of Horatian and Juvenalian *satura*.[9] Satire is undoubtedly the literary form of expression that is closest to extraliterary reality while showing a clear pedagogical bent (hence also the overlap, and sometimes confusion, with historiographical or moralizing writing). Therefore, it provides a powerful framework for bringing about real-life change, frequently behind the protective veils of humour, erudition, or vulgarity. Elliott precisely locates the structural and functional links between the modes of satire and utopia in the play between the positive ideal, realm of the utopia, and the negative real, domain of satirical criticism. Utopia thus becomes a vital tool of early modern satire by strengthening the constructive, pedagogical facet that is particularly pronounced in the Horatian and Lucianic models.[10]

8. Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002), 39: "Satyrisch ist der Dichter, wenn er die Entfernung von der Natur und den Widerspruch der Wirklichkeit mit dem Ideale […] zu seinem Gegenstande macht. Dieβ kann er aber sowohl ernsthaft und mit Affekt, als scherzhaft und mit Heiterkeit ausführen; je nachdem er entweder im Gebiethe des Willens oder im Gebiethe des Verstandes verweilt. Jenes geschieht durch die *strafende*, oder pathetische, dieses durch die *scherzhafte* Satyre." (A poet is satirical when he chooses as subject of his text the distance from nature and the contrast between the real and the ideal. He can do this either seriously and with affect or in a playful and amusing fashion, depending on whether he is in the domain of the will or in the domain of reason. The former is subject to punishing, or pathetic satire, the latter to playful satire.) My translation.

9. For broad overviews of these topics, see Sophie Duval and Marc Martinez, *La Satire (littératures française et anglaise)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2000), and Quintero, ed., *A Companion to Satire*. For satirical praise and blame, see Annette Tomarken, *The Smile of Truth: The French Satirical Eulogy and Its Antecedents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). For the inverted world, see Lucie Desjardins, ed., *Les figures du monde renversé de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Hermann, 2013).

10. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia*, ix, 3, and especially 22: "Satire and utopia seem naturally compatible if we think of the structure of formal verse satire, usually characterized by two main elements: the predominating negative part, which attacks folly or vice, and the understated positive part,

As for the shift in the definition of satire, it is worth looking briefly at Jakob Locher, the Latin translator of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*, *The Ship of Fools* (1494), who was adamant about the satirical qualities of his master's bestseller all throughout several of the almost two dozen introductory texts that he added to his 1497 translation, the *Stultifera Navis*: "Quam satyram vocitare queo, nam candida pangit / Munera virtutum conterit atque probrum" (I can call it satire, as it sings the glorious gifts of virtue and crushes vice), as he puts it in a programmatic epigram addressed to his readers.[11] True to Locher's ambitions, this important Latin adaptation of one of the first bestsellers of a contemporary author in the age of the printing press is the basis for the quickly following translations in many European vernaculars (especially French, Flemish, and English) that would be published as early as 1497, many of them in prose.[12] It perfectly illustrates, therefore, the aforementioned shift in early modern satire, privileging attitude, purpose, or style at the expense of predominantly generic qualities. As a mode, satire will henceforth be defined by what it is trying to achieve and how it is trying to achieve it. The two major epistemological models remain the Horatian *ridentem dicere verum* and the Juvenalian *indignatio facit versum*, respectively the markers of, on the one hand, a more playful and, on the other, a more punishing satire. This dichotomy will quickly come to correspond to the aspirations to heal either more harmless follies or more serious crimes, even though this separation is much less clear-cut in the texts of Horace and Juvenal and will remain so in More.[13] What changes with the "rediscovery" of Lucian for his disciples, Erasmus and More, with regards to poetics and rhetoric, at least in the realm of satire, is the much more pronounced influence of irony, the dialogic (and therefore less rigidly didactic) structure, the nature of the real/ideal dichotomy, and the more synthetic mixture of *historia* and *fabula* in

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which establishes a norm, a standard of excellence against which folly and vice are judged. The literary utopia […] reverses these proportions of negative and positive […] presentation of the ideal overweighing the prescriptive attack on the bad old days which Utopia has happily transcended" (22).

11. Nina Hartl, *Die* Stultifera Navis. *Jakob Lochers Übertragung von Sebastian Brants* Narrenschiff, 2 vols. (Münster: Waxmann, 2001), 2:28. All English translations of Hartl's text are mine.

12. See Anne-Laure Metzger-Rambach, *"Le texte emprunté." Étude compare du* Narrenschiff *de Sebastian Brant et de ses adaptations (1494–1509)* (Paris: Champion, 2008).

