

HOW TO GROW A NOSE:

SOME MORE EFFORT IF YOU WISH TO BECOME HAPPY

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Five hundred years after it first appeared in print, Thomas More's small *libellus* on the best state of a commonwealth, which came to be known simply as *Utopia*, remains one of the greatest literary enigmas of the Renaissance, and much of its enduring appeal is due to this, its obstinate and persistent refusal to see its textual cipher being unlocked. In his highly acclaimed *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt famously compared "More's conundrum" (Carey 1999, 38) to the impenetrable and incongruous mood elicited by Hans Holbein the Younger's celebrated painting "The Ambassadors" which, although it was completed seventeen years after *Utopia* was released, plays on a similar configuration of strangely disquieting, anamorphic art (1980, 17-26). On occasion, *Utopia's* semantic quandary has even been equated to the maddening inscrutability of the stately portrait of the author himself, which Holbein painted in 1527, and which has become the standard representation of More during his later years as Chancellor of Henry VIII (Ackroyd 1998, 260-61; Achterhuis 2016, 25-26). What kind of man are we looking at here? Is he really as authoritative, shrewd and uncompromising as his sumptuous gown and livery collar suggest? Isn't he rather more convivial, to the point where he can barely conceal a self-satisfied smirk? Is the profound ambiguity of

More's facial expression in the Holbein portrait but an outward reflection of the fact that, in all likelihood, he was wearing a cilice underneath his red velvet doublet, or does it signify a much more insidious, unresolved internal tension between his public and private persona?

In a sense, the plethora of unsettled matters raised by More's little volume comes down to one single issue: How would the author have wanted his book to be read? The issue is all the more troublesome as reading *Utopia* is not exactly a daunting, vertiginous experience, despite its implicit appropriation of reams of Classical scholarship, its great many allusions, and its abiding reliance on exceedingly clever rhetorical figures. More is no Rabelais. He is no Swift either. And yet, the reader cannot help but wonder what all this talk of a remote island of perfectly governed, happy and satisfied people is supposed to mean, what we are expected to think of Raphael Hythloday's loquacious encomium to the Utopians, to what extent the figure of More as he appears within the book voices the views and opinions of the book's author, why More the author would have wanted to invent "a stranger, a man of quite advanced years, with a sunburned face, a long beard, and a cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders" (More 2016a, 9) to tell the story of a faraway land in which people are purportedly living in harmony and, should they not always be at peace with the outside world are at least always at peace with themselves—in short, the reader is constantly left speculating what More's intentions might have been when he decided to put pen to paper.¹

In this essay, I want to shed some light on these and other questions—without going so far as to suggest that I would be able to properly resolve them—by juxtaposing More's enigmatic text with another small utopian treatise in which the boundaries

between literature, political philosophy and ethics are blurred, and which continues to divide the scholarly community as to its precise status, as to how it should be read, and as to what the author's intentions might have been when he composed it. The text in question is entitled "Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Wish to Become Republicans", and it was included, in ostensibly random fashion, by Marquis de Sade in the fifth dialogue of his *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, which started to circulate, as an anonymous pamphlet in two small volumes, in France during the second half of 1795, just over a year after the so-called 'Thermidorian Reaction' put an end to Robespierre's Reign of Terror (Sade 2006, pp. 104-49). In his seminal critical analysis of Sade's life and works, Gilbert Lely speculated that Sade may have only inserted this atypical, socio-political essay into *Philosophy in the Boudoir* in order to alleviate the lingering smell of the *ancien régime* that was running through its pages, and that it could have been originally destined for a stand-alone publication (Lely 1957, 545), to which it effectively gave rise long after Sade's death (Sade 1965). Others, however, have claimed that it cannot be dissociated from the 'philosophical' principles Sade exposed in the rest of the book and which, in typically Sadean fashion, follow a recurrent alternation between theoretical discourses and erotic scenes, so that instead of its being considered an arbitrary digression, it should be acknowledged as an integral part of the book's narrative structure (Le Brun 1986, 263; Pauvert 1990, 183).

Bizarre as it may seem at first, my juxtaposition of More's *Utopia* and Sade's "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." will be based on four distinct, yet interconnected points of convergence between the two texts. In retracing and unpacking these synergies, I will endeavour to show that reading More alongside and through Sade—much like Lacan at one point read Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1997) 'with Sade'

(Lacan 2006*b*)—may generate a fresh perspective on the value of both works for what, in utopian studies, has been termed the “education of desire” (Abensour 1973; Thompson 1977, 791; Levitas 2011, 123-50), as it impacts upon the vexed relationship between hedonism and happiness. More specifically, I will argue on the basis of a combined reading of *Utopia* and “Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .” that what can be extracted from these texts, over and above certain socio-political arguments about communality, state power and social justice, is a perennially valuable, composite style of reasoning, which celebrates satire as the most advanced technique for destabilizing doctrinal knowledge, and which embraces subjectivity as a fundamentally unstable construct. Whatever has been said, then, about the political messages of More’s *Utopia*, and Sade’s ‘dystopian’ version of the ideal commonwealth, the texts may function as lasting reminders of the fictional status of autonomous selfhood and the intrinsic impossibility of full satisfaction—happiness being no more than an unpredictable momentary occurrence that is predicated upon the ineluctable dissatisfaction of desire and the empty promises of a limitless hedonism.

The first point of contact between *Utopia* and “Frenchmen, Some More Effort...” can be easily identified at a purely textual level, although for all I know neither More- nor Sade- scholars have ever paid any serious attention to it. At one stage in his relentless disquisition, the author of the political pamphlet in *Philosophy in the Boudoir* explicitly refers to More’s *Utopia* in support of the thesis that the natural lechery of women (*le désordre des femmes*) is reason enough for all forms of adultery to be decriminalized: “In *Utopia*, Thomas More [*Thomas Morus*] proves that it is advantageous for a woman

to indulge in debauchery, and the ideas of this great man were not always dreams. Thomas More also wanted engaged couples to see each other naked before their nuptials. How many marriages would be foiled if that law were practiced! You must admit that the opposite truly means buying a pig in a poke!" (Sade 2006, 133).

Although it is by no means clear what exactly More himself wanted, the Utopians have indeed adopted the custom of insisting that potential marriage partners are being shown naked to each other before they take things further, of which Hythloday says that it "seemed to us foolish and absurd in the extreme", both in order to avoid the holy bond of matrimony being subsequently undermined by feelings of disgust, discord or offence, and in order to legally protect both parties from deception (More 2016a, 79-80). Yet nowhere in *Utopia* is it stated, or even insinuated, that debauchery would be beneficial to women. If anything, the Utopian rulers are adamant that no type of sexual activity outside marriage is acceptable, under any circumstances. Men and women who are found guilty of engaging in sex before marriage are prohibited from marrying for the rest of their lives, unless they are being pardoned by the governor, and they also bring public disgrace upon their parents, because the latter are deemed to have failed in their moral duties (More 2016a, 79). Utopians who violate the marriage bond by engaging in extra-marital sex are "punished with the strictest form of slavery", from which they can again only be redeemed by the governor, whereas recidivism in these matters is invariably punished by death (More 2016a, 80-81). Either the author of "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." deliberately misrepresented the Utopian system, somewhat naively assuming that his readership probably would not notice, or his revolutionary hubris led him to misread the text, or he drew on unreliable secondary source materials, yet the Utopians would definitely not have been happy with the way in which they were

depicted in the pamphlet here.² I will return to the issue of mis-representation and distortion later on in my essay, because it crucially affects the way in which the fourth point of convergence between More and Sade is being interpreted.

