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Drama in the life and works of Thomas More

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1988

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DRAMA IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF THOMAS MORE

by

Daniel David Fredricks

A Dissertation Submitted to
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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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Whatever else Thomas More was--and he was many things in his busy life--he was a consummate actor who knew drama intimately. From childhood until his death he was exposed to drama. He acted in plays, wrote little pieces, studied classical examples, and alluded to dramatic works on many occasions for rhetorical purposes. The historical record of his life shows an all-pervasive involvement with drama and influences from several sources: his humanistic studies, the concurrent medieval drama and early Tudor drama, and the court pageantry. The record of More's experience with drama has been scattered throughout the biographies and critical literature. This dissertation attempts to give a coherent picture of this aspect of More's life.

Another dimension of More's fascination with drama manifests itself in his own role playing which numerous biographers and scholars have mentioned. This work analyzes exactly what role More played at particular times. He knew he wanted to become a counselor to the king at the time Henry VIII was crowned, but he needed to find the right voice for this. The "Coronation Poem," Richard III and Utopia are all attempts to find that voice. Having made the decision to join the council, More played the role of the Platonic Man of the Cave and knew that that role could ultimately result in his demise. Finally, after More had

been imprisoned, he began to take on the role of the Christian martyr.

At each stage of his role playing, he was the author of the script that he was following. He wrote his own history before he lived it. He created a fictional "Thomas More" and, in effect, turned his life into a work of art in his attempt to act out the part of his fictional creation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

Thomas More's reputation as a Christian martyr far overshadows whatever else he accomplished--but his other achievements were considerable: judge, steward of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, scholar, polemicist, correspondent of international renown, ambassador, Chancellor, parent, and friend. Such a full life hardly allows time for something as apparently frivolous as drama, and yet drama in its various manifestations continuously influenced More from youth until death.

More's relationship with drama has been studied both from the point of view of his influence upon drama and from the point of view of the influence of drama in various forms upon his life and works. To date, the record of More's experience with drama is scattered throughout his own writing, the biographies, and the critical literature. No existing work shows both the extent of More's involvement with drama and the influence of drama in his life. Previous studies either mention drama in passing as part of the biographical account or show More's influence on drama as part of the history of ideas. A third critical approach postulates More's role playing in an almost sociological sense without identifying the particular roles he played at specific times.

Biographies by their nature treat More's life comprehensively and attempt an evaluation of his character and his career in a historical context. Indeed, in More's case, the biographies until recently have been a series of hagiographies. Neither a saint's life nor an objective account of personality and career focuses much attention on drama which, after all, comprises only one dimension of More's life, albeit an important one.

Works in the genre of the history of ideas abstract the elements of drama and render them as intellectual products rather than personal experiences. Since More is not traditionally thought of as a dramatist, studies in this area such as Hogrefe's (1959) confine their attention to the influence of More's humanism on early Tudor drama and seldom speculate on the influence of drama on Thomas More's personality.

Likewise, sociological studies of role playing such as Greenblatt's (1980), even when they are grounded in literary history, tend to portray individual behavior as representative of group phenomena. Greenblatt identifies More's role playing as typical of Renaissance self-fashioning but not as indicative of the influence of drama on More's life. In this sense, role playing becomes an impersonal social behavior devoid of particular values rooted in other areas of More's experience. The emphasis falls on the role playing as social behavior rather than on the roles themselves as particular expressions of More's personality and values.

There is therefore a need to pull together in one place the biographical accounts of More's experience with drama and to assess the influence on More's life of drama in all its manifestations as well as to specify what roles More played at particular times.

Review of the Literature

That Thomas More played roles of various sorts in the course of his personal and professional life is well known to those familiar with the scholarship. Almost every biographer mentions this, beginning with William Roper, More's first biographer; and some, like Marius, give considerable weight to the fact. Referring to More's stepping in among the players at Cardinal Morton's, Marius writes: "For this biographer it is worth saying that this youthful intervention on a public stage is typical of all More's life, for he was always making himself a stage and acting on it for an audience" (22). But aside from using drama as a motif in his biography, Marius focuses neither on More's role playing nor on the centrality of drama in his life.

The most comprehensive treatment of More's role playing is Stephen Greenblatt's Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (1980). For Greenblatt, self-fashioning is an artful process. He chooses the term "fashion" from Spenser's phrase "to fashion a gentleman" because it is a distinctly Renaissance term that in the sixteenth century begins to be used widely to describe the presentation of one's self, whereas it never appeared with that meaning in medieval works. Greenblatt points out that the word "fashion" does not occur at all in Chaucer (2). Self-fashioning interests Greenblatt because "it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life" (3). Greenblatt examines six writers as case studies in Renaissance self-fashioning: More, Tyndale, Wyatt, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. He does not present any all-inclusive theory about self-fashioning: "This book will not advance any comprehensive 'explanation' of English Renaissance self-fashioning; each of the chapters is intended to stand alone as an exploration whose contours are shaped by our grasp of the specific situation of the author or text" (8). What he does identify, however, are ten conditions that seem to be common in most case studies. The most important one for my purposes is the ninth: "Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language" (9).

Greenblatt points out that More enjoyed playing roles, a point made by a number of other biographers and critics. He mentions More's feigning sullenness and lack of vitality in order to free himself from time-consuming social obligations to Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon (21), an anecdote recounted by Roper. Greenblatt claims that "the theatrical metaphor was More's favorite" (27) for the reason cited earlier--that self-fashioning obscures the boundary between literature and social life.

I am indebted to Greenblatt for his emphasis on the degree to which the theatrical metaphors More uses expose More's sense of the irony of life. I am also indebted to Greenblatt for his reminder of the theatrical nature of public life under Henry VIII, although he has not documented this phenomenon fully; nor was the idea new with Greenblatt. He hints at the connection between Henry's lavish displays and his contemporaries' conception of his power, but Lauro Martines actually deals with the general thesis of art and power more thoroughly in his work on Italian city-states (232-233). Greenblatt is clear that More participates as an actor in this world (29), but never describes the role.

My analysis of the dramatic in More's life is based upon Greenblatt's notion that "the historical More is a narrative fiction" (31). By this Greenblatt means that More lives his life "as a character thrust into a play" (31). But Greenblatt has no comprehensive picture of the fiction of Thomas More's life even though he postulates its existence. I go further than Greenblatt in showing that Thomas More is playing the part of a character called "Thomas More," who is the product of his own and other people's creation, that he writes the script and then lives his life to play out that script. The roles consist of adviser to the king, Platonic Man of the Cave, and martyr. All these together make up the fictional character "Thomas More."

Whereas for Greenblatt Utopia is a psychological "expression of More's inner life," a portrait of his "self-criticism," and a "longing for self-cancellation" (54), for me, the work is primarily a statement of More's beliefs about private property and the ostentation of court life and of his realization that such values make his role as adviser to the king ultimately lethal. Martyrdom as the final role in my scheme is not self-cancellation. It is More's final act in a performance which makes "Thomas More" a legend--a legend already in print, both in More's self-characterization and in accounts of him by his friends.

Objectives and Strategy

This dissertation has two objectives: (1) to bring together the scattered references to drama in Thomas More's life and argue that drama was more than an incidental experience in his view of the world and (2) to show that

More played specific roles at certain times and followed a script which he had, in effect, written long before he acted out the roles.

Thomas More was a consummate actor who knew drama intimately. From childhood until his death he was exposed to drama. He acted in plays, wrote little pieces, studied classical examples, and alluded to dramatic works on many occasions for rhetorical purposes. The historical record of his life shows an involvement with drama and influences from several sources: his humanistic studies, medieval and early Tudor drama, and court pageantry. This dissertation attempts to give a coherent picture of this aspect of More's life and to provide biographical evidence to support my contention that More conceived of his life in dramatic terms.

More's fascination with drama manifests itself in his own role playing, which numerous biographers and scholars mention. This work analyzes the particular roles More played at different times. He knew he wanted to become a counselor to the king at the time Henry VIII was crowned, but he needed to find the right voice for this. The "Coronation Poem," <u>Richard III</u>, and <u>Utopia</u> are all attempts to find that voice and to play the role of counselor. Having finally made the decision to join the king's council and having become counselor in fact, More then played what I call the role of the Platonic Man of the Cave and knew that

that role would ultimately result in his demise although he did not know exactly how. Finally, after More had been imprisoned, he began to take on the role of the Christian martyr.