13. See for example, Horace's defense of critical, even violent speech as well his subtle criticism of his predecessor Lucilius's style, in *Satires*, book 1, satire 4.

favour of the notion of *argumentum* as described in the *Ad Herennium*, usually attributed to Cicero:[14]

> Id quod in negotiorum expositione positum est, tres habet partes: fabulam, historiam, argumentum. Fabula est, quae neque ueras, neque ueri similes continet res, ut eae sunt quae tragoediis traditae sunt. Historia est gesta res, sed ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota. Argumentum est ficta res, quae tamen fieri potuit, uelut argumenta com[o]ediarum.

We recognize here a more nuanced version of what Aristotle had already proclaimed in his *Poetics*, of course: "It is also clear [...] that the function of the poet is not to say what has happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e., what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity."[15] These major notions of early modern satire inform *Utopia* and turn the text into an influential model of satirical writing, as my analysis will attempt to show.[16]

The clear distinction between *fabula* and *argumentum*, two types of fiction with the latter functioning strictly within the realm of "probability or necessity," is very helpful in defining More's satirical undertaking, especially in addressing the treatise/fiction dichotomy identified by critics in *Utopia*.[17] The rhetorical triptych emphasizes the significance of the intermediate category, the *argumentum*, i.e., what could have (or should have) happened,

14. Rhetorica ad Herennium, I, 12: "What consists of describing actions is made up of three parts: fable, history, fiction. Fable contains elements that are neither true nor likely, such as the ones in tragedy. History contains events that took place, but in an earlier period. Fiction is an invented story that nonetheless could have taken place, such as the themes of comedy." *Argumentum* ("what could have or should happen") therefore functions as a category mediating between historically accurate accounts (*historia*) and fictional inventions (*fabula*). Without recurring to classical treatises, Elliott points out that "the very presentation of Utopian life has a satiric function insofar as it points up the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be" (*The Shape of Utopia*, 42). For the concept of dialogism, see above all Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

15. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (Penguin, 1997), 51b.

16. See my "From *Satura* to *Satyre*," and *"Difficile est saturam non scribere": L'herméneutique de la satire rabelaisienne, Études rabelaisiennes* 45 (Geneva: Droz, 2007), for more detailed accounts of early modern satirical mixture.

17. See David Marsh's useful comments on truth and fiction in *Lucian and the Latins* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

which accommodates satirical criticism marvellously, and it is frequently conveyed through irony and dialogue. This "argumentative" approach is also tailor-made for the confrontation of the ideal and the real while enabling us to further refine the vital distinction between factual truth and truth of ideas, two types of "realism" that constitute a staple of satirical discourse. The *argumentum* thus allows for the dominance of the truth of ideas in a fictional but probable context, opposing a deplorable historical reality to an ideal state of affairs, whether or not the latter is deemed attainable. Such challenges seemed especially widespread at a time that saw long-held beliefs and dogmatic truths shaken by ground-breaking innovations, inventions, and discoveries (from the printing press to the discovery of the New World), that favoured the spreading of new ideas. Relying solely on the power of the verb to spur the diligent reader into action and its capacity to "jest in earnest" for "truth itself [to be] brought into question," as More puts it in book 1 (26, 31), satire is a major weapon in the fight of the weak against religious and political authorities.[18] This premise is illustrated brilliantly at the beginning of Lucian's *True History*: "I shall at least be truthful in saying that I am a liar. I can escape the censure of the world by my own admission that I am not telling a word of truth. […] Therefore my readers should on no account believe in [my stories]."[19] Like Rabelais's narrator in the prologue to *Pantagruel*, More's narrator and Raphael Hythloday, "peddler of nonsense," reverse the Lucianic paradigm and with subtle irony claim the exact opposite to challenge the reader to decode their construct while keeping intact a semblance of their protective mask.[20]

The main part of this article will be informed by two major concerns: 1) an attempt to situate *Utopia* within the satirical tradition, briefly going back to Lucian of Samosatus and, more extensively, to the *Ship of Fools*-corpus; 2) an examination of More's way of subscribing to that tradition while emerging

18. For the magical powers of the satirical verb, its basic weapon in its endeavour to heal the ills of society, see Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

19. Lucian, *Works*, vol. 1, ed. A. M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), 253.

20. See Douglas Duncan's comments on Lucianic satirical intentionality, consisting of "coaxing rigid minds out of their reliance on scholastic formulae, and persuading them to welcome complexity in a spirit of witty and liberal inquiry" (*Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 69), quoted in Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 46.