The second synergy between the two texts concerns the strange authorship ploy and the associated, double filtering of the narrative. In his prefatory letter to Peter Giles, which was designated as the preface to *Utopia* in its first edition, More apologized to his friend for taking so long in completing the manuscript, a delay which was all the more embarrassing since the only thing he had to do was to recount the words of Raphael Hythloday (More 2016a, 3). In the third edition of the book, a letter was included from the humanist scholar and publishing coordinator Beatus Rhenanus to the lawyer Willibald Pirckheimer, in which Rhenanus reported how some “foolish fellow” (*quidam pinguis*) had said of More that he “deserved no more credit than a paid scribe, who simply writes down what other people say after the fashion of a pen-pusher” (More 2016a, 132). In these ancillary materials, More is thus presented, and indeed presents himself, as a mere spokesperson, as a “passive conduit” (Baker-Smith 2011, 141) for the views and opinions (in the dialogue of *Utopia*’s Book I), and the travelogue and personal experiences (in the discourse of Book II) of a third party interlocutor, whose accidental acquaintance he had made outside the cathedral in Antwerp. Thus, More could only lay claim to being Hythloday’s mouthpiece and, as we shall see later on, because of this he also expressed his worries over the truthfulness of his account. However, as soon as it is ascertained that Hythloday is a literary invention, which would not have been at all obvious to everyone from the first editions of the book, More’s authorship status becomes ambiguous, because he regains full authority over Hythloday’s words whilst simultaneously distancing himself from the very contents of these words by allowing

them to enter a critical dialogue with a first-person narrator by the name of Thomas More, who is by no means convinced that the Utopian life-world represents the ideal commonwealth. In other words, were we to accept that everything Hythloday says has effectively been invented by More the author of *Utopia*, his self-representation within the book, as Hythloday's critical soundboard, opens up crucial questions about the relationship between authorship, authentication and authenticity.

Remarkably, similar issues emerge from the rather peculiar presentation of "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. After the young Eugénie de Mistival has been sodomized consecutively by two male libertines, and everyone decides it is time for a philosophical pause, she asks the master of ceremonies Dolmancé "whether a government truly needs a set of morals, whether they can really influence the essence of a nation" (Sade 2006, 103), to which he replies that it so happens that he has just purchased an anonymous pamphlet which will answer all of Eugénie's questions. Casting her eye over the document, Madame de Saint-Ange, in whose boudoir Eugénie's education is taking place, instructs her brother, the Chevalier de Mirvel, to read it aloud, and what follows is the full forty-five page text of the pamphlet, which takes up almost a quarter of Sade's entire book. In 'Sade and the Revolution', Pierre Klossowski posited that the pamphlet is in a sense more Dolmancé's than Sade's work—and at the end of the Chevalier's recitation Eugénie's first reaction to it is that she is tempted to regard Dolmancé as its author, which he does not explicitly deny—yet that precisely because of this authorship ploy the document is more revealing of the author's intentions than anything else in the book, or than any official document Sade produced during his years as a republican politician (Klossowski 1992, 58-59).³ In his essay 'Kant with Sade', Lacan made an almost identical point when he wrote that the

pamphlet should be recognized for “its closer relationship to the real”, similar to how Freud had interpreted the dream within the dream, in the sixth chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as a representation of reality, “the true recollection” (*die wirkliche Erinnerung*), and “the most decided confirmation of the reality of the event” (Freud 1953, 338; Lacan 2006b, 648). Yet were it to be the case that Sade’s authorship ploy in “Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .” mainly served the purpose of a “protective barrier against discovery” (Phillips 2001, 70), why would he have wanted to double it—*Philosophy in the Boudoir* was published anonymously, as a posthumous work by the author of *Justine*—and what part of the political pamphlet would have made him anxious, more than a year after the execution of Robespierre and his fellow terrorists? Moreover, it would have been quite easy, much easier than in the case of Hythloday, for readers to ascertain that Dolmancé was the author’s literary creation, a purely fictitious character whose own relationship to the pamphlet is rather ambiguous, since he purports to agree with only some of the views expressed therein. Hence, if Dolmancé represents Sade’s own beliefs, then the former’s equivocal reception of the pamphlet, which is notably read by the Chevalier, and apparently for no other reason than his being also endowed with a beautiful voice (Sade 2006, 104), makes it next to impossible to establish, much like in *Utopia*, which of the pamphlet’s views are shared by its author. We know that Sade was a lifelong opponent of the death penalty, yet we also know that his sexual mores were not nearly as remorselessly barbaric as those advanced in the revolutionary tract, or in any of the other libertine perorations for that matter.⁴ Much like *Utopia*, Sade’s pamphlet raises the question of the authorial voice, without ever resolving it.

The third convergence between *Utopia* and “Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .” pertains to the cardinal place of ethics (morals, moral philosophy), as the necessary precondition for politics and governance. In *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, the anonymous author of the pamphlet proclaims that “the laws to be promulgated are based on morals” (Sade 2006, 155), whereas in *Utopia* too the laws that are passed by the king and ratified by the people are driven by a set of ethical principles (More 2016a, 71-72). In Sade as well as in More, the ethical system that is being promoted as the most valuable one for ensuring liberty and equality draws on a strange, idiosyncratic combination of Stoic and Epicurean principles, and rests on a distinct conception of the fundamental relationship between desire, pleasure and happiness.

Throughout Sade’s libertine novels, the ‘sadistic’ heroes campaign for and act upon a radically new ideology of desire and happiness. Much like the Stoics, Sade’s libertines proceed from the recognition of Nature as the supreme sovereign authority. Yet unlike their Greek and Roman counterparts, they do not believe that Nature is driven by virtue, neither in the form of justice, courage, wisdom or temperance, nor in the shape of any other mechanism that might contribute to progress and development. Much like the Stoics, Sade’s libertines unreservedly argue in favour of an ethical stance that involves humanity’s voluntary submission to the laws of Nature. Yet unlike their fellow philosophers, they believe that Nature is intrinsically monstrous—a cruel, callous, brutal and selfish force that knows no other law than that embedded in the principle of radical evil. For Sade’s libertines, the ultimate goal and the supreme happiness in life coincides with the realization of a state of absolute destruction, which goes so far as to include self-immolation and the annihilation of Nature itself, and for which—in accordance with the spirit of libertinage—they deem the liberation of desire to be an

essential precondition. Through the mouth of his 'sadistic' heroes, Sade thus attempts to release the ferocious force of Nature's desire in the hearts of those who have committed themselves to be the instruments of the Natural order. Whereas in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant, 1997), the philosopher of Königsberg aspired to formulate a moral law that would relieve the rational being from the burden of all transient empirical pleasures obtained from the satisfaction of desire, Sade set out to achieve the exact opposite. In his libertine philosophy, he wanted to set a rational being's desire free from the burden of religion, morality, and all social institutions that are aimed at curtailing its ferocious potential. By implication, he therefore also required his republic to be based on a limited framework of policies, rules and regulations, and a minimal set of laws. Although his ethical system was very much the opposite of Kant's, Sade shared Kant's belief in the insuperable antagonism between desire and the law. In order to set desire free, in order to ensure that desire instills freedom in the citizens of the republic, the law itself needs to be set free, i.e. it needs to be unpacked, unleashed and allowed to disappear to the point where but the smallest remnant of its regulatory power remains intact.