At each stage of his role playing, he was the author of the script that he was following. He wrote his own history before he lived it. In effect, he created a fictional "Thomas More" and proceeded to turn his life into a work of art in his attempt to act out the part of his fictional creation.

In developing my argument, I shall first show that drama, both as literature and as performance, ubiquitously influenced More from his youth to his death. Next, I shall demonstrate that the Renaissance notion of the world as a stage was a commonplace for many humanists but was something more profound for Thomas More and affected in a very personal way his decision to play roles. Then, I shall identify the parts which have been left unnamed by those who have heretofore hypothesized More's role playing: the counselor to the king and the Platonic Man of the Cave. In this context, I shall argue that the martyrdom is a logical next role after the Platonic Man of the Cave. Finally, I shall demonstrate that Thomas More turned his life into a work of art by creating a fictional "More" whose script he wrote long before he acted out the part.

Limitations and Definitions

This dissertation focuses on a representative sample of More's major and minor writings, but preference is given to imaginative works over polemical works. Some of More's pieces no longer exist but are cited by other authors. In these cases scholars have to make inferences. Examination is confined primarily to his English works. Utopia is an exception.

There is no definitive list of More's book collection nor any exhaustive list of his allusions. This is not an influence study in the French tradition of comparative literature. There was no attempt to locate editions of classical works to which More would have had access. Arguments here are based on biography, history, and the transmission of ideas rather than on linguistic or rhetorical elements in the sources.

I have used primarily the Yale Edition of the Complete Works but have occasionally cited other editions of More's works. Secondary sources through the summer of 1987 are included but nothing more recent.

Some of my key terms and the definitions I give them are these:

(1) Drama. The term "drama" in this study encompasses a broad spectrum of elements including plays written or performed as well as other works which are not specifically plays but are developed with dialogue. The meaning goes well beyond the notion of a serious play to include comedies, dramatic lyrics, debates, philosophical dialogues, mimes, mummings, pageants, disguisings, and also speeches and other works which are publicly performed. Even narrative story-telling in which characters speak for themselves or whose narrators adopt a persona as the tale is recounted is by my definition "dramatic." Drama is something one does as well as something that one reads. It refers to both the material and its production. It is both the end and the means.

(2) Role. The term "role" describes what sociologists identify as the cluster of behaviors associated with specific positions in society (Abercrombie 180-181). These attributes are determined by the position rather than the personality of the individual. In other words, the role defines a pattern of behaviors identifiable regardless of the person playing the role. Two very different people can play the same role, and while their personalities may influence what they make of the role, the role itself remains discernibly the same one. In fact, as I use the

term, the influence of role on the individual is much stronger than that of the individual on the role. Roles are almost impervious to the idiosyncrasies of the people who take them on.

(3) Voice. The term "voice" here refers to any medium or channel of expression. There is an implicit suggestion that one must find the right match of personality and circumstance in order to convey certain ideas. A voice may turn out to be a genre such as poetry or prose or a medium such as writing or speaking or even the taking on of a role.

(4) Script. "Script" has a general application here to delineate the outline or intentions or plans that one follows in order to play out a role. In some sense the script records the sequence of events and the major turning points. In a more specific sense, "script" may refer to written documents which themselves are a part of the plan. In this dissertation in the second sense, there are a few documents written at earlier points in More's life which are precisely the outlines for actions at later points in his life or are things which he wanted to have others recognize in retrospect as intentions.

CHAPTER II

DRAMATIC EXPERIENCES AND INFLUENCES

Youthful Encounters with Drama

The all-pervasive influence of drama upon More's life probably began with the example of More's father. John More had a reputation for telling funny stories (Marius 8, 11), and he may have won this reputation by acting out the parts in his narrative. Performance of stories in public often entails some dramatization with the narrator assuming various roles. Thomas observed these humorous accounts from a very early age. According to Harpsfield, More, like his father, enjoyed a reputation as a good storyteller. Indeed, Harpsfield says that Thomas "incomparably did exceede" his father in tall tales (10). Marius calls More "the greatest English storyteller between Chaucer and Shakespeare" (xxi, 23), and presumably More, like his father, dramatized his story telling.

John More probably also gave Thomas his first experience of actual dramatic performance. When Thomas was ten years old in 1488, his father was serving as Master of the Revels at Lincoln's Inn. The various Inns of Court, which were the schools for the training of young lawyers, were also social clubs for practicing barristers. Part of the annual activities included dramatic performances, and different members would be elected each year to serve as Master of the Revels. It is highly probable that Thomas saw the Christmas Revels in 1488 and may have seen them for some years prior to that. No records indicate that Thomas himself participated in the Lincoln's Inn plays at this early age, but since his father was Master of the Revels, he almost certainly would have seen dramatic productions.

Lincoln's Inn provided Thomas More contact with dramatic experience for a total of nearly forty years. After two years at Oxford and two years at the New Inn, More himself was first admitted to Lincoln's Inn at the age of eighteen. The official register of Lincoln's Inn, The Records of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn, also known as the Black Book, records Thomas's acceptance on February 12, 1496. Roxburgh points out that although the terms of study were short, new students at Lincoln's Inn were expected to be in residence during three vacations for three years! He cites as evidence for this conclusion the list of thirty-one names on the eighth folio of the first Black Book with the heading "Ceux sont les nonns de ceux qu fueront assignes de continuer yci le nowel l'an primer, H.vj" (30). No doubt the students who remained during the holidays were engaged in the play productions which were under the direction of the Master of the Revels. More continued to be involved with the activities of Lincoln's Inn for many years after he became a barrister. He was elected to serve as Butler in 1507 at age twenty-nine, as Marshall in 1510 at age thirty-two, and as Alternate Master of the Revels in 1528 at age fifty. This last office he could not fulfill because of professional obligations, and he had to pay a fine in order to be exempt from his duties. The fact that More had been in the King's service since 1517, and became Lord Chancellor the following October, 1529, perhaps explains the kind of professional demands on his time when he had to turn down the duties as Alternate Master of the Revels. The very fact that he had been offered the position corroborates More's long-standing interest in the young lawyers and their dramatic endeavors and seems plausible evidence for arguing that More witnessed or assisted with numerous dramatic performances in the course of his professional career. Some scholars even argue that, in retrospect, the election as Alternate Master of the Revels contributes significance to More's childhood interest in drama (Schoeck, "Sir Thomas More and Lincoln's Inn Revels," 430).

William Roper's observation on More's life at Cardinal Morton's residence allows us to ascribe beyond conjecture an early involvement in drama to More. When Thomas was twelve years old, his father sent him to serve as apprentice in the household of John Morton. The placement of young boys in other respectable households was customary with the English upper-middle class. Although some Europeans found this practice of British surrogate parenting to be cold and uncaring, the British themselves considered it an excellent opportunity for training in deportment and for making connections in the world of business and politics. And advantageous it was for young Thomas More, since John Morton happened to be both Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chancellor of England. One can imagine the caliber of intellectuals and professionals who frequented Morton's household. Thomas's exposure to literary, political, legal, and religious ideas would have been extraordinary for a boy of his age.

Morton must have had a special interest in Thomas because he arranged for his admission to Oxford in 1492, and is said to have remarked on the promising future that lay ahead for Thomas More: "This child here wayting at the table, whosoeuer shall liue to see it, will proue a mervailous man" (Roper 5). More must have been a remarkable lad, for it would take something quite out of the ordinary to impress someone whose daily counsel was with kings and cardinals, someone who was to be a cardinal himself only a year after young Thomas left the household. Hogrefe speculates that during More's years at Cardinal Morton's, Medwall quite likely performed his play Nature there and that because of More's direct knowledge of the play, was later able to identify Medwall as author of Nature for his nephew, the printer William Rastell (257). Whether or not

More saw that particular play is really of concern only to someone trying to establish the authorship or publication history of Medwall's play. That More saw secular dramatic works of the early Tudor period seems almost certain. Marius points out that at Morton's home Thomas More would have seen not only the early experiments with secular drama but also drama in a larger metaphorical sense--"that of sin and redemption, of life and death, of doom, bliss, and damnation, God and Satan" (24).