at the same time, in this pivotal moment of satirical writing, as an important contributor to a movement that renews and transforms satire into a major tool of social change on the eve of the Reformation (alongside eminent satirists such as Sebastian Brant, Jakob Locher, Erasmus, and François Rabelais). This new brand of Renaissance satire marked by a synthesis of esthetic, ethical, and didactic concerns will inform many of the major texts of European humanism. As insinuated, most comments on satire in *Utopia* have concentrated on what could be called concrete satire, i.e., more or less easily identifiable political, religious, and social criticism of contemporary historical conditions, especially in England, as well as on borrowings from Roman satirists. Within the framework defined above, I would like to propose a more abstract approach here, focusing on satirical strategies and structures rather than on concrete historical targets, in order to shed more light on the functioning and role of the form in the early sixteenth century, while underlining the important status of *Utopia* in the evolution of satire at this critical juncture. My analysis will touch on the following main issues: the role of satirical laughter, with special attention to irony; the concepts of virtue and values, with an attempt to use More's treatment of both notions as an illustration of the satirical strategies at play at the time by looking briefly at Jakob Locher's *Stultifera Navis* and Rabelais; and the interplay between monological and dialogical satire, one of the main characteristics of early modern incarnations of the form, which informs the central real/ideal dichotomy at the heart of satirical discourse.

Before getting to satirical laughter in more concrete terms, a brief sketch of the Lucianic framework for early modern satire in general and More's illustration in particular seems helpful. As for the Greek cynic's influence on *Utopia*, the main textual references have been the *Saturnalian Letters* and above all *True History* and its fantastical voyages allegorizing the (mostly grotesque) "Other."[21] If we look at the rhetorical framework that informs the formation of modern satire, however, the *Prometheus in Words* seems essential for our purpose, as it is in this short treatise that the Greek cynic boasts of his great achievement, the harmonious combination of philosophical and comic writing:

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21. See Logan, 106–09 (excerpt from Lucian of Samosata) and 248–49 (excerpt from D. Baker-Smith, *More's "Utopia"* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991], ch. 8). And let's not forget Hythloday's confirmation of the Utopians' delight "with the witty persiflage of Lucian" (69).

Dialogue and comedy were not entirely friendly and compatible from the beginning. Dialogue used to sit at home by himself and indeed spend his time in the public walks with a few companions; Comedy gave herself to Dionysus and joined him in the theatre, had fun with him, jested and joked, sometimes stepping in time to the pipe. […] Dialogue's companions she mocked as "Heavy-thinkers," "High-talkers," and suchlike. She had one delight—to deride them and drown them in Dionysiac liberties. […] Nevertheless I have dared to combine them as they are into a harmony, though they are not in the least docile and do not easily tolerate partnership.[22]

Certainly, in *Utopia*, the Dionysian liberties seem restricted to the erudite component, derision through wit and philosophy, with a hint at the context of the symposium in the dinner announcement and the mention of refreshments. Rabelais will more clearly build on this Lucianic precept, but More's text is nevertheless inspired by this epistemological *coincidentia oppositorum*, which, in his case, might be more accurately described as the combination of political philosophy, on the one hand, and irony and wit, on the other. The *jocoserious* element that is favoured by such a synthesis allows More to infuse what would have amounted to a treatise with the elements of dialogue (between Raphael and "Morus," of course, but more importantly between the text and the reader) which appeals to the readers' critical judgment while at the same time entertaining them. The medicine necessary to bring about the satirical cure, Thomas Nashe's famous "sugared pills," is easier to administer and the remedy will be more efficient and durable if the patients, i.e., the readers, come to their conclusions themselves, through a kind of "emancipated didactics" that shuns the master/disciple relationship of most conventional moral treatises or satires. Hence the lack of clear-cut solutions, as we will see below and as Dominic Baker-Smith observes, even though his conclusion as to the fictional status of *Utopia* should be nuanced with reference to the rhetorical figure of the *argumentum* as we have seen: "We are made aware of issues and possibilities, but not of positive recommendations. It is this characteristic that marks *Utopia* as a work of fiction rather than a tract, and it is one which is never far

22. Lucian, 6:425–27.

removed from the use of dialogue."[23] It seems precisely this lack of "positive recommendations" that opens up the dialogue with the emancipated reader, stressing the endeavour of what Griffin calls an "open-ended moral inquiry," an illustration of the rhetorical *argumentum* that enables the text to surpass purely fictional status.[24]