In 'Kant with Sade', Lacan wrote that Sade had taken up Saint-Just—one of the main political leaders during the French Revolution, and one of the chief architects of the Reign of Terror, when thousands of purportedly anti-revolutionary elements lost their head under the guillotine—at exactly the right point, "where one should" ("*là où il faut*") (Lacan 2006b, 663). The phrase "*là où il faut*" should be emphasized, here, because Lacan believed that the liberation of desire, and the associated liberation of the law, requires more innovative aspirations than the mere politicization of happiness.⁵ And indeed, although Sade never referred to Saint-Just in any of his libertine novels nor,

for that matter, in the political pamphlet that was inserted in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, the latter's legendary opposition to extensive, detailed laws chimes with Sade's strict anti-legalistic political philosophy. "We require few laws. Where there are many, the people are slaves," Saint-Just noted in his own doctrine for a revolutionary republic (Saint-Just, 2004c, 1136). "The sword of the laws . . . always hangs ominously over the passions," claimed the anonymous author of "Frenchmen, Some More Effort. . .", to which he added: "[L]aws may be so mild, so few in number, that all men, no matter what their characters, can easily comply" (Sade 2006, 111 and 119).

Of course, the idea that a complex legal system is not a necessary precondition for safeguarding the existence of the ideal commonwealth, especially when one can rely on the power of human rationality and the strength of an appropriate educational system, has a long history, which can be traced back to Plato's *Republic* (Plato 2007, 127). And indeed, the Utopians too do not have much appetite for detailed law-making. Hythloday reports: "They have very few laws, for their training is such that very few suffice. The chief fault they find with other nations is that even their infinite volumes of laws and interpretations are not adequate. They think it completely unjust to bind people by a set of laws that are too many to be read or too obscure for anyone to understand" (More 2016a, 86). Tongue-in-cheek, Lacan wrote that the struggle for the liberation of desire requires the law to become a widow, "the Widow *par excellence*" (Lacan 2006b, 663), by which he alluded to the historical slang word for the guillotine (*Veuve*, widow), and to the seemingly inevitable terror upon which the political fight for freedom is predicated. The day after the 'Thermidorian Reaction' of 27 July 1794 (9 Thermidor, Year II), twenty-six-year-old Saint-Just himself was guillotined, alongside Robespierre and other leading figures of the Revolution. Lacan insinuated that if only

the young man had succeeded in maintaining the mischievous, satirical stance he had adopted in his first literary text—the long, mildly pornographic poem entitled ‘Organt’, which had been published anonymously in 1789 (Saint-Just 2004a)—he could have emerged from the Thermidorian Reaction as a victor, saving his head as well as his reputation.

However, the key difference between Sade and Saint-Just is that the latter continued to embrace Rousseau’s belief in the natural goodness of humankind, whereas the former, or at least his fictional libertines, could only conceive of Nature as radically evil. In serving Nature’s desire, the libertines transform themselves into instruments of torture whose will is predicated upon the self-assumed right to *jouissance*. As a result, their happiness depends neither on the complete renunciation nor on the direct pursuit of pleasure, but on something that is situated ‘beyond the pleasure principle’ (Freud 1955), despite the fact that, time and again, the ineluctable cycle of pleasure interferes with their quest for supreme happiness in absolute destruction. Much like Epicurus and the Stoic philosophers, the Sadean heroes predicate their happiness upon the eradication of all ‘dishonourable’, lesser pleasures, i.e. those stemming from the satisfaction of purportedly inferior desires, yet in a radical reversal of the Epicurean tradition, they define lesser pleasures as those stemming from the consideration of others, from respect, gratitude, pity and charity, and from all the cardinal Stoic virtues (justice, courage, temperance, etc.). Like the Epicureans, the libertines can just about accept that pleasure could be a source or an approximation of happiness when it is carefully calculated, which implies that they also adopt a hedonistic calculus, yet on the strict condition that the pleasure in question occurs in accordance with the vicious voice of Nature. Most of the time, however, pleasure constitutes a major obstacle to the

libertines' happiness, because it is but a bleak shadow of the supreme happiness that they think will coincide with the full realization of their desire for absolute destruction. Even Pope Pius VI, who turns out to be one of the most morally corrupt libertines ever to occupy the Holy See, is forced to admit to his inescapable impotence: "Regret nothing but that we are unable to do enough, lament nothing but the weakness of the faculties we have received for our share and whose ridiculous limitations so cramp our penchants" (Sade 1968, 781).⁶

Returning to something he had written at the very beginning of 'Kant with Sade', Lacan asserted that Sade had fractured "the ancient axis of ethics" (Lacan 2006b, 663), because insofar as happiness remains both an ethical goal and the supreme good in Sade's system—as axiomatic a moral precept as it had been in all the major philosophical schools since Plato and Aristotle—it is no longer regarded as of communal benefit, but as intrinsically selfish, pervaded by self-interest rather than predicated upon an altruistic concern over the equal well-being of all citizens. Drawing on the idea that Natural law is synonymous with selfishness, relying on the principle that all human beings are born free and equal before the law, and without ever going so far as to question the rational status of humankind, which enables human beings to correctly apprehend Natural law, Sade's libertine heroes profess another kind of happiness, which Lacan described in the opening page of his text as "happiness in evil" ("*bonheur dans le mal*") (Lacan 2006b, 645), because it aligns happiness with vice, criminality, pain, death and destruction. Much like the Stoics, the Sadean libertines thus aspire to living their lives according to Nature, yet because they hear the voice of Nature as commanding limitless *jouissance*, they do not arrive at the Stoic conclusion that life in accordance with Nature is *de facto* virtuous, but at exactly the opposite dictate, notably that obeying Nature is strictly

synonymous with a celebration of vice. As such, Sade's 'criminal' obverse of Kant's moral philosophy imposes a reconsideration of the precise status of desire, but also a re-examination of the right to *jouissance* that is allegedly derived from this desire.

As to the Utopians, they occasionally anticipate Kant's exposition of the categorical imperative in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, with the proviso that they continue to espouse the Epicurean principle that "good and honest pleasure", when it is generated in ourselves as much as it is given to others, may still be a source of happiness (More 2016a, 70). Like the Stoics, the Utopians want people to live according to Nature, and like the Stoics they believe that Nature represents virtue, yet they are sceptical of the view that virtue is *de facto* synonymous with happiness, because they recognize that leading a virtuous life may be harsh and painful. In an extraordinary anticipation of Kant's moral philosophy, the Utopians nonetheless believe that virtue is to be pursued as much as possible, because the immortality of the soul, which they consider to be a religious principle crucially supported by reason (More 2016a, 69), guarantees the realization of the supreme good in the afterlife.⁷

By contrast with Kant, yet in the spirit of Sade, the Utopians thus continue to pursue the pathway of desire. They do not accept that desire is strictly incompatible with the conscious experience of uninterrupted agreeableness, as Kant would have it (Kant 1997, 20). In refusing to advocate a complete renunciation of desire—and thereby of sensual pleasure, as the satisfaction of desire—the Utopians can therefore be seen as being more truthful than Kant in regarding happiness as a concrete achievable goal. Yet much like Sade they are also forced to accept that when they take "honest pleasure [as] the measure of happiness" (More 2016a, 68—marginal gloss), this is only a poor, momentary approximation of the supreme good. For the Utopians, therefore, happiness

is not just a philosophical illusion, as it emerges from the Epicurean and Stoic conceptions. In the latter ethical systems, happiness (as the inner state of tranquility stemming from the renunciation of the passions) appears as illusory, because the superior pleasure associated with the renunciation of the inferior desires will be diminished by the constant return (in good Freudian fashion) of the repressed desires striving for satisfaction. With reference to various Stoic sources, the philosopher Anthony Kenny has summed up the issue brilliantly: “Given the frail, contingent natures of human beings as we know ourselves to be, the denial that contingent goods can constitute happiness is tantamount to the claim that only superhuman beings can be happy. The Stoics in effect accepted this conclusion, in their idealization of the man of wisdom . . . It was unsurprising, after all this, that the Stoics admitted that a wise man was harder to find than a phoenix. They thus purchased the invulnerability of happiness only at the cost of making it unattainable. Since a wise man is not to be found, and there are no degrees of virtue, the whole human race consists of fools” (Kenny 2004, 286).⁸