The episode of importance for this examination of drama is the one first recounted by Roper and repeated by other biographers. Apparently young Thomas More joined extemporaneously in dramatic entertainments at Morton's house "where, thoughe he was younge of yeares, yeat wold he at Christmas tyde sodenly sometimes steppe in among the players, and neuer studyeng for the matter, make a parte of his owne there presently among them, which made the lookers on more sporte than all the plaiers beside" (Roper 5). More was in residence at Morton's at the time that Henry Medwall was serving as Morton's chaplain. Although Rastell did not publish Medwall's <u>Fulgens and Lucres</u> until 1497, More may have seen a working version of the play or have been aware of its sources.[1] If this is the case, then More may have participated in one of the first performances of this English Renaissance interlude and could not have failed to see how it expressed the virtues espoused in his classical studies. From the version of Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres which is now in existence, one can infer that the first part of the play was an interlude performed between two banquets. Medwall has given dramatic form to what is essentially a debate on true nobility between a rich but idle aristocrat and a humble but virtuous commoner.

The treatment of this issue was not new in literature with Medwall. The early humanists seemed to be offering their answer to an age-old debate, and their answer was that nobility rested not with inheritance or wealth but rather with the practice of virtue. Chaucer had addressed the same question in both "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and "The Franklin's Tale." There is a strong possibility that More may have played the part of one of the two servant boys in the induction to Medwall's prototype of Fulgens and Lucres. The boys referred to only as A and B comment on the play as it progresses by debating with one another the relative merits of the two suitors Gaius Flaminius, the plebeian, and Publius Cornelius, the patrician. They are thus both inside the play and outside it at the same time. This earliest known example of secular drama thus is virtually a play within a play and certainly probes at that often subtle boundary between art and reality which fascinated so many of the Renaissance writers, including More. Happé commented on the extent to which Medwall seems to be conscious of his audience in both asides and direct address. Happé says that

Medwall "maintains the sense that they are especially privileged onlookers" (20). <u>Fulgens and Lucres</u> on a number of occasions addresses the audience as if the audience were on the stage. Cornelius speaks these lines:

> Now a wise fellow that had sumwhat a brayne
> And of suche thingis had experience
> Such one wolde I with me retayne
> To gyue me counseile and assistence,
> For I will spare no cost or expence
> Nor yet refuse ony laboure or payne
> The loue of fayre lucres therby to attayne.
> So many gode fellowes as byn in this hall,
> And is ther non syrs among you all
> That wyll enterprise this gere?
> Some of you can do it if ye lust;
> But if ye wyl not than I must
> Go seche a man ellis where. (I, 347-359)

Similar examples can be found in lines 363, 1315, and 1413-1417.

While no one can ascertain for certain that the source of <u>Fulgens and Lucres</u> is indeed the play in which Thomas More "made a part for himself," there is reason to suppose that one of More's first experiences as an actor reinforced his awareness of the artificial and sometimes deliberately ambiguous line between art and reality, an awareness that was to have important consequences in the final dramatic performance of More's life. In his own life More witnessed--and perhaps to a great degree exemplified--the truth of Medwall's line "Ther is so myche nyce aray / Amonges these galandis now aday / That a man shall not lightly / Know a player from another man (I, 53-56).

Acting was not More's only experience with drama in his youth. More's own correspondence shows that he wrote part or all of a play called Solomon. In his letter of November 1501 to John Holt, the noted grammarian who wrote Lac Puerorum, one of the first important Latin grammar texts in English, More indicates that he is sending materials which Holt requested but not the emendations to a comedy called Solomon: "I have sent you everything you wanted, except the additions I have made to the comedy about Solomon; those I could not send you at the moment, as I did not have them with me. I shall arrange for you to get them next week, along with any other of my materials you wish" (SL 1-2). The supposition is that the play was to be used to help with the teaching of Latin. Either the play was one of More's or he was adding something to one already written by another author. No record exists to settle this question.

More's own accomplishments in his youth as a writer of drama were limited, but there can be no doubt that he was attracted to dramatic writing and experimented with rudimentary forms. Among More's juvenilia are nine pageants which he painted on cloth and then described in verse of rhyme royale. Each of the nine scenes and verses treats some aspect of life much in the way medieval art and verse might serve as exempla. The topics are childhood, manhood, love, age, death, fame, time, eternity, and poetry. Characters from the previous panel are carried to the subsequent one to provide thematic unity. The ideas are of a rather typically secular moral quality that transcends time periods. Treatments of ubi sunt and memento mori are rather conventional, just the sort of thing that would be normal fare for a late fifteenth-century schoolboy with a sensitivity to classical learning and spiritual reflection. Most scholars place little importance on the pageants. Still, one must see even in these childhood works the beginning of a sense of the pageantry of life, the incipient statement of life as a stage on which pageants are played. Robert A. Duffy argues that More's pageants show "some affinity with English theatrical practice at the beginning of the sixteenth century" (15). There is a very real connection between the kind of art and literature represented by More's pageants and the theatrical pageants and trionfi which were part of More's surroundings in childhood. We know from his letter to Holt that More was moved by the entry of Catherine into London: "never, to my knowledge, has there been such a reception anywhere" (SL 2). Certainly no one would claim that More's pageants are drama per se, but no one can deny that they show similarities to a highly stylized form of drama popular at the time. Duffy points out the dramatic quality of the self-introductory lines: "I am called Chyldhood," "Manhood am I," "Old Age am I," "Fame I am called," and so on (16). The format is presentational. The verses seem to be written for performance or recitation rather than for silent reading. More's early dramatic works were unsophisticated and even crude by standards of only a generation later, but their existence is manifest proof of More's involvement with drama from an early age.

Family Connections with Drama

Drama became part of More's life in still another way. Through family and friends More had contacts with major dramatists and their printers throughout his youth and his adult life. His sister Elizabeth married John Rastell and their daughter Joan, More's niece, married John Heywood. The contributions of Rastell and Heywood to the development of English Renaissance drama are documented in a variety of sources and are topics in and of themselves for the student of that field. John Rastell printed three plays of uncertain authorship, Gentleness and Nobility, The Nature of the Four Elements, and Calisto and Melebea, some time between 1525 and 1530. He also printed Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres some time between 1512 and 1516 and was probably the printer of Skelton's Magnificence (Hogrefe 255-256). Rastell was an author in his own right and devised pageants for public occasions. Reed thinks that Rastell may have been present when Henry VII and his queen in 1493 and 1500 praised the Gray Friars for their plays (5); and Ungerer thinks that Calisto and Melebea may have been commissioned for John More's wedding in 1529 (Norland 59). Of course, this work is a translation of the Spanish dramatic dialogue La Celestina (1499) by Fernando de Rojas, a Spanish lawyer of Jewish descent. Rastell's role in preparing the play for the wedding is uncertain, but if Ungerer is right, Rastell's involvement in some capacity also links European drama of the period to Sir Thomas More.

William Rastell, John's son and More's nephew, was also a printer. He printed Medwall's Nature, John Heywood's The Play of Love and The Play of the Weather and two other plays which have been attributed to Heywood: The Pardoner and the Friar and John John, the Husband, Tyb his Wife, and Sir John, the Priest. Of course, he is also important to scholars as the publisher of More's English works. Because much of the publication of these dramatic works took place during the lifetime of Sir Thomas and because these men were members of the family and of the circle of friends, it is reasonable to conjecture that More himself knew of the works in question. Perhaps he read them or saw them performed; most certainly he talked with the authors or publishers about them in the same sense that he would talk with other family members in some detail about their activities.