It is at this juncture where the role of laughter comes into play, enhanced by the injection of irony as a protective veil of the satirical *argumentum*, a new element that was largely absent from conventional satirical discourse for the centuries leading up to the late fifteenth century and refines the Lucianic framework as mentioned above.[25] The satirical role of laughter has always been manifold, falling into three main categories: the gentle, highly didactic laughter prized by Horace and his disciples; the seemingly gratuitous, clownish laughter, as reflected frequently in popular theatre or in *bernesque* satire; and the acerbic, biting laughter of invective usually linked to Juvenal.[26] While not absent from classical verse *satura*, irony is a problematic element in this genre, as it is bound to obscure the didactic message of Horatian satire and seems out of place in the violent Juvenalian mode. As early modern satire evolved to include elements from a wider variety of literary forms (Menippean satire, Greek satyr-play, popular theatre), and became a fundamental vehicle for serious social and political criticism (first and foremost in accessible prose and especially during religious confrontations), irony became more important in providing a fresh protective layer and engaging a critical dialogue with the diligent reader.[27] In this we encounter the phenomenon that A. Tomarken has called the "smile of

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23. D. Baker-Smith, 212.

24. Griffin, 45.

25. Exceptions that confirm the rule are notably the *Roman de renard* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but the growing importance of irony and the resulting polysemy and ambivalence are demonstrated with exceptional clarity in popular theatre, ranging from the play of *Maître Pathelin* (ca. 1465), far more complex than conventional *farce*, to the rise of the highly allegorical, satirical *sotie*-play shortly thereafter. See the introduction in Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès, Jelle Koopmans, and Katell Lavéant, ed., *Recueil des sotties françaises*, vol. 1 (Paris: Classiques-Garnier, 2014), 7–43.

26. See Pascal Debailly, "Le rire satirique," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 56 (1994): 695–717.

27. Among the many studies of irony, see above all Ernst Behler, *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990); Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (Toronto: Routledge, 1994); and Pierre Schoentjes, *Poétique de l'ironie* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).

truth" in her aforementioned study of Renaissance satirical eulogy, as opposed to gently scolding Horatian laughter or an indignant, acidic Juvenalian chuckle.

Examples of this kind of informed or erudite laughter abound in *Utopia*, touching on all kinds of diverse subjects with fine irony and subtlety, as in the following criticism of scholasticism:

> They [the Utopians] are far from matching the inventions of our modern logicians. In fact they have not discovered even one of those elaborate rules about restrictions, amplifications, and suppositions which our young men study in the *Litle Logicbook*. They are so far from being able to speculate on "second intentions" that not one of them was able to see "man-in-general," though I pointed straight at him with my finger, and he is, as you well know, bigger than any giant, maybe even a colossus. On the other hand, they have learned to plot expertly the courses of the stars and the movements of the heavenly bodies. […] As for the conjunctions and oppositions of the planets, and that whole deceitful business of divination by the stars, they have never so much as dreamed of it. (58–59)

More's satirical strategy is quite elaborate in such examples, as he is using modern and Socratic antithetical irony to point at implied major absurdities or abuses of contemporary society, in this case in the realm of scholasticism. The laughter generated by this ludic criticism is further enhanced by the opposition of theory and practice, as scholasticism is shown to be far removed from real-life concerns when Hythloday points ironically at "man-in-general" with his finger, all the while aware that this concept is proven invalid by the very existence of the "other" and their values diametrically opposed to generally accepted European norms. Then, once he has established these parameters, he finishes the assault with a more direct stab at a concrete consequence of our ill-advised practices, in this example the "deceitful business" of astrology as opposed to the solid science of astronomy, thus ridiculing the entire system that such pseudo-learning is based on. As one could suppose, the subtlety of this approach increases with the sensitivity of the subject, such as royal and papal behaviour. After noting that the Utopians are not in the practice of making treaties, Hythloday observes:

> In Europe, of course, the dignity of treaties is everywhere kept secret and inviolable, especially in those regions where the Christian religion prevails. This is partly because the kings are all so just and virtuous, partly also because of the reverence and fear that everyone feels toward the popes. Just as the popes themselves never promise anything which they do not most conscientiously perform, so they command all other princes to abide by their promises in every way. If someone declines to do so, they compel him to obey by means of pastoral censure and sharp reproof. The popes rightly declare that it would be particularly disgraceful if people who are specifically called "the faithful" acted in bad faith.
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> But in that new world, which is as distant from ours in customs and way of life as in the distance the equator puts between us, nobody trusts treaties. The greater the formalities, the more numerous and solemn the oaths, the sooner the treaty will be broken. The rulers will easily find some defect in the wording of it, which often enough they deliberately inserted themselves. No treaty can be made so strong and explicit that a government will not be able to worm out of it, breaking in the process both the treaty and its own word. If such craft, deceit, and fraud were practiced in private contracts, the politicians would raise a great outcry against both parties, calling them sacrilegious and worthy of the gallows. (76)