In ‘Kant with Sade’, Lacan averred that the notion of *ataraxia* had “deposed their [the Stoics’] wisdom” (Lacan 2006*b*, 663). Implicitly referring to the fact that the Stoics regarded a human being’s full compliance with the cardinal virtues as indicative of someone’s voluntary acceptance of the laws of Nature, he added that in this respect the Stoics did not deserve praise for degrading desire either, because in doing so they had not so much elevated the (symbolic) Law (of Nature), but rather cast it aside, given that Nature’s Law—as Sade’s libertines tend to repeat *ad nauseam*—is also, and perhaps primarily, characterized by the very capriciousness of desire, especially in its most brutal manifestations of absolute cruelty.⁹ As to Kant, because his categorical imperative is also based upon a renunciation of the ‘pathological’, its formal impact will be equally

contaminated by the material objects of the faculty of desire. To his credit, this is what he himself acknowledged when he accepted that no rational being is intrinsically holy, yet it did not stop him from projecting happiness onto the afterlife in his postulate of the immortality of the soul, or from using it as an argument in support of the rational being's non-negotiable duty to comply with the moral law during the time of his earthly existence (Kant, 1997, 102-103). Both the Utopians and the Sadean libertines are more honest, yet they do of course come to very different conclusions when they adjust their desires to the voice of Nature . . . Once again, it should be noted though that the filtering of these accounts, and the insidious instability of the authorial voice make it extremely difficult to decide what exactly is being advocated here. After surveying the Utopians' ethical system, Hythloday concedes: "In all this, I have no time now to consider whether they are right or wrong, and don't feel obliged to do so. I have undertaken only to describe their principles, not to defend them" (More 2016a, 78).

The fourth point of contact between More and Sade is by far the most important one. Both Sade and More make it crystal-clear that their works are squarely positioned with reference to truthfulness and fidelity. When Dolmancé develops an argument to persuade Eugénie that fraud and deception are the "key to all graces", he speaks in the name of an "undeniable truth" (Sade 2006, 58-59). For the author of "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." it is crucially important that the reader is convinced of the truth that Christianity and Royalism are indistinguishable in their demands for submission (Sade 2006, 107), whereas in the second part of his pamphlet he reclaims the right to express everything purely on account of the fact that his readership is expecting him to reveal great truths (Sade 2006, 138-39). Throughout the book, both in the erotic scenes and in the theoretical discourses, the French adverbial phrase "*en vérité*", which is generally

translated as ‘honestly’, or ‘I swear’, is one of the most commonly employed expressions. On numerous other occasions in Sade’s libertine novels do the heroes explicitly invoke truth as the guarantor of their actions and beliefs, and as what they owe to the world. As Foucault observed in his 1970 lectures on Sade at the State University of New York—Buffalo, “the entire ten volumes [of Sade’s colossal *La Nouvelle Justine*] are positioned entirely with an eye toward truth” (Foucault 2015, 97). Foucault singled out but one major example, but it suffices to capture the mood. When all is said and done, and Nature itself has dutifully exterminated the virtuous Justine, the libertine Noirceuil exclaims: “[F]rom all this, I see nothing but happiness accruing to all save only virtue [*je ne vois dans tout cela que la vertu de malheureuse*]—but we would perhaps not dare say so were it a novel we were writing” (Sade 1968, 1193). Juliette replies: “Why dread publishing it . . . when the truth itself, and the truth alone, lays bare the secrets of Nature, however mankind may tremble before those revelations. Philosophy must never shrink from speaking out [*la philosophie doit tout dire*]” (Sade 1968, 1193).

A similar, narrative ‘truth-procedure’ permeates More’s *Utopia*. At the beginning of his first letter to Peter Giles, More states: “Truth in fact [*sit propior veritati*] is the only thing at which I should aim and do aim in writing this book” (More 2016a, 3). Accordingly, he implores Giles to check the text against his own recollection or, better still, to get Hythloday himself to verify the details, since More has “taken particular pains to avoid having anything false in the book” and wishes to ensure that his “work contains nothing false and omits nothing true” (More 2016a, 6). In Peter Giles’ own letter to the statesman Jerome Busleyden, which was also included amongst the parerga of the book’s first edition, he praised “the accuracy of his [More’s] memory” (*felicissimae memoriae fidem*) (More 2016a, 127), and reassured his correspondent that there is no

need to accumulate arguments to render the account more credible (*argumentis astruere fidem*), for the pure and simple reason that More himself could vouch for it (*Morus ille sit autor*). (More 2016a, 128). A more trustworthy narrator than More cannot be wished for, whereas the ship-captain Hythloday remains equally steadfast when it comes to speaking the truth: “For if I wish to speak the truth, I will have to talk in the way I’ve described [*Nam si vera loqui volo, talia loquar necesse est*]. Whether it’s the business of a philosopher to tell lies, I don’t know, but it certainly isn’t mine” (More 2016a, 37).

What is this truth that Sade’s libertine heroes as well as More and his companions are so keen to preserve? It is patent that it is not the truth of what is being narrated, although in light of the way in which *Utopia* was presented, this conclusion is probably less easy to draw from More’s book than from Sade’s texts. Indeed, it may not have been immediately obvious at all from *Utopia*’s first edition, in which the prefatory epistles and lengthy endorsements by some of the most eminent humanists of the day all suggested that More’s retelling of Hythloday’s discourse ought to be taken seriously. However, with More’s second letter to Peter Giles, which was only included in the 1517 Paris edition of the book, all doubts as to the objective reality and the actual existence of the Utopians are taken away. More reminds Giles of how a “very sharp fellow” (*hominis illius acutissimi*) has dared to question “whether the book is fact or fiction”, and although he does not need to do anything anymore to persuade his friend, because he actually shared in the whole experience and has already been able to validate More’s recollections, he nonetheless lays out his answer: “I do not deny that if I had decided to write of a commonwealth, and a tale of this sort had come to my mind, I might not have shrunk from a fiction through which the truth, like medicine smeared with honey, might

enter the mind a little more pleasantly. But I would certainly have softened the fiction a little, so that, while imposing on vulgar ignorance, I gave hints to the more learned which would enable them to see what I was about. Thus, if I had merely given such names to the governor, the river, the city and the island as would indicate to the knowing reader that the island was nowhere, the city a phantom, the river waterless and the governor without a people, it wouldn't have been hard to do, and would have been far more clever than what I actually did. If the veracity of a historian had not actually required me to do so, I am not so stupid as to have preferred those barbarous and meaningless names of Utopia, Anyder, Amaurot and Ademus" (More 2016a, 115). To the more learned, this response cannot but strike as a supreme example of More's razor-sharp irony. The names of the island, its capital city, its main river and its governor mean exactly what More claims he could have made the names to mean were he to have invented a completely fictional tale. And so he concedes, albeit through a cunning rhetorical device of double bluff, that he had not been bound by the veracity of the historian, but had indeed invented a fiction, in order to sweeten the truth.

So More's story, which is in and of itself the recounting of the story of Raphael Hythloday—whose surname means 'expert in trifles', 'well-learned in nonsense' or, quite simply, 'nonsense-monger' (Surtz 1965, 301-2)—should not be taken literally, but rather as a product of the author's imagination, specifically designed to allow the truth to enter the reader's mind somewhat more pleasantly. Yet if the fiction is honey, and medicine is the truth, what is the active substance that the reader is being administered here? What is this bitter pill that is so hard to swallow that it requires so much heavy sugar coating? And where, exactly, lies the boundary between medicine and honey? Where does fiction give way to fact? Where resides the truth in the fictional

commonwealth that More has dreamed up? A similar question can be raised with regards to Sade's "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." The author paints a detailed picture of an imaginary 'utopian' republic, yet which of these principles should be taken seriously? If the author's argument against capital punishment is sound, then surely it does not follow that murder is "never criminal, and indeed essential in a republican state" (Sade 2006, 147). If we can accept that the state should not be given the right to punish people for something that it has caused (Sade 2006, 123), which is also Hythloday's argument against the punishment of thieves (More 2016a, 16), then surely this cannot imply that the state should "punish the man who is negligent enough to be robbed" (Sade 2006, 123).