John Heywood married Joan Rastell, John's daughter and More's niece. His dramatic works have already been mentioned. The stuffiness of university scholasticism did not at all suit John Heywood. It is said that "he retired to his native place, and became noted to all witty men, especially to Sir Thomas More" (Reed, 49). Gerard Langbaine, the younger, is even more explicit about the friendship of Heywood and Sir Thomas: "He was most familiar with Sr. Thomas More, whose Neighbour he was, and by whom I suppose he was introduc'd to the knowledge of Queen Mary; in whose Favor he grew exceedingly" (253-254). If this piece of biographical evidence is true, there can be little doubt that More was familiar with Heywood's drama. Evidently relationships between the More family and the Rastells and the Heywoods endured even beyond Thomas's lifetime. Elizabeth and Joan Rastell lived with John Heywood's family after John Rastell died; and Joan Staverton, the oldest of Thomas More's sisters appointed John Heywood to be her executor (Reed 84-85). An abbreviated genealogical chart clarifies the relationships among the people whose own experience with drama was a part of the lives of More and his family. (See Appendix.)

Dramatic Works of the Young Adult

In 1503, at the age of twenty-five, Thomas wrote a brief dramatic poem, "A Mery Jest how a Sergeant would Learn to Playe the Frere." The plot is simple: a sergeant disguises himself as a friar in order to collect some money from a merchant but is drubbed in the attempt when he discards his disguise. The dialogue in the poem is clear even though the form of the work is more typically what we think of as narrative poetry rather than drama. A profligate son, heir to a rich estate, squanders his fortune and then feigns illness and hides with friends from his debtors. A sergeant, in turn, pretends to be a friar offering spiritual advice in order to get into the house. When the sergeant reveals his identity and tries to arrest the debtor, the women of the house pommel him and toss him out. The moral is that people should mind their own business. There is enough narrative voice that the work can hardly be called drama, but a dramatic quality is present. The immediacy of the speakers in the poem is similar to the effect created by Skelton in his his poem "Philip Sparrow" or even more strikingly by Rojas in La Celestina and much later by Browning in his dramatic monologues. In his usual witty mode, More points out what can happen to those who dissemble for questionable reasons. The diction makes clear the role playing:

> This thing was tryed
> And verefyed,
> Here by a sergeaunt late,
> That thrifty was,
> Or he coulde pas,
> Rapped about the pate,
> Whyle that he would
> See how he could
> In goddes name play the frere:
> Now yf you will,
> Knowe hoe it fyll,
> Take hede and ye shall here. (EW 327-8)

The sergeant is interesting in this case because he is pretending to be someone else. In keeping with this endeavor, we read that "All his array,/ He chaunged with a frere./ So was he dight,/ That no man might,/ Hym for a frere deny" (329-330). The change of clothes clearly does not make him a friar, but drama depends on appearance, and the sergeant is adopting an appearance suitable to the role he is playing. There is never any doubt that this "fayned frere" (330) is a fake, but the success of his endeavor within the story depends on his sustaining an illusion. When he breaks the illusion, the civilities offered to the friar break down and slapstick comedy ensues. The raucous humor of the scene is worthy of Chaucer's Nicholas, Alisoun, and Absolon or of Don Quixote's tryst with Maritornes.

Heywood's <u>Pardoner and the Friar</u> shows some of the same slapstick humor as does More's <u>Mery Jest</u>, and the similarity suggests that Heywood may have been influenced by More's little dramatic poem. One scholar has pointed out that not only do More's poem and Heywood's play have a common theme, but in two places, Heywood's play falls into the meter of the poem (Reed 137-138). The churchyard brawl, reminiscent of the one in <u>Tom Jones</u>, shows that Heywood has a sense of dramatic action in an otherwise talky play. Echoing the assessment of A. W. Reed (139) and Hogrefe (294), Alcuin Blamires suggests that Heywood may have been influenced by More's satiric vision of the world (50). Blamires further defends Heywood's reputation as a dramatist against the cliché that his plays are merely debates by arguing that Heywood goes far beyond the scholastic debate and a dry "cerebral exercise": "But if you start to infuse it [the debate] with racy backchat, subjectivity, and informality, if you throw out the rules, it slides towards something else which can only lamely be called 'argument.' Eventually a point is reached where the 'argument' is dynamic rather than geometric, dramatic rather than forensic" (51). Reasoning analogous to that of Blamires can be applied to "A Mery Jest." In some sense More's poem is about acting, specifically the failure to sustain an illusion; and by its tension and portrayal of animation, it "slides," as Blamires uses that term, toward drama. More's work is clearly dramatic within its verse form.

More's other minor works show a didactic quality similar to that in much medieval drama. About the same time as the "Mery Jest," More wrote two other minor works: a lament for Elizabeth of York and some verses for a Book of Fortune. Neither would have won him literary fame. Both express conventional medieval commonplaces about death and fortune rather than humanistic or Renaissance enlightenment. The lackluster quality of the works notwithstanding, their themes show More as a man conscious of and influenced by drama. The notion of life as a pageant wherein each person plays his part and then at death removes the costume or trappings of this world is much older than the medieval notion of the danse macabre. For a man who was sensitive to the artificiality of much of the posturing in life and who had an understanding of acting and the writing of drama, death and fortune would be perfectly logical topics of meditation.

Death, fortune, and the passage of time were frequently topics of More's writing. His later works are more sophisticated to be sure, but these products of the twenty-five-year-old More already contain the seeds of later thoughts. Some critics see a connection between More's love of Lucian's works and his verses on death and fortune; in both there is recognition of the futility of earthly endeavor and the hollowness of a materialistic existence (Fox 43). Others have linked the verses on fortune to the kind of parlor games played in Utopia (Marius 49). Death and fortune were themes of medieval literature in various genres, especially drama. More could not have ignored the didacticism of medieval literature, which indeed lasted throughout much of the Renaissance.

One final example of More's writing of dialogue in his young adulthood may show his influence on the Tudor dramatists. Rudolph Habenicht suggests that More's polemic works may have influenced Heywood: "the dialogue in prose becomes a kind of interlude, with irony, pun, dialect, and characterization so lively and realistic it appears to have been born 'in the brilliant conversation held at his London home'" (59). Habenicht might well have included Utopia among the influences on Heywood, for the dramatic dialogue is essentially the same in the debate between Hythloday and the fictional More. Whatever the likelihood of the influence--and the suggestions of Habenicht and Blamires seem at least plausible--the case of Heywood is a clear example of the extent to which More's circle was exposed to and involved with drama.

Drama and Public Life

Drama was a controversial public issue in the early 1500s and could not have escaped the notice of a statesman and politician like Thomas More, even if More had had no personal interest in drama. In early February 1512, when Thomas More was in his mid-thirties, a bill was introduced in Parliament (3 Hen. VIII, c. 9) against persons wearing disguises and visors (Brewer I, pt. 1, 511). We know from Edward Hall's Chronicle that Henry himself loved to put on costumes and to disguise himself (513), but apparently mummers had caused disorders by wearing masks and visors as they visited the properties of the wealthy. The preamble to the "Acte against disguysed persons and Wearing of Visours" states: "Lately wythin this realme dyvers persons have disgysed and appareld theym, and covert theyr fayces with Vysours and other thynge in such manner that they sholde nott be knowen and divers of theym in a Companye togeder namyng them selfe Mummers have commyn to the dwellyng place of divers men of honor and other substanciall persones; and so departed unknowen" (E. K. Chambers, Vol 1, 396n). Mummings and disguisings were quite common in More's time, and the abuse of disguises had obviously reached proportions necessitating legal proscriptions of the use of stage paraphernalia in non-theatrical settings. As a lawyer, More would have known of this controversy. Given his life-long fascination with drama, he must have taken a keen interest in it. Because drama was such an integral part of public life in the early sixteenth century, More's career as a lawyer, a polemicist, and a statesman for England guaranteed that he would participate in the world of drama in the normal course of his affairs.