Here, the biting irony stems from a projection of an imaginary "ideal" onto the European reality, which, in turn, is reflected in the actual state of affairs in a distant "no-place" with "two kinds of justice," which inevitably leads to the logical and all-too-familiar endpoint of this complex juxtaposition: a disdain for treaties, for precisely the reasons that characterize the European abuse of the system, which is thus criticized behind the protective veil of *Utopia*. The rhetorical *argumentum* is reflected in the (fake) ideal applied ironically to Europe, a veritable "no-place" in this respect, stressing the real abuses that the Utopians are said to have identified. Despite the lack of explicit decoding (as in the previous example), the implicit binary structure blurs the lines between the real and the ideal, subtly reversing the roles of the deplorable European reality and the venerated Utopian ideal. For the informed reader, Europe is the object of both critiques, exposed in ironic praise that doesn't truly apply and recognized as the proper target in the explicit criticism of the "other." We recognize here the Erasmian approach to satire in the *Praise of Folly*, which,

oscillating between *prosopopeia* and *mock ethiopeia*, favours a highly complex structure laced with the narrator's heavy irony while reserving more blunt criticism of the pope—a stronger "cure"—for the anonymous *Julius exclusus*, an approach that reflects the more dangerous political atmosphere Erasmus was writing in after the advent of the Reformation.[28] Published immediately before Luther's posting of his ninety-five theses, *Utopia* allows us a precious glance at a more subtle variant: early modern pre-Reformation satire at its best.

These observations lead us to the next point, the notion of the *mundus inversus*, especially with regards to virtue. If virtue is defined as "living according to nature" (60) by the Utopians, More's development of this concept constitutes a prime illustration of the text's pivotal position in early modern satirical discourse, as it declares the confrontation between virtue and vice, a combat of uncertain outcome:

> The vices fight a battle against the virtues. The game is ingeniously set up to show how the vices oppose one another, yet combine against the virtues; then what vices oppose what virtues, how they try to assault them openly or undermine them insidiously; how the defenses of the virtues can break the strength of the vices or skillfully elude their plots; and finally, by what means *one side or the other* gains the victory. (46, emphasis added)

Despite the common nature of such moral games in humanist circles, it is remarkable for a satire that the ending is left undecided, despite the fact that all the advantages seem to support the victory of the virtues. The moral role of the satirist and the effectiveness of his cure therefore depend increasingly on the receptiveness, exegetical capacities, and ensuing actions of the diligent readers; such dialogism illustrates the readers' emancipation and quickly becomes a trademark of early modern satire.

Such a development in favour of the readers' active participation in the interpretation of seriocomical writing becomes even clearer if we compare it to a similar situation in Jakob Locher's adaptation of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*, the *Stultifera Navis*. Towards the end of his version, Brant's disciple adds a four-chapter sequence entitled the "Concertatio Virtutis cum Voluptate," consisting

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28. This was truly a time when one could die for causing laughter, as G. Genette puts it in an insightful essay: "Morts de rire," in *Des genres et des œuvres* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), 411–522.

of an introduction by Sebastian Brant and an epigram addressed to the reader, as well as the monologues of the opposing parties: Voluptuousness's invective reproaches and Virtue's elegiac response. The outcome here is never in doubt. In short, Voluptuousness's main argument—her "post mortem nulla voluptas" concluding a catalogue of more or less enticing pleasures—is easily dismantled by Virtue's forceful response, denigrating the deceitfulness of the "bestia spurca nimis," drawing on the support of celebrities such as Julius Cesar and Alexander the Great, and ending her speech with an appeal to the youth:

> Virtus sola regit terras, dominator in alto,
> Dividit et nutu dona beata suo.
> O iuvenes ! Dum fata sinunt, expellite vanas
> Corporis illecebras loethiferumque nefas !
> Imbuite ast animos Virtutis dogmate vestros,
> Ut sapient rectam pectora vestra fidem !²⁹

All the keywords of conventional satire are to be found in this categorical dismissal of the opposing parties' position—commanding heart and mind—combined with a Roman-influenced warlike virtue figure, eradicating the outmatched enemy. The reader is a mere passive recipient of remedial incantations of the omnipotent protagonist: allegorized Virtue. This sermon-like, univocal, satirical "magic" will be replaced by a less dogmatic and more collaborative approach in early modern satire, as we have seen, and More is one of the first satirists to subscribe fully to this attitude. Henceforth, the truly active readers will be called upon to combat an evil that appears more dangerous and should therefore mobilize their active resistance in a more complicated, even dangerous, world. This new situation appeals to a more pragmatic and ultimately more effective brand of satire, shunning the foregone conclusion of the inevitable defeat of vice in favour of a more realistic view of this eternal combat of the human condition.