Over the years, numerous commentators on *Utopia* have drawn attention to its highly peculiar composition, its extensive use of rhetorical figures and its ingenious wordplay, which all combine to generate a pervasive sense of mockery, so that the entire work reeks of a 'seriocomic' style (Pineas 1961; Heiserman 1963; McCutcheon 1971; McCutcheon 1983; Fox 1993, 52-65; Baker-Smith 2000, 38-55). This can already be gauged from More's distinctive choice of name for his imaginary island which, although it has become synonymous with 'ideal place', was initially meant to convey a 'non-existing place'.¹⁰ Yet it is equally apparent from the marginal glosses, which were allegedly added by Peter Giles, and from the various ancillary materials, which are as much part of the book as the glosses, and which all partake of a brilliantly orchestrated strategem amongst a handful of European humanists to present fiction as fact, creative imagination as social reality. Indeed, much of More's book is scathing satire redolent of the sardonic dialogues and sketches of Lucian, the second century master of the genre (Lucian 2004), who had answered Horace's famous question '*ridentem dicere verum*

quid vetat? [What prevents me from speaking the truth through laughter?] with a resounding ‘nothing!’, and whose works More had translated jointly with Erasmus some ten years before he composed *Utopia* (Jardine 2014, 37). One might even consider More’s book to be a belated answer to Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*, which was notably written at More’s London home in 1509, and whose Latin title (*Encomium Moriae*) contained an exquisite pun on More’s name—Erasmus crafting a panegyric to More *qua Folly* (Erasmus 1993).

All of this should not be taken to imply, however, that *Utopia* is but a literary exercise in a merry exchange of pseudo-profound divertissements amongst Renaissance humanists who are trying to outwit one another. Satirical as the book may be, one should not ignore its trenchant social critique, its exposure of religious fallacies, its opposition to a particular political system, its attack on certain economic principles. Yet here too, it is not always easy to ascertain what exactly More is satirizing, where his own views merge with and diverge from those of his cast of characters, including the More who is being greeted by Peter Giles outside the main cathedral in Antwerp. If it is assumed that More the author renders the truth through the mouth of Hythloday, nonsense-monger as he may be, it would be implied that *Utopia* contains a vehement dismissal of the prevailing plutocracy in More’s time, this “conspiracy of the rich”, who are only driven by greed and pride, and who merely rely on the interests of the commonwealth in order to secure their idle life of luxury (More 2016a, 111). Were Hythloday to speak on behalf of the author of *Utopia*, the book would become both a bitter disapproval of a proto-capitalist ideology, in which statecraft and priestcraft conspire to accumulate wealth at the expense of hard-working citizens, as well as a protracted paean to the radical abolition of private property in communist living, as the

only form the best commonwealth can take, and this is indeed how most of the great social utopianists—from Fourier to Saint-Simon, and from Marx to Jameson—have interpreted the book.

Unfortunately, matters are not so straightforward. Historically, we know that Thomas More did enter the Council of Henry VIII, thus ignoring the advice of Raphael Hythloday (More 2016a, 29-39), and choosing to adopt the strategic position of the More in *Utopia*, whose diplomatic “indirect approach” to counsel is predicated upon the principle that “what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make as little bad as possible” (More 2016a, 37). In addition, the Utopian state as outlined by Hythloday in Part 2 of the book is far from utopian, in the contemporary meaning of a perfect, ideal society, and on occasion verges eerily towards a totalitarian dystopia. Citizens of Utopia are not free to travel without special permission from the governor. With the exception of officials and scholars, everyone is obliged to perform six hours of manual labour per day, at strictly regulated times. No more than one hour per day may be spent on recreation; the other free hours must be devoted exclusively to intellectual activities or on a chosen trade. In the Utopian family, marriage is sacrosanct, yet wives are always subservient to their husbands, and the latter are allowed to chastise their spouses should the need arise.¹¹ Furthermore, the ideological foundations upon which the Utopian society has been built appear to be showing serious cracks: Utopians abhor war, yet they do not hesitate to take territory from their neighbours when their own population control systems warrant geographical expansion; they attach no value whatsoever to money, let alone to gold and silver, yet they maintain substantial repositories of the filthy lucre in order to subsidize warfare; they believe to adhere to the highest moral values, yet they employ mercenaries—the “vicious and disgusting”

Zapoletes (More 2016*a*, 94)—to do much of their fighting for them, use bribery to turn their enemies against their leaders, keep slaves, impose harsh punishments—including the death penalty for rebellious slaves, who are executed “like wild beasts” (*velut indomitae belvae*) (More 2016*a*, 85)—and have no respect for any other beliefs than their own, especially with regard to the distribution of wealth.

Most importantly, in many of the marginal glosses, More the author (or perhaps Peter Giles, adding a running commentary with More’s full acquiescence) can be seen as satirizing the intrinsically flawed Utopia Hythloday is raving about. For instance, when Hythloday details one of the two games Utopians are permitted to play during their recreational hour, notably the game of ‘vices against virtues’, the marginal gloss reads: “Their games are useful too” (More 2016*a*, 53). When it is being explained how, in Utopia, everything is public, everyone lives “in the full view of all” and there is nowhere to hide, the gloss comments: “O sacred society, worthy of imitation, even by Christians!” (More 2016*a*, 62). And when Hythloday emphasizes how in Utopia prisoners of war are only kept as slaves when the war has been fought by the Utopians themselves, and how the children of these slaves do not inherit the social status of their parents, and are therefore never born into slavery, the gloss is once again priceless in what it thinks is being illustrated here: “The wonderful fairness of these people” (More 2016*a*, 81). However, More’s finest moment definitely comes when Hythloday appears to deplore the fact that the Utopians, despite their natural inclination to learning, have not succeeded in discovering the key precepts of modern logic, as they are being taught through the *Parva logicalia* of the Western world. At this point, the marginal gloss states: “The passage seems a bit satiric” (*Apparet hoc loco subesse nasum*) (More 2016*a*, 67). A more literal translation of the Latin would be “Apparently there is a nose underneath

this passage”, or “There would seem to be a nose underneath this”. Amongst the Renaissance humanists, the nose was considered to be the organ of ridicule—not a ridiculous organ, but the organ that allows its bearer to identify the musty odour of stale, mirthless orthodoxy and to treat it with merry contempt. Erasmus famously said of himself that he had a nose, and in More’s first letter to Peter Giles he referred to people who dislike satire as being ‘flat-nosed’ or ‘pug-nosed’ (More 2016a, 6). When the gloss indicates that the passage on the Utopians’ failure to grasp established logical principles may be a bit satiric, the joke is that their lack of understanding in matters of modern logic should be interpreted as a compliment rather than a criticism, at least from the perspective of More the author who, as a devoted neo-Platonist, vehemently opposed the phalanx of formalistic rules in the scholastic tradition of Western logic.¹²

In *Utopia*, More satirizes the body politic of his era and the allegedly superior Utopian commonwealth in equal measure. Not only does he invent a flawed and fractured Utopia, but he mocks the purportedly fair social structures and institutions upon which it rests, thus rendering such principles as the complete abolition of private property and the replacement of a money economy with a collectivist system of controlled mutual assistance as equally circumspect. One could even go so far as to say that *Utopia* is no more than More’s satiric re-writing of Plato’s *Republic*, one of the very first and finest attempts at thinking through the conditions of possibility for a more just society, and with it of a long tradition in political and moral philosophy of devising the better life and designing the best state of a commonwealth, which is being carried through into the 21st century, across the ideological and religious spectrum. Whereas Plato’s republic is imaginary, yet portrayed by a philosopher of the highest caliber,

More's commonwealth is supposedly real, yet depicted by a disheveled ship-captain with an interest in Greek philosophy.