Another way in which drama intersected the life of Thomas More is that the polemic style of some of More's writings verges on the dramatic. In October 1515, More wrote a long letter to Martin Dorp defending Erasmus's Praise of Folly and his proposed Greek New Testament, both of which Dorp had criticized in a long letter to Erasmus late in 1514. The style of More's response shows a flair for dramatic dialogue and an ability to use dramatic irony. In the first several paragraphs More claims that he knows how much Erasmus and Dorp value one another and therefore how surprised he was when some friends brought him a copy of

Dorp's letter which, they claimed, criticized Erasmus. More dramatizes the scene in order to put himself in the role of defender of Dorp. By creating fictitious critics of Dorp, More is able to show all the points at which he thinks Dorp has been unfair to Erasmus while pretending to defend Dorp. This is a kind of variation on the philippic that Cicero used against Antony. A few sentences from More's letter will make clear how More criticizes Dorp by putting into the mouths of others the very criticisms which he then pretends to counter:

> I read through this letter in their presence. There was nothing in it to convince me of any hostile intent on your part toward Erasmus; nor could there be anything to convince me of that. There was, however, some evidence that you were confused beyond my expectations. But as I desired rather to uproot this view from their minds than corroborate it, I claimed I read nothing in the letter which might not proceed from a friendly heart. "But," one of the group remarked, "I am not criticizing what he wrote, rather the fact that he did write; for that reason, in my view, he by no means acted as a friend" . . . My rejoinders and my manner of dismissing them were such that they readily grasped the idea that I would not listen to any untoward remarks about you and that I was almost as well disposed toward you as toward Erasmus, and I could not possibly be better disposed toward him. For as to the fact that you preferred to discuss the matter with him by letter rather than by word of mouth, no matter what your intention was in so doing, I am convinced, in keeping with my opinion of you, that you definitely did not act out of ill will; and he too entertains no doubts in the matter, knowing full well your attitude toward him. (SL 10-11)

The disclaimers that abound in the text are the real criticisms disguised. By pretending to doubt the interpretation of the fictitious critics, More can say whatever he likes in criticism of Dorp. In effect, he creates a fictional persona called Dorp, who by contradistinction with the real Dorp makes the real one look anything but innocent and charitable. He exposes Dorp's poor taste and bad judgment: "I am inclined to believe it was no deliberate action of yours but merely an accident that it reached the public. I am forced to this point of view especially because in this letter there are some things which I am fully convinced you would have changed had you wished to publish it, as they are not quite the sort of thing to be written either to him or by you" (11). He later makes Dorp appear incompetent: "Besides, by no means do I think you have said too much against any one of these points; and in certain instances even I miss many points with which I should like to have seen your letter better equipped as it advanced against Erasmus, so that he could have a finer opportunity to fortify his camp with more powerful siege works to oppose you" (12). In short, More uses the devices of characterization that are used in drama to attribute qualities to a person that are the ones he wants to emphasize. Without directly attacking Dorp, More is able to put into the mouths of others the very criticisms with which he himself wishes to damn Dorp.

Yet another kind of dramatic feature of More's life is his interest in posturing and role-playing, an interest attested to by Erasmus who, on July 23, 1517, wrote a substantial letter to Ulrich von Hutten responding to Hutten's request for a written portrait of Thomas More. Erasmus's letter is delightful in itself, a real tribute to More's versatility, affability, genius, and quick wit and a testimony of the high regard with which More was held by his humanist contemporaries. Erasmus reports that "from boyhood he was always so pleased with a joke, that it might seem that jesting was the main object of his life; but with all that, he did not go so far as buffoonery, nor had ever any inclination to bitterness" (Nichols, III, 391). One suspects that the jesting refers here to something other than simply story telling.

Erasmus also mentions quite specifically that More wrote little plays as a young man but does not say what those plays are: "When quite a youth, he wrote farces and acted them" (391). Erasmus writes that he met More when More was not older than twenty-three (389). Other sources put the date of their first meeting as early as 1499 (R. W. Chambers 63; Marius 44). At the time of the letter to Hutten, Erasmus was around fifty years old, so the phrase "when quite a youth" could refer to More around twenty, for a twenty-year-old is still a youth in the eyes of a man of fifty, or it could refer to More at an even earlier age--perhaps the Cardinal Morton years. More either told Erasmus of those farces which he wrote and acted, or he showed them to him. That More wrote them is not doubted. Erasmus's letter to Hutten also mentions More's early efforts at verse and a dialogue that expanded on Plato's Republic in the defense of women (Nichols, III, 398).2 Erasmus's letter confirms the early interest in drama which we know from the records of Lincoln's Inn, from Roper's and Harpsfield's accounts, and from More's own correspondence with Holt.

Drama in More's Household

More encouraged dramatic readings and performances in his house. His household, which was also a school for his children and wards, was evidently filled with jesting and merrymaking. A. W. Reed characterizes the spirit memorably: "It is good to feel the catholicity of mind and the saving sanity of natural humor that fostered the mingling of piety, scholarship, and unabashed free fun within the More household" (155). Erasmus's letter to Hutten mentioned above corroborates the "friendly cheerfulness with a little air of raillery" and the "humor and playfulness" (III,389, 392) which were part of More's family. In a letter to his children commending them for their letters to him, More seems particularly pleased with son John's letter because "he plays with me both pleasantly and cleverly, and turns my jokes on myself wittily enough. And this he does not only merrily, but with due moderation, showing that he does not forget that he is joking with his father, whom he is eager to delight and yet cautious not to give offense" (SL 150). It is apparent that More enjoys wit and humor wherever he finds them and encourages the kind of verbal repartee that would be common among his intellectual companions. Equally important for More is attention to style--not the overwrought and highly rhetorical style, but writing and speaking with simple eloquence. In the same letter to the children he writes: "for while there is nothing so neat and witty that will not be made insipid by silly and careless loquacity, so also there is nothing in itself so insipid that you cannot season it with grace and wit if you give a little thought to it" (151). His contribution to Holt's Lac puerorum is reason enough to believe that More encouraged the reading and writing of plays as part of the curriculum in his school. One scholar, in a discussion of More's catholicity of mind and of his school's broad curriculum referred to More as "Head of the Drama Department" (Mason 48).

In keeping with all the rest we know of More's circle, it should not be surprising that even More's household servant, Walter Smith, was an author and a bit of an entertainer. Smith's XII mery Jests of the wyddow Edyth is a collection of anecdotal tales about the trickery of the Wyddow Edyth, who is a descendant in type of the Wife of Bath. This lying, jesting, deceiving woman marries one man and runs away with another; deceives a barber by making him believe she is rich; borrows money from others; and deceives a doctor of divinity, a scrivener, a draper, a suitor, a bishop's servant, and numerous others. Her tricks are the kinds one finds in Boccaccio and Chaucer.[3]

The tenth of the twelve jests tells how the widow deceived three young men who were servants in Thomas More's house in Chelsea. The widow first attempts to make the three suitors believe that she is wealthy: "She recounted her famyly & housshold so great, / That three yong men she cast in a heat" (W. Smith 76). They are so taken with the widow that they are oblivious to her faults. In the characteristic bawdy fashion of Renaissance literature, Smith is among those writers who showed little delicacy for matters which our residual Victorian sentiments now demand. He portrays the infatuation of the first suitor, Thomas Croxton:

> For busy sute they made night and day
> In his cause, if I shall the sooth say;
> And he him·selfe was full seruiseable
> To this wydow at dinner and at the table
> And eke at supper he stoode ay at her back,
> So neare that, and if she had let a crack
> Neuer so styll, he must haue had knowledge;
> But all is honycombe, he was in such dotage; (77)

Smith seemed to be intrigued with this lady's gastro-intestinal system. The second suitor, Thomas Arthur, received a similar gift: "Therewith she imbraced him: be mery, sweet hart;/ She turned her **** in his lap, & let a great ****./ And I loued you not (q. she), I wold not geue you this./ Ha, ha, quod Tomas, ye be a mery one, i wis" (80).4

Given the nature of Smith's work and the custom of oral reading, one can conjecture with reasonable certainty that Smith's XII mery Jests was "performed" for the entertainment of More and his family and friends. Although the work is not drama per se, it lends itself to dramatic reading and would be appreciated not only for its meter and rhyme but also for its Chaucerian and Rabelaisian flavor and repartee. P. M. Zall reminds us that the early English jestbooks, of which Smith's work is one modified example, were meant to be read aloud: "Their style is conversationally dramatic, vernacular vs. literary, and sometimes seemingly taken down from actual speech" (1-2). Much of More's own early writing has the same jestbook tone, and Reynolds goes so far as to say that he "suspects More's hand" in the XII mery Jests (Sir Thomas More, 6).