The master/disciple relationship of monologic and conventionally didactic satire gives way to a dialogical structure that stresses the importance of the diligent readers' role in pushing for the changes that the satire calls for.

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29. Hartl, 2:332: Virtue alone reigns on earth, dominates in the heavens, / And on her bidding are distributed the gifts of bliss. / Oh youth! As long as fate allows, chase away / vain, carnal temptations and harmful sins! / Instead fill your souls with the teachings of Virtue / So that your hearts subscribe to true faith!

Despite the inherent danger of misinterpretation by the malevolent or simply unqualified reader, such an approach ultimately promises a more lasting cure, emanating in part from the target audience, the reader-patients themselves. The search for *mediocritas*—the golden mean of a more balanced *rapport de forces*, in this case between the satirist and the readers—is henceforth an essential strategy of satirical writing. The narrator, Morus, addresses the reader directly in book 1 in an exhortation in favour of this kind of "pragmatic idealism":

> You must strive to influence policy indirectly, handle the situation tactfully, and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make as little bad as possible. For it is impossible to make everything good unless you make all men good, and that I don't expect to see for a long time to come. (34)

This sober realism seems in stark contrast to Hythloday's ensuing description of an allegedly perfect but at the very least rationally organized world. Along those same lines, the narrator's strong reservations about his interlocutor's account are expressed most clearly at the most strategic point of the text, the very end of book 2:

> When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that not a few of the customs and laws he had described as existing among the Utopians were quite absurd. These included their methods of waging war, their religious practices, as well as other customs of theirs. […] I was not sure he could take contradiction in these matters, particularly when I remembered what he had said about certain people who were afraid they might not appear wise unless they found out something to criticize in the ideas of others. […] I said that we would find some other time for thinking of these matters more deeply, and for talking them over in more detail. […]
>
> Meanwhile, though he is a man of unquestionable learning, and highly experienced in the ways of the world, I cannot agree with everything he said. Yet I freely confess there are very many things in the utopian commonwealth that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see. (96–97)

If "irony offers the only way out" in the attempt to reconcile the clash of opinions between Hythloday and Morus, as Baker-Smith asserts,[30] this "conclusion" can be read in a variety of ways, ranging from pessimism about the hopelessness of the current state of affairs to an encouragement of the reader to reflect "on these matters more deeply" and "in more detail" in order to improve the probability of turning the narrator's idealistic wishes into more realistic expectations. Any possible resolution of the narrator's disagreement with Hythloday remains unspecified and thus left to the reader to determine. Expectations and wishes, i.e., realistic improvements and unattainable ideals, are as yet to be determined, too. The lack of a firm conclusion can therefore be ascribed to an adherence to satirical *argumentum* and dialogism, inciting the reader to reflect more thoroughly on the issues at hand without an explicit recommendation in favour of either Hythloday's or Morus's viewpoint, the ironic "smile of truth unfolding its full potential."[31] It is noteworthy, furthermore, that the commonly accepted order of composition of *Utopia*, i.e., book 1 after book 2, seems to steer the argument away from a monologue along the lines of a Horatian sermon towards Lucianic dialogism, stressed throughout book 1 and at the end of book 2.

Some of the central question streated by early modern satire are reflected in these passages, first and foremost the issues of arbitrary values and virtues as well as of uniform behaviour. The difference between this open-ended, dialogic approach laced with ironic smiles, on the one hand, and, on the other, conservative monologic satire informed by outright laughter, which had largely dominated until the early sixteenth century and its large-scale religious, political, and social upheavals, became clear in the firm hierarchy found in Locher's *Concertatio*. An avid reader of Lucian, Erasmus, and More, Rabelais will tackle the same issues in his satirical novels that are partially set in

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30. More, 244. One should also note the critic's important comment on the relativity of the concept of "opinion," drawing on Plato's *Republic*: "a mental state based on surmise which is lighter than ignorance but darker than the clear vision of the philosopher" (244).