The stylistic complexity and semantic ambiguity of *Utopia* make it next to impossible for the reader to decide which, if any, political position is being prescribed. And it is no doubt this inherent undecidability which has prompted many of the most prominent interpreters of *Utopia* to regularly change their mind about the import of the text (Skinner 1979, 259; Skinner 2002, 244; Achterhuis 1998; Achterhuis 2016). *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to Sade's "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .". Although it is clear that the author despises the *ancient régime*, its reliance on a spurious religion for keeping its citizens in chains, and its promotion of a divisive set of ethical principles, it is much less clear-cut which of the alternative, revolutionary ideals are proposed in earnestness. Sade would have had good reasons for supporting the engineers of the French Revolution—after all, they were responsible for facilitating his release from Charenton, and for securing him a respectable social position—yet he would have had equally good motives for criticizing Robespierre's Reign of Terror, as well as his newly established cult of the Supreme Being, which no doubt played an important part in his re-arrested towards the end of 1793. As Francine du Plessix Gray put it in her introduction to *Philosophy in the Boudoir*: "The very title of the tract [Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .], and its dual pastiche of clichés used by the hoi-polloi sansculottes and by Sade's *bête noire*, the priggish, learned Robespierre, suggests that the author meant it to be a parody of revolutionary principles . . . The social and sexual anarchy touted in *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, its disavowal of private property, and its cordial support of theft [also] totally contradict the decorous British-style parliamentary system this staunch elitist held to in real life . . ." (du Plessix Gray 2006, xiv-xvi). Likewise, whilst it

would be misguided to employ More's delineation of an authoritarian, patriarchal and punitive utopia as solid evidence of his ongoing support for a distinctly imperfect proto-capitalist society, which if it is not completely good may at least be made somewhat less bad—because there is no real alternative—it would be equally inconsiderate to take his (or rather Hythloday's) incisive critique of the reigning social inequalities and the rampant exploitation in the purportedly Christian political configurations of his day, as indubitable proof of his advocacy for a communist, or socialist system, which may not be ideal either, but which may at least provide citizens with a happier, more prosperous life. Much like Sade's pamphlet, in its format as a political treatise *Utopia* fails to deliver an unambiguous message, yet this has not stopped a plethora of serious-minded thinkers and equally determined adventurers to take inspiration from it to conjure up and implement new 'intentional communities' which, if they do not restrict themselves to the design and implementation of small-scale social experiments (Cooper 2014), more often than not collapse dramatically, with fairly disastrous consequences for the people involved.¹³

Does this imply that the truth which Sade's heroes, More and Hythloday are so ardently seeking is in itself but a lie? Does the truth merely coincide with the fiction? Is there no other medicine than the honey itself? Again, I do not think matters are that simple. Just because Erasmus once recommended *Utopia* to one of his correspondents as perfect reading "*si quando voles ridere*" (Erasmus 1979, 148) does not imply that the entire composition is but one protracted joke. Just because More was recognized as a man endowed with the sharpest wit, an inveterate joker who, according to his great-grandson, "spoke always so sadly that few could see by his looke whether he spoke in earnest or in jeaste" (More 1642, 235), does not mean that nothing in *Utopia* deserves

to be taken seriously. It is well-known that More himself was a fervent opponent of the controversial practice of enclosure of the commons during the early 16th century (Hexter 1965, lxxxviii), so Hythloday's radical dismissal of this politically sanctioned operation, in the first book of *Utopia*, definitely seems like it reflected the views of More the author. Likewise, when Hythloday admonishes Kings and Princes, and the entire ruling class for being hell-bent on waging war, in most cases for the pure purpose of their own enrichment, it is once again More's own pacifist Christianity that comes to mind.

But what if the truth of *Utopia* and "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." were to lie, primarily if not exclusively, in their very celebration of playful satire as the most advanced form of social critique, and the books were to be employed not as political treatises, but as educational manuals, of the kind that would allow their readers to grow a good nose? The subtitle of Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* is "The Immoral Mentors: Dialogues Aimed at the Education of Young Ladies" and the epigraph reads "May every mother get her daughter to read this book" (Sade 2006). Given the violently pornographic quality of the erotic scenes in it, and the fact that it culminates in Eugénie sewing up her mother's vagina, the book's recommendation can but strike as deeply sardonic, yet there may be something more profound, here, about Sade's ostensibly insipid black humour.¹⁴ And so perhaps we should not be too rash when it comes to interpreting the reference to More in "Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . ." Instead of an accidental or deliberate mis-representation, it may very well be intended as a cunning satirical take on the very book from which the author of the pamphlet had learnt how to be properly satirical.

On their part, and aside from their status and chosen profession, More and his fellow-conspirator Erasmus were first and foremost Christian humanists, who were

adamant that the highest good was to be found in the cathedral of learning, provided it was not directed by a caucus of doctrinal theologians and scholastic philosophers—the quintessential agelasts of the day. According to the humanist values More and Erasmus were keen to disseminate, education was the key to morality and good citizenship, yet it could only be liberating—in the ‘positive’ sense of contributing to some form of self-governance and a shared community spirit, rather than in the ‘negative’ sense of freeing someone from constraints—on the condition that it be broad-based, pluralistic, multi-layered and light-hearted. Rigorous without being rigid, formalized without being formalistic, imaginative without being frivolous, humorous without being silly—this is how More and Erasmus would have wished to define the knowledge that would imbue a new generation of young people with the essential qualities of good citizenship. The humanist knowledge stood in sharp contrast to the knowledge professed by the theologians, who were not only renowned for their principled classifications and pseudo-scientific doctrines, which were generally advanced in the thomistic tradition of strict dialectical reasoning, but also for their visceral aversion to humour, and it stood apart from the deeply ingrained doxa of the rulers, who were seen to be acting upon purportedly unshakeable yet highly questionable convictions, and who did not have the courage to put their own authority into proper perspective.

In a succinct survey of what he designated as the “mystery of Thomas More’s *Utopia*”, Gregory Claeys wondered: “[I]f the text is not, fundamentally, intended as both serious social criticism and the provision of a remedy, but is a satirical *jeu d’esprit*, wherein lies its hope?” (Claeys 2011, 69). The question applies in exactly the same terms to Sade’s

“Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .”, yet at its heart there also already lies an assertion, namely that some hope *can* be derived from these writings. It is an assertion with which I wholeheartedly agree and which, by way of conclusion, I shall try to articulate more clearly.

Perhaps the great value of *Utopia* and “Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .” is that they present their ‘utopias’ as neither desirable nor strictly achievable, because More and Sade realized full well that any conscious striving towards the realization of perfection is fundamentally fraught with danger, and is likely to produce monsters—as in Goya’s famous etching—who will appear as creatures that are either *in defectu* or *in excessu* of the desired ideal of purity, and who will therefore need to be discarded or exterminated. Yet they somehow also recognized that rationality in itself does not guarantee the best state of a commonwealth, because it is not immune against becoming integrated into its own epistemic utopia, where universality would meet particularity, essence would match existence, and absolute truth would be guaranteed in a closed system of carefully controlled, computational knowledge production. With More, we did not have to wait for Sade to show how the self-confessed rational mind, who believes to act upon the voice of Nature, may become the architect of an enclosed totalitarian *dystopia*, in which citizens’ individual liberties are crushed in the name of freedom. Learned as the Utopians may be, they do not seem to produce their own literature. Musically skilled though they are, the sounds of their instruments only serve the purpose of accompanying the prayers and hymns in their religious services, or communal meals. Laugh as they do, they only poke fun at people who do not share in their cherished value system, or who lack the intellectual abilities that they attribute to themselves. Cultured as they may be, the Utopians lack culture, probably because they

have never learned how to grow a proper nose. With Sade, however, we are being presented with an ideal state whose ideology of radical, rational freedom has become strictly synonymous with mutual exploitation and limitless cruelty.