Drama in Polemic Writings

There are many places to which one could point for illustrations of More's use of drama for rhetorical purposes even into his adult years. Part of this, of course, is the practice of citing the classical sources of literature for examples and argumentation, the kind of thing that Petrarch, Valla, Ficino, and Pico had done earlier. The humanists' liking for teaching by case study rather than by scholastic "logic chopping" is precisely the area where More's interest in drama shows up most noticeably. His Responsio ad Lutherum written in 1522-23 when More was in his mid-forties shows how much of a commonplace drama was in his rhetorical writings and the degree to which he assumed that his allusions to drama would be understood by his humanist contemporaries.

First, one must recognize that More distances himself from authorship by creating a John Carcellius who himself pretends to have found the core of the Responsio and not to have written it. Carcellius claims he found the book by Ferdinand Baravellus in a printer's shop and merely added his own comments to it. From a rhetorical point of view, the disguise allows More to be "as scurrilous as he wished and yet still enjoy the same kind of immunity as Moria in Erasmus' Praise of Folly" (Fox 134). The introductory letter from the imaginary Baravellus to his friend Francis Lucellus is itself dramatic in nature with dialogue written in the first person. More's use of drama for polemic purposes sometimes relies on a thorough knowledge of classical drama and a subtle appreciation of allusion. More's answer to Luther's epistle at the beginning of The Babylonian Captivity of the Church begins with an allusion to Roman comedy: "This whole epistle breathes Luther's Thrasonic vainglory and the scoundrel's malicious spite toward the authority of the Roman See" (CW5 I 41). The adjective "Thrasonic" refers to Terence's play The Eunuch; Thraso is a rich, pompous, conceited military officer, a type of the braggadocio, and the comic villain of this play. The plot of the play turns on Chaerea, the younger brother of Phaedria, disguising himself in the garb of a eunuch in order to ravish Pamphila. Thraso in all this is exposed as the conceited fool he really is and is thwarted in his desires for Pamphila when it is revealed that she is really an Athenian citizen and therefore not suited for slavery. In More's sentence "Thrasonic" operates on several levels. First, by implication, Luther is a conceited fool. In addition, Luther is a villain who is trying to ravish a maiden. This may refer to Luther's attack on the Church itself or to his marriage to a runaway nun on June 13, 1525, a matter which, according to Marius, incensed More almost beyond reason (308). Finally, if one reads Terence's play to suggest that Thraso becomes the real eunuch who is kept dangling by Thais the courtesan, then by analogy More suggests that Luther is the eunuch in this attempted rape of the Catholic Church. In addition to the aptness of the allusion to The Eunuch, the quite casual employment of the adjective shows More's ready use of drama for illustrative purposes in his polemic writing.5

At the age of fifty-one More was still using dramatic dialogue as a vehicle for his polemic works. The Refutation employs the same device of dramatic dialogue, as do many other of More's works including those from his high-humanist period, the later polemic works, and finally the Tower works. Kenneth J. Wilson says that More's Refutation is "dramatic in its context and Ciceronian in its oratorical rhetoric" (237). Once again, the student of Tudor drama would be reluctant to call the bulk of More's writing drama in a pure sense, but embryonic dramatic devices are present everywhere: ironic tone, spurious author-narrators, fictional personae, dialogue, use of the first person, and intermittent attempts at the kind of stychomythia which would have evolved from the Latin influences like Seneca rather than from the English tradition. A brief example from the Responsio illustrates the nearly dramatic nature of an imaginary argument between Luther and More:

> Again therefore we demand: "how do you know that God has seized you?"
> "Because I am certain," he says, "that my teaching is from God."
> "How do you know that?"
> "Because God has seized me."
> "How do you know this?"
> "Because I am certain."
> "How are you certain?"
> "Because I know."
> "But how do you know?"
> "Because I am certain." (CW5 I 307)

More's intention here is to make Luther look ridiculous by pointing out the circularity of his "proof." More dramatizes the logical fallacy in stichomythic lines, which appear to be a real conversation, in order to exaggerate the absurdity. By means of dramatic dialogue More is able to develop Luther's fictional character to suit his polemic purposes.

More continued to use drama for rhetorical purposes even toward the end of his life. In June of 1529, More wrote A Dialogue Concerning Heresies. Fox believes that "by representing dramatically the interaction of two divergent personalities and viewpoints, More hoped to move his readers into agreement with the orthodox position through humane persuasion rather than dogmatic coercion" (Fox 123). Marius feels that in the Dialogue More is "at his bawdy best" and shows his affinity to Chaucer (340). In this work he brings together his flair for dialogue and his love of the comic for persuasive ends.

Drama of Public Spectacle

Another aspect of More's life that was semi-dramatic in nature was his role as an official orator. More gained recognition and a reputation as a public orator for London and for the monarchy (Marius 15). To the twentieth-century mind the public speaker is a practitioner of epideictic rhetoric rather than an actor, even if political presentations often seem to be mere show. In More's day, however, public speaking was to a certain degree intended as spectacle. On many occasions both public speeches and theatrical pageants were incorporated into the festivities.

Such must have been the case when Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, visited England. We know that Rastell devised a pageant at the Lyttyl Conduit by Paul's Gate when Charles and Henry went to St. Paul's (Reed 19). We also know from Hall that on Friday, June 6, 1522, More exercised his function as public orator in a major ceremony welcoming Charles V to London. In the presence of the hundreds of lords and retainers of England and of Spain, More "made to theim an eloquent Oracion, in the praise of the two princes [Henry and Charles], and of the peace and loue betwene them, and what comfort it was to their subiects, to se theim in such amitie" (637). Such occasions were decidedly dramatic, both in terms of their political symbolism and in terms of their performance as public spectacle, and they brought to the Renaissance mind visual reinforcement of the notion of life as a pageant. Greenblatt captures well the sociological dynamic: "The theatre is widely perceived in the period as the concrete manifestation of the histrionic quality of life, and, more specifically, of power--the power of the prince who stands as an actor upon a stage before the eyes of the nation, the power of God who enacts His will in the Theatre of the World" (253).

Three years later, at the age of forty-seven, on Sunday, June 18, 1525, More participated in the ceremonies for the creation of Henry's and Elizabeth Blount's natural son as Duke of Richmond. Reed reports that More "took a prominent part in the pageants" (47). While Hall does not mention More by name, the Chronicle does indeed record that "at those creacions, were kept greate feastes and disguisynges" (703). The Letters and Papers of Henry VIII are somewhat more specific about More's role: "The King then received the patent from Garter, as the lord Chamberlain was absent, and 'took it' to Sir Thos. Moore, who read it aloud" (Brewer IV, pt. 1, 639). One doubts that there is much room for creativity in the reading of letters patent; the point is not so much the reading but rather the entire "performance." The chronicle entry makes clear that the ceremony has its formal stages, including proper vestments, particular positioning of the participants, symbolic gestures and props, and prescribed movements. The formal letter patent in effect was like a script which the participants enacted as More read it: "On coming to the words gladii cincturam, the young lord kneeled down, and the King put the girdle about his neck, the sword hanging bendwise over his breast" (Brewer IV, pt. 1, 639). There is no further indication of More's participation in the "feastes and disguisynes" that day, but these events were the normal fare for public entertainment. We may reasonably infer that as an official public orator, More must have participated in similar performances on other occasions.

In 1527 John Rastell and his son William collaborated on an elaborate pageant at Greenwich for the ambassador of

France, who was being entertained by Henry and Wolsey. The State Papers record this pageant as The Father of Heaven (Reed 74). We have no record of Thomas More's involvement with this event, but because he was engaged in court affairs, one can be reasonably assured that he was at least aware of the occasion.

Influence of Medieval Drama

A major source of dramatic influence at the end of the fifteenth century was the so-called medieval drama. The term "medieval" is not entirely satisfactory for describing cultural, artistic, and intellectual phenomena because it encompasses a span of time too large for useful discrimination. We often forget, for example, when we talk of medieval performances outside the church buildings that these did not even begin until the twelfth century (Brockett 120). As the vernacular languages replaced Latin and everyday speech replaced the liturgical chanting, the vernacular religious drama reached its peak between 1350 and 1550 (Brockett 121 and 127). Most of the surviving evidence about the medieval theatre comes from the sixteenth century, the century in which More died.