31. As Elliott in *Shape of Utopia* points out, irony undercuts the authority of both interlocutors and creates the type of ambiguity that challenges the diligent reader on whom my reading focuses (41). In the case of the exposure of naked couples before marriage, for instance, Hythloday's viewpoint ("foolish") clashes with the persuasive arguments "advanced by the Utopians (as reported by Hythloday)" so that "the norms of the work itself are not in accord with Hythloday's standards." Elliott further remarks that this ironic ambiguity is what bothered Edward L. Surtz in his *Praise of Pleasure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 193, as "correct interpretation becomes troublesome and elusive" (28), a clear indication of the didactic, moral vein favoured in Roman *satura*.

Utopia, home of the humanist giants Grandgousier, Gargantua, and Pantagruel, which illustrates More's immediate impact on Renaissance satire.[32] Rabelais's approach underscores, enhances, and clarifies the status and influence of More's satire. One striking illustration is the Thelema-episode in *Gargantua*, a revolutionary and clearly utopian institution led by the anti-monk Friar John, who reverses hierarchical patterns of thought by valuing practical, manual tasks over the conventional spiritual duties of clergymen, questioning traditional ecclesiastical values and power in an atmosphere evoking the inverted-world topos.[33] Rabelais's solutions show a more radical development of More's ideas of religious tolerance. The only rule of this avant-garde abbey is "Do what you will," leaving the reader in fear of pure anarchy that nevertheless fails to materialize "because people who are free, well born, well bred, moving in honorable social circles, have by nature an instinct and goad which always impels them to virtuous deeds and holds them back from vice, which they called honor."[34] This more secular version of the religious concept of *synderesis* is used to bring about the *coincidentia oppositorum* between free will, uniform behaviour (they all dress and act alike, naturally), and a common set of shared, albeit often arbitrary, values. In order to get to this stage, however, the Thelemites had to be admitted into this select institution, and the selection process was stringent, as the famous inscription set above the main gate of the abbey shows:

> Hypocrites, bigots, do not enter here,
> Blanched sepulchers who ape the good and true,
> Idiot wrynecks, worse than Goths to fear,

32. More's influence is stressed by Blanchard. On *Utopia*'s influence on Rabelais, see Verdun Louis Saulnier, "Mythologies pantagruéliques. L'utopie en France," in *Les Utopies à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 135–62; Timothy Hampton, "Nation and Utopia in the 1530s: The Case of Rabelais's Gargantua," in *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century: Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 66–108; Jean-Claude Margolin, "Rire avec Érasme, à l'ombre de Rabelais," in *Rabelais pour le XXIᵉ siècle*, ed. M. Simonin (Geneva: Droz, 1998), 9–29.

33. François Rabelais, *Gargantua*, ed. D. Frame (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), ch. 40, pp. 93–94: "[Friar John is] no bigot; he's no ragamuffin; he's honorable, cheerful, determined, good company; he works; he toils; he defends the oppressed; he comforts the afflicted; he succors the wretched; he guards the abbey close. – I do much more, said the monk, for while dispatching our matins and anniversaries in the choir, I also make crossbow, I polish bolts and quarrels, I make nets and pouches to catch rabbits. Never am I idle."

34. Rabelais, *Gargantua*, 126.

Or Ostrogoths, who brought the monkeys near;
Imbecile sneaks, slippered impostors too,
Furred bellybumpers, all, away with you!
Flouted and bloated, skilled in raising hell:
Go elsewhere your abusive wares to sell.
[…]
Here enter too, all you who preach and teach
The Gospel live and true, though many hound;
You'll find a refuge here beyond their reach
Against the hostile error you impeach,
Whose false style spreads its poison all around:
Enter, we'll found herein a faith profound,
And then confound, aloud or penned unheard,
The foemen who oppose the Holy Word.[35]

This is the basis of a social experiment aiming at forming elites that could then possibly serve as role models, although Rabelais does not address this issue. The Thelemites are free to leave the Abbey when they please, especially after getting married, but their life outside this utopian construct is never mentioned. One could surmise, therefore, that the segregation of a close-knit community of the "happy few" confirms Morus's aforementioned pessimism, even though he hints at a set-up that seems a blueprint for Rabelais's development, with no enforced conformity and a shared set of values: "It was arrogant folly for anyone to enforce conformity with his own beliefs on everyone else by means of threats or violence. […] The Utopians all believe that after this life vices are to be punished and virtue rewarded" (86). The more extensive and elaborate development of such ideas in *Gargantua* might well be due to the Reformation schism, which saw Rabelais reinforce his transgressive satire whereas More, later in his career, was involved in the persecution of "heretics," his ideal Utopian model being severely damaged by the influx of a grim reality.[36] Far from conceiving his masterpiece as a big joke, More probably underestimated

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35. Rabelais, *Gargantua*, 120, 122.