In constructing narratives whose elusive authorial voices, ethical inconsistencies, and pervasive internal tensions make any firm conclusion about their message *de facto* inconclusive, and in taking satire to dizzying heights—although only ever at the expense of those who are so full of themselves that they overflow with pride and vanity, or who no longer feel they have to struggle to give existence to their voice—More and Sade clearly react against both the arrogance of the political rulers and the self-proclaimed superiority of the religious establishment. Yet what they present, by way of alternative to the sterile, arid and largely self-serving knowledge economy of their time, is both an exercise in humility and a paean to the social power of self-deprecation.

What *Utopia* and “Frenchmen, Some More Effort . . .” may offer us, in times of widespread economic recession, unending civil wars, rampant terrorism, escalating religious extremism, perilous political satire, and the accelerating corporatization of higher education, with its concurrent promotion of the economically most valuable subjects in science and technology, is a crucial reevaluation of the importance of the poetic inspiration and the creative imagination. *Utopia* and “Frenchmen, Some More Effort...” are perfect reading if one wants to have a laugh, but they may be dead serious in their ambitions to make us question our proclaimed rationality, to make us reconsider our most firmly established convictions, and to make us doubt the hope of perfectibility—in short, to make us laugh at ourselves.

The hope of these texts, therefore, lies in their very reliance on and promotion of a composite style of reasoning, which is neither strictly pure nor merely practical,

neither exclusively serious nor entirely frivolous, but which thrives on a hybrid, anamorphic and intrinsically playful construct for destabilizing established bodies of knowledge, much like Nietzsche would attempt to do through his pursuit of a radically alternative, gay science (Nietzsche 2001). In terms of their contents, as well as on account of their style, the texts do not hold the promise, or the prospect of complete satisfaction, insofar as the instability of the authorial voice, the gradual disorientation of the reader, and the elusiveness of the object (of social critique, or of bitter satire) all conspire to sustain desire in its status as a 'longing for'. The hedonistic calculus that runs through the ethical systems of both the Utopians and the aspiring French republicans is but a decoy, then, for what is essentially an acknowledgement of the unavoidable state of dissatisfaction that characterizes the human condition. Yet instead of deploring this miserable state of affairs, or seriously articulating the terms and conditions of an achievable, ideal commonwealth, More and Sade demonstrate that happiness may be found in the very maintenance of desire as an insatiable force. It should also be emphasized, however, that as educational manuals, More's and Sade's texts do not contribute in any way to the promotion of a new disciplinary practice, through which desire would be modeled, shaped and tamed, but rather to an emancipatory form of instruction, in which the "education of desire" is geared towards the creation of an endless "desire for education", supported by the faculty of critical analysis, whose distinguished flag features a really nice nose. Maybe this is where we should situate our highest hope, and maybe this highest hope is more necessary than ever before in 21st century educational settings, on account of the seemingly unstoppable instrumentalisation of knowledge, and the associated neo-liberal domestication of desire as a commodifiable economic good. One More effort . . .

NOTES

- ¹ Throughout my essay, I will reference the most recent Logan-Adams edition of *Utopia* (More 2016a), which is the only commonly available English translation that includes all the ancillary materials as well as its copious marginal glosses, which are invaluable for the interpretation of the text, and of which it can be said that they belong to it as much as its two constitutive books (Pieper 2016). The translation by Dominic Baker-Smith for Penguin Classics (More 2012) is more casual and slightly better attuned to More's conversational Latin than the Logan-Adams version, yet this edition sadly omits all of the marginal glosses as well as some of the ancillary materials. The Verso edition (More 2016b), which was expressly published to coincide with the quincentennial of More's book, contains an interesting preface by China Miéville and some essays by Ursula Le Guinn. Although this is not immediately clear, this edition is based on the very first 1551 English translation by Ralph Robynson, yet it omits all the glosses and all the ancillary materials. The Norton Critical Edition of the text (More 2011) includes the ancillary materials and many valuable excerpts from classic contributions by prominent More-scholars, yet for some reason it only contains a selection of the marginal glosses in footnotes, whereas the Clarence H. Miller translation (More 2014) amalgamates the marginal glosses as endnotes with the translator's notes, under the description of 'sidenote'. For scholarly purposes, the Latin-English parallel text prepared by Edward Surtz S.J. and J.H. Hexter for Volume 4 of *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More* remains unsurpassed, yet here the English is rather cumbersome and wooden in places (More, 1965). The newer Latin-English version by Logan, Adams and Miller (More 1995) is more compact, although in this edition the spelling and punctuation of the Latin text have been modernized and standardized. The most authentic version of the Latin text is the one included in the French equivalent of the Surtz and Hexter volume, which was prepared single-handedly by André Prévost (More 1978).
- ² In their monumental *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Frank and Fritzie Manuel dryly noted that "Thomas More . . . was known and misquoted by both Restif [Sade's lifelong rival in all matters libertine] and de Sade" (Manuel and Manuel 1979, 547). I have not been able to establish which, if any, of the French translations of *Utopia* Sade may have consulted. More's book was first translated into French in 1550, yet the most popular version of it during the 1790s was by Thomas Rousseau, which was effectively an anti-royalist re-writing of the entire text that would have been ideally suited for the purposes of revolutionary politics. However, in this version too, sexual promiscuity and adultery re-appear as crimes that should be severely punished (More 1780, 234-43). In his notes to the Pléiade edition of *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, the editor points out that Sade probably adapted a phrase from the second volume of Jean-Nicolas Démeunier's *L'esprit des usages des différens* [sic] *peuples*, yet here the author simply formulated the rhetorical question "Doesn't Thomas Morus prove that it is advantageous to the women of Utopia to walk around naked?", without any reference to debauchery. See Deprun (1998, 1341) and Démeunier (1780, 291).
- ³ On 4 July 1789, Sade was transferred from his prison cell in the Bastille to the asylum of Charenton, from which he was released on 2 April 1790, after the French republican government decided to abolish the infamous *lettres de cachet*, through which people could be detained indefinitely by royal decree. Although everyone knew he was an aristocrat, Sade nonetheless succeeded in obtaining various political posts, culminating in his appointment during the Summer of 1793 to the role of president of *la Section des Piques*, one of the new geographical districts in Paris, with its own legislative assembly. In this role, he wrote a number of political pamphlets, which were generally well-received, yet on 8 December 1793 he was arrested at his house on account of an incriminating letter he had written back in 1791. This was no doubt just a pretext, the real reason being that his ardent atheism was deemed irreconcilable with Robespierre's developing cult of the Supreme Being. For more details about these and other events during Sade's time as a republican civil servant, see the numerous Sade-biographies (Pauvert 1989; Lever 1993; Bongie 1998; du Plessix Gray 1999; Schaeffer 1999).
- ⁴ Sade's reputation was tarnished by the so-called 'Arceuil' or 'Rose Keller affair' of 3 April (Easter Sunday) 1768, during which he allegedly sexually abused a prostitute, and again by the Marseilles incident of 27 June 1772, which resulted in Sade and his valet being sentenced to death on the grounds of sodomy and attempted poisoning (he had spiked some sweets with an aphrodisiac substance), but compared to what

his libertine heroes are up to, Sade's sexual antics were quite mediocre. As to his opposition to the death penalty, nowhere did it manifest itself more poignantly as when, by a curious twist of fate, he had the totally unexpected opportunity to take revenge on his hated in-laws—and especially on Madame de Montreuil, his mother-in-law, who had secured the *lettre de cachet* from the king that had put him away for thirteen years—during his time as president of *la Section des Piques*. At that point, the creator of some of the most depraved characters in the history of depravity could not bring himself to signing their death warrant. As he wrote to his legal advisor Gaspard Gaufridy: “They wanted me to put to the vote a horror, an inhumanity. I categorically refused. Thank God, I’ve washed my hands of it . . . During my presidency, I inscribed the Montreuil on a list of citizens to be spared.” (Bourdin 1929, 342).