Throughout the middle ages dramatic performances at festivals and feasts were common occurrences. E. K. Chambers' two-volume work is still the standard point of departure for the documentation of the medieval sources. In recent times Wickham (1974), Nagler (1976), and Tydeman (1979) have brought the discoveries of modern scholarship to the examination of medieval drama. Scholars whose eyes were dazzled by the Elizabethan spectacle of the late 1580s and 1590s now acknowledge that dramatic productions were more frequent in all periods of the middle ages than was once thought. When we think of More as a man of the Renaissance, we tend to overlook the fact that the drama we call "medieval" outlived More by about a generation. A kind of parochialism affects some scholars of early Tudor drama, who think that the interludes, the Senecan imitations, the farces of the university wits, and the plays of the humanist program represented some rebirth from a period of dramatic deprivation. On the contrary, the passion plays and the miracle plays continued to be performed well into More's lifetime, and the various cycles and morality plays actually reached their zenith in the early sixteenth century! The most popular play in More's day was in all likelihood Everyman. There were four printings during More's lifetime: 1515, 1526-28, 1528, and 1535 (Pollard and Redgrave 472). A glance at the chronological table in Tydeman's book will quickly dispel any notions that "medieval drama" was a thing of the past for Thomas More (247-249).

It is only fair to acknowledge that a greater variety of drama existed in the Tudor period than had existed earlier. The experimentation in drama in the early sixteenth century was paralleled by experimentation in other genres and culminated in the unprecedented flourish of literature at the height of the Elizabethan period. That the writers of More's era were among the early experimenters is undeniable, but to claim that they made drama popular is probably giving them more credit than they deserve and is, in some sense, absolutely misleading. Their drama was not the popular drama of the day; it was too intellectual and aristocratic. What they accomplished was the introduction of secular themes into a genre that had been dominated almost exclusively by religious and moral issues, but even here the humanists were not unlike their "medieval" counterparts: they too valued drama that taught a lesson. The difference in their approach was that they moved away from allegorical works to pieces that were subtler. Their second accomplishment was the experimentation with form. All the foregoing remarks are not meant to minimize the contributions of the early Tudor dramatists but merely to put their work in proper context--a world that was already filled with a love of drama and spectacle, a world that already understood that "this wide and universal theatre presents more woeful pageants" than any stage performance.

As the Corpus Christi plays developed in the two hundred years 1350-1550, they brought about first the movement of the dramatic productions outside the church and then the subsequent experimentation with stage design

(Brockett 121). Several varieties of the outdoor stages on which the medieval dramas were produced reinforced the notion of life as a play. The literal, visual representation of heaven, earth, and hell in some way encompassed the entire universe. The mansions for heaven and hell were usually more elaborate than those for earth and sat at opposite ends of the stage. All the traffic of the stage between the two extremes represented man's struggle on earth and the nature of the choice that faces mortals. The movement of the actors from the earthly mansions to either heaven or hell was emblematic of the journey one makes in life moving toward the afterlife. The entire apparatus of the medieval stage suggested that all life is itself a stage on which we act out our days on earth in anticipation of what is to follow.

The subject matter of the plays is human existence in a broad sense. The farces deal with adultery, cheating, hypocrisy, and human foibles. The morality plays, the secular version of the religious cycles, deal with virtue and vice and the ubiquitous reminder of death in the _memento mori_ motif. One can do no better than reread _Everyman_ in order to understand the very natural instruction More and his contemporaries would have gleaned from morality plays. Marius explicitly points out the similarity in the theme of More's verses on the death of Elizabeth of York and the theme of _Everyman_ (48). For the humanist, these "medieval" works may have been a bit too allegorical, but they fulfilled Horace's maxim: They were entertaining and useful.

One further observation about late medieval drama helps to explain its popularity and to show why drama as a genre is uniquely suited to the exploration of the fine line between art and reality, an issue important in understanding Thomas More's life. After the essentially ecclesiastical period of religious drama, the mechanics of production grew rapidly more complicated. The outdoor performances allowed for more apparatus and for greater spectacle. Something about the sensationalism of mechanical devices and special effects has always appealed to theatergoers. The late medieval drama allowed ample opportunity for spectacle. Among the kinds of effects to be simulated were these: the movement of the star of Bethlehem, the striking down of soldiers with lightning, the resurrection of Christ, the appearance of God in the clouds, the ascent of Jesus and Satan to the pinnacle of the Temple, the throwing of lightning by an angel, and the belching of fire and smoke from the mouths and horns of devils. Recall that Chaucer's "Franklin's Tale" alludes to the high level of skill in medieval stagecraft:

> For I am siker that ther be sciences
> By whiche men make diverse apparences,
> Swiche as thise subtile tregetoures pleye.
> For ofte at feestes have I wel herd seye
> That tregetours, withinne an halle large,
> Have maad come in a water and a barge,
> And in the halle rowen up and down.

Somtyme hath seemed come a grym leoun;
And somtyme floures sprynge as in a mede;
Somtyme a vyne, and grapes white and rede;
Somtyme a castel, al of lym and stoon;
And whan hem lyked, voyded it anon.
Thus seemed it to every mannes sighte. (1139-1151)

Tydeman points out that in The Castel of Perseverance a particularly dangerous special effect required that one of the devils have "gunne powder brennynge In pypys in his hands & in his eris & in his ars whanne he gothe to battel" (173). As might be imagined, an occasional accident befell an actor. In 1496, shortly after Thomas More had presumably quite safely "stepped in among the players" in the comfort of Cardinal Morton's banquet hall, an unwary actor playing Satan in the mystere of St. Martin at Seurre was burned on the buttocks by the special effects of gun powder. Tydeman reports that the actor "was so speedily rescued, undressed, and re-costumed, that without betraying any sign that something was wrong, he went out and played his part" (214). Such an incident would, no doubt, appeal to More's keen sense of humor if not to his low threshold for pain.

Serpents, dragons, Hell-mouths, violent deaths, mutilations, bloody sacrifices, decapitations, crucifixions, floods, rains, storms, tempests, and the multiplication of loaves and fishes were all parts of the challenge to satisfy the late medieval desire for sensationalism and apparent realism. Tydeman makes the point succinctly: "Small wonder if medieval audiences regarded themselves more as participants in the action than as mere passive spectators" (183).

Drama of Courtly Life

Another major source of dramatic influence on Thomas More was the court. In many ways, all of courtly life was an unending pageant of intrigue, posturing, and pretension interrupted only long enough for the courtiers to be entertained by professional actors. There were several aspects of drama connected with the court: drama performed at court, civic pageantry, chivalric tournaments, and diplomatic role-playing. The role-playing at court will be discussed in the fourth chapter on More's own role playing, but drama as court entertainment, civic pageantry, and chivalric tournaments were all parts of the ambiance in which More lived and moved day after day.

The most common type of court entertainment was the interlude, often performed in crowded banquet halls either between courses of a meal or between the meal and some other entertainment that followed. Some scholars have suggested that the allegorical and didactic nature of the court interludes shows the influence of the more common and popular morality plays (Happé 11). The quasi-professional actors often played several different parts. Relatively small casts and minimal scenery made these interludes readily portable so that they could be performed in various banquet locations without extensive preparation. This is no doubt the sort of theatrical piece in which Cardinal Morton watched the young Thomas More "making a part for himself" and causing the spectators to marvel at his histrionic talents and his wit. Oscar Brockett points out that both Richard III and Henry VII maintained acting companies to perform interludes (143). Disguisings were also popular; and during the festivities at the wedding of Arthur and Catherine in 1501, Henry VII treated guests to great banquets with disguisings as part of the entertainment. Sydney Anglo suggests that this may have been the first English festival with extensive indoor use of elaborate pageant cars (Spectacle 101). Could this elaborate dramaturgical display have inspired More's enthusiasm in his letter to Holt of November, 1501? The disguisings for this enormous state festival included singing, dramatic dialogues, allegorical assault upon a castle, and dance (103). The event was as elaborate as those of the Burgundian court and is the only disguising of the period for which complete documentation exists. The production took place in Westminster Hall after the wedding of Arthur and Catherine on November 18, 1501 (E. K. Chambers 398).

Dramatic influences from European courts also may have influenced More. The Burgundian Court was the scene of the most elaborate productions of all Europe. In addition, another form of drama called the chamber of rhetoric was popular throughout the Low Countries. Significantly, the genre added still another possibility to the already rich diversity for public ceremony. The rhetorical style of these "dramas" was just a step away from the rhetoric of public oratory in which More was often engaged. The presentational nature of public oratory and the potential for taking sides in a fictional dialogue create a close kinship between the drama of the chambers of rhetoric and the kinds of public presentations which More performed regularly. In the years preceding the accession of Henry VII, the relations between England and Burgundy were good. Margaret of England and Charles of Burgundy were married in 1468. Boas and Reed mention that Margaret was Caxton's patron at Bruges before he moved to Westminster in 1476 (Medwall xii). Henry VII was interested in ceremony and in European culture. The dramatic influences of the Burgundian court would have had several avenues into Tudor England and would have comprised part of that dramatic ambiance surrounding the young adult More.

All of this pales by comparison with the early years of the reign of Henry VIII, who really put on a show and demonstrated not only that his reign was to be marked with lavish display in every area of life but also that he himself would be both lead actor and director of the pageant. Unlike his father, who enjoyed the dramatic productions at a dignified distance, Henry VIII jumped right in with abandon. Whatever can be said about Thomas More's "making a part for himself" can be said doubly or trebly for Henry. Greenblatt explains that the application of a theatrical metaphor to More's inner life has a counterpart in the "theatricalization of public life in the society dominated by Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey" (28).

It is hard to know whether Henry VIII lusted for power in those early years of his reign or whether he only later saw the potential of getting more power from the arts which he had already enjoyed and supported. A king is presumably no different from any other man in his needs, desires, and weaknesses. Putting political and economic motives aside, one can still explain Henry's passion for playing roles as a kind of psychological motive, an intoxication with festivity or even an addiction to drama. The records of the Revels in his reign from 1509 to 1527 show frequent and expensive purchases for dramatic occasions. The performance of dramatic events surrounding Henry's court was common fare, not a rare occurrence.

In order to appreciate the extent to which Henry VIII engaged in his own dramatic doings, one need only glance through the state letters and papers or Hall's Chronicle, where the extravagance is recorded. In the record of the revels for 28 February 1510, we read that Henry and a group of his courtiers from 18 January until the last day of February dressed as Robin Hood and his merry men and entertained Queen Catherine: "The disguising finished in the parliament chamber at Westminster last day of Feb. 1 Hen. VIII." There are several pages of items (many yards of cloth of different colors, feathers, hats, knives, targets, javelins, thread, wire, furs, etc.) which were purchased for the king's revelry (Brewer II, ii, 1490).

A few days prior to the Robin Hood disguising, Henry had appeared at a joust in disguise. The account reads like something right out of Malory:

> And the xii. daie of Ianurie, diuerse gentleman freshely appareled, prepared them self to Iuste, vnknowen to the kynges grace, wherof, he beyng secretly informed, caused hymself and one of his priuie chambre, called Willya' Compton to bee secretly armed, in the litle Parke of Richemond: and so came into the Iustes, vnknowen to all persones, and vnloked for: The kyng ranne neuer openly before, and there were broken many staues, and greate praise geuen to the two straungers, but specially to one, whiche was the kyng: howebeit, at a course by misfortune, sir Edward Neuell Esquire, brother to the Lorde of Burganie, did runne against Master Cumpton, and hurte hym sore, and was likely to dye. One persone there was, that knew the kyng, and cried, God saue the king, with that, all the people wer astonied, and then the kyng discovered hymself, to the greate comforte of all the people. (Hall 513)

On Shrove Sunday, 1510, in the middle of a banquet for ambassadors from other countries which was being held in the Parliament Chamber at Westminster, Henry slipped out of the room and reappeared dressed in Turkish fashion leading a group of mummers. After the mumming, the king left and returned in his normal attire. When the dancing later began, Henry suddenly disappeared again and after a while reappeared in another disguise. Evidently Henry took great delight in changing his appearance and in costuming himself in order to surprise his guests. "Mumming" appears first in the documents of Henry VIII and seems to have almost the same meaning as "disguising" (E. K. Chambers 400). Does the fact that "mumming" does not occur in Henry VII's documents mean that Henry VIII had expanded the dramatic repertoire? Henry may even have been responsible for introducing the masque to England. On Twelfth-night, 1512, Henry and eleven other courtiers went "disguised, after the maner of Italie, called a maske, a thyng not seen afore in Englande" (Hall 526). While this dancing of disguised players with undisguised ladies from the audience is not really drama per se, it represents one more form of entertainment where someone in costume performs for the pleasure of an audience. Too narrow a definition of drama rooted in our contemporary notions of the genre may cause us to miss the presence of one more form of dramatic endeavor in the court of Henry VIII. This view of Henry must be almost as different from the Holbein Henry as the "man of marvelous mirth and pastimes" is from the Holbein More. For all his superb talent, Holbein has left us a picture of a very sober sixteenth century.

The playing at playing which both Thomas More and Henry Tudor could do when the occasion demanded must have made them great mutual admirers in those early years of their work together. In Don Quixote Cervantes wrote: "The most cunning part in a comedy is the clown's for a man who wants to be taken for a simpleton must never be one" (II.3). Both Henry and Thomas were too intelligent to miss the cunning behind the clowning in the other person, but in those early years neither had reason to be concerned. Henry, at any rate, was directing the show and felt no constraints on his part. More at that time did not see, or more likely momentarily forgot, that his own role was destined to take a new direction. The two actors could simply enjoy each other's humor, talents, and good company.

More's exposure to drama at court did not end at the palace gates. Civic pageantry in the form of royal entries for noblemen, military victors, and visiting dignitaries was also common. These entries combined allegorical texts with emblematic mimes or tableaux. The scenes were designed to greet the visiting dignitaries, to wish them well, and at the same time to express hopes or concerns for future action. The guilds or confraternities were thus able to express their own ideas and suggestions through the means of drama. As the rising middle class began to be more economically important, these dramatic occasions took on more political importance. Thomas More certainly could not fail to appreciate this aspect of drama. At first the processions were very rudimentary, but gradually plays were added to the processions, and by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries major dramatists were writing for these royal entries. Recall that More's letter of November 1501 to John Holt reflects his own exposure to the pageantry of Catherine's entry into London: "never, to my knowledge, has there been such a reception anywhere" (SL 2). The author of Utopia who abhorred the pride associated with wealth and luxury was nevertheless moved by the artistry of pageantry. In fact, More never objected to eloquence except when it was out of place. In this regard he is like the great authors of the end of the century. Both Shakespeare and Cervantes make fun of affectation. The humanists discriminated between eloquence and "unnecessary intricacy" (Riley 147). This may help to explain the waning of allegory in the first half of the sixteenth century. Allegory was not More's preferred mode of expression under most circumstances, and some scholars credit More and his circle with the development of "freer forms of imaginative drama" (Reed 117); nevertheless, allegorical pageantry provided him still one more exposure to a world filled with drama.

Another form of courtly entertainment was the tournament. Originally a way of training knights, tournaments turned into dramatic productions with allegorical mansions and emblematic devices. The players took on roles from the chivalric romances and acted out stories, pretending to combat one another for love, honor, and revenge. This form of entertainment was still flourishing throughout Europe in the time of Henry VIII, particularly in the Low Countries where this kind of pageantry had some of its most ardent followers. More had to attend some of these functions in his role as ambassador for Henry. The most renowned tournament of More's day was that held between the French and the English at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Many individuals were critical of the expensive show, but J. J. Scarisbrick, a recent biographer of Henry VIII, argues that "what contemporaries extravagantly described as the eighth wonder of the world and what has often since been discounted as mere playacting was designed to bring the chivalries of two nations together to joust and tilt, feast and dance--instead of to fight" (79). Thomas More almost certainly would have recognized the drama of the tournament, and would have been enough of a politician and a diplomat