36. His severe criticism of Protestantism in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* attests to this change of mind. Manuel and Manuel underscore the wide range of More's critical and polemical writing, from "gentle humanist" to "bitter partisan" (139), as his "wit and satire were meant to correct, chastise, wound. His aggression ran the gamut from tame to carnivorous" (142).

the extraliterary role of satiric, seriocomical writing that has a considerable impact on reality and thus surpasses by far the status of mere fiction, as the notion of the *argumentum* shows.

In this context, one related element in the process of the satirical cure is the beneficial role of good literature, to which every Utopian child is exposed, as is every Thelemite:

> These and the like attitudes the Utopians have picked up partly from their upbringing, since the institutions of their commonwealth are completely opposed to such folly [such as worshipping the rich for their fortune], and partly from instruction and their reading of good books. […] Every child gets an introduction to good literature.[37]

Rabelais's seriocomical self-promotion of his book and its healing effects (applicable to mental and physical ailments), starting in the prologue of *Pantagruel*,[38] has been well studied and adds a fundamental facet to the process of the satirical cure, progressing from Lucian through Erasmus and More, but it also implies again the need for cultural elites to take the lead in this open-ended process by providing the cure, i.e., books that are bound to have a positive impact on reality. In this subtle illustration of the satirical *argumentum*, the books praised in *Utopia* or in *Pantagruel* therefore provide powerful evidence of the value of good books in general and, implicitly, of More's and Rabelais's masterpieces in their own right.

In conclusion, I hope to have succeeded in sketching out, however briefly and incompletely, some pertinent aspects underscoring the viability of an abstractly satirical reading of *Utopia* as well as More's eminent place in the formation of a broader conception of satirical writing and the satiric mode—beyond the dominant monologism of Roman *satura*—that characterizes the early modern period. As illustrated in the extreme versions of reader involvement, of the selection of appropriate "utopians" to be admitted to the Abbey of Thelema or of idealized and unattainable educational programs that

37. More, 58.

38. Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, ed. D. Frame (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), prologue, 134: "Find me a book, in whatever language, whatever faculty and area it may be, that has such virtues, properties, and prerogatives."

Rabelais develops both in *Pantagruel* and in *Gargantua*,[39] it seems that one major purpose of the utopian construct, from a satirical point of view, is the systematic and thought-provoking depiction of the extreme opposite of the shortcomings of contemporary society rather than the conception of a workable alternative to this society,[40] what Griffin calls "a theoretical alternative to the way of the world."[41] Rather than posing direct criticism or offering concrete solutions, the text is first and foremost a rhetorical and intellectual exercise meant to develop critical independent thinking leading to the development of other ways of organizing political, religious, or social life through the juxtaposition of extremes (i.e., of deplorable reality and the unattainable ideal), meant to open a path toward *mediocritas*; hence the baffling effect on critics of More's exploitation of "multiple frames and ironic possibilities."[42] Along those lines, the narrator's final reservations provide strong evidence of the ultimate goal of More's satire: the development of critical thinking against overwhelming authoritarian tendencies, be they of contemporary European or of Utopian origin. The satirical cure is mainly directed towards the abstract roots of the evil, a general attitude or even mental state, not merely its palpable symptoms, such as a concrete incident or perpetrator. This more thorough satirical remedy is closely related to the solicitation of the active readers' cooperation resulting in a fruitful dialogue. Therefore, the satire aims at achieving a stimulating, open-ended discussion rather than a sterile rigid positioning in favour of one of the two extremes, implicitly or explicitly depicted, as many polemical satires of the approaching wars of religion would prefer to do.

39. For the educational programs, see Edwin Duval, "The Medieval Curriculum," in *Rabelais's Incomparable Book: Essays on His Art*, ed. Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1986), 30–44.

40. This does not exclude, however, the suggestion of elements needed for a better alternative; see for example Lawrence Wilde, *Thomas More's* Utopia: *Arguing for Social Justice* (Routledge, 2017), 47–54, on Utopia's "elective government." More seems aware of different ways of electing a prince, leaning on Aristotle and Erasmus for condemning hereditary monarchies.

41. Griffin, 45. As for such theoretical alternatives, think of the complete elimination of lawyers to "have readier access to the truth" or the placement of children on the battlefield (More 75, 81).

42. Blanchard, 8.