⁵ With regard to the politicization of happiness, Lacan implicitly referred to Saint-Just's famous ‘*Rapport au nom du Comité de salut public sur le mode d’exécution du décret contre les ennemis de la Révolution*’, which was delivered to the National Convention on 3 March 1794, at the height of the Reign of Terror, and in which he had proclaimed: “It is a generally felt cause that all the wisdom of a government consists of reducing the party that is opposed to the revolution, and of making people happy at the cost of all vices and all the enemies of freedom . . . May Europe learn that you want to have neither an unhappy person nor an oppressor upon French territory; may this example bear fruit upon the earth; may it propagate the love of virtue and happiness. Happiness is a new idea in Europe” (Saint-Just 2004b, 672-73). In ‘Kant with Sade,’ as well as in his *Seminar VII* (Lacan 1992, 292), and in the 1958 paper ‘The Direction of the Treatment’ (Lacan 2006a, 513), Lacan re-formulated Saint-Just's point as happiness having become a political factor (or matter), yet on each occasion he expressed his doubts as to the novelty of the idea, indicating in ‘Kant with Sade,’ for instance, that “it has always been a political factor” and that it may very well feed into the hands of “the scepter and the censor”, i.e. the power of the Church—priestcraft thus becoming as involved in its pursuit as statecraft (Lacan 2006b, 663). Lacan may have borrowed the idea of the intellectual convergence between Sade and Saint-Just from an evocative 1948 essay by Blanchot (1995), which in itself gave rise to an even more instructive juxtaposition of Sade's and Saint-Just's views in Blanchot's lengthy introduction to a separate publication of “Frenchmen, Some More Effort...” (Blanchot, 1993).

⁶ For a further analysis of the antagonism between Nature's command, the libertines' grandiose fantasy of accelerating and escalating destructiveness, and their recurrent complaint about their own mediocrity, see Schuster (2016, 39-42).

⁷ Against the Epicurean tradition, Kant developed his moral law upon the principle that pleasure, which always stems from the satisfaction of one or the other desire, or from the presence of an object whose reality is desired, should never constitute a motive (reason, incentive, determining ground) for a rational being's decision to act morally. Yet by contrast with both the Epicureans and the Stoics, he did not consider happiness to be a valid motive for moral action either, because much like the other ‘pathological’ grounds, he saw it as being synonymous with self-love, and as too transient, empirical and material for it to qualify as a proper determining ground of the will. Despite his critique of Epicurean and Stoic ethics, Kant was in agreement, however, with how these ancient schools of philosophy had associated happiness with the state of lucid tranquility they called *ataraxia* (ἀταραξία).

⁸ To some extent, the Stoics themselves were aware of the problem, but at the same time they refused to accept that the wise, happy man was really no more than a mythical ideal.

⁹ This point is captured in the last sentence of the third paragraph of Section 13 of Lacan's ‘Kant with Sade’. In French, the sentence reads: “*On ne leur tient aucun compte de ce qu'ils abaissent le désir; car non seulement on ne tient pas la Loi pour remontée d'autant, mais c'est par là, qu'on le sache ou non, qu'on la sent jetée bas.*” Fink has translated this as: “We fail to realize that they degraded desire; and not only do we not consider the Law to be commensurably exalted by them, but it is precisely because of this degrading of desire that, whether we know it or not, we sense that they cast down the Law” (Lacan 2006b, 663). In my interpretation of Lacan's admittedly abstruse sentence, the impersonal pronoun ‘on’ represents Lacan's own opinion, whereby he is indicating that the Stoics should not be credited for degrading desire, because in doing so they also dismiss the Law. And so I would propose the following alternative translation: “We need not give them [the Stoics] any credit for degrading desire, because apart from the fact that the Law is not elevated accordingly, it is precisely owing to this degradation, whether we know it or not, that we sense the Law to be cast down [*jetée bas*]”.

¹⁰ On 3 September 1516, More sent his manuscript to Erasmus, entrusting him with the task of steering it through the printing process, whereby he referred to it as “my ‘Nowhere’” (*Nusquam mitto*) (More 1961, 73).

¹¹ For an instructive list of all the Utopian vices and the various things the Utopians find ‘morally corrosive’, see Wilde (2017, 16).

¹² In More’s lengthy missive of 21 October 1515 in defence of satire to the theologian Maarten van Dorp, after the latter had openly criticized Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*, he stated: “Now this book, the *Little Logicals* [*Parva Logicalia*], which is so called, I suppose, because it has very little logic in it, is worth while looking at, with its suppositions . . . and passages in which occur little rules, not only silly, but even false . . .” (More 1961, 20-21).

¹³ For a recent example, see Evans (2015).

¹⁴ The notion ‘black humour’ was coined by André Breton, who did not hesitate to include Sade in his *Anthology of Black Humour* as one of the most magisterial incarnations of it. In his presentation of the texts, Breton emphasized that Sade’s “plainly outrageous passages” actually “relax the reader by tipping him off that the author is not taken in [*en lui donnant à penser que l’auteur n’est pas dupe*]”, whereby he added that in his life Sade had but inaugurated the genre of the ‘sinister joke’ [*mystification sinistre*], whilst still paying a very high price for it (Breton 2009, 46). When Lacan mentioned Sade’s black humour in ‘Kant with Sade’ (Lacan 2006b, 648), he was undoubtedly thinking of Breton’s comment here. In addition, the idea of Sade not being duped (by his own literary fantasy, and his creative freedom) is a key pillar of Lacan’s argument in ‘Kant with Sade’, because it enabled Lacan to differentiate between the ‘practical reason’ of the fictitious Sadean libertines and the ‘practical reason’ presiding over Sade’s own life, as a writer of libertine novels (Lacan 2006b, 653-58). Yet if there is anything that still divides the community of Sade-scholars, it is precisely the author’s intent. In her introduction to the English translation of *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, Francine du Plessix Gray stated that Sade’s intent was “clearly parodic”, both in the revolutionary pamphlet that is being read aloud by the Chevalier, and which Lacan too singles out for its “deriding of the historical situation” (Lacan 2006b, 648), and in the cruelly pornographic parts of the book (du Plessix Gray 2006, viii-xiv). Nonetheless, suffused with sardonic humour as some of Sade’s works may be, it is quite unlikely that every reader will burst out laughing when Eugénie sews up her mother’s vagina with a huge needle and thick red thread. One could venture the hypothesis that through his act of writing, Sade intended to elicit *jouissance* in his readership, whilst simultaneously making his readers feel guilty and ashamed for deriving *jouissance* from their act of reading—and that this is where Sade’s real perversion needs to be situated—yet I am not convinced that Sade cared all that much about his readers, or that he had a specific type of readership in mind when he wrote his libertine novels. In his recent study of why Sade was taken seriously, and seemingly for the first time, during the 20th century, Éric Marty called Breton the worst reader of Sade one can imagine, precisely because he had dared to identify him as a black humorist, and had thus refused to take him seriously (Marty 2011, 16), as if humour by definition excludes seriousness.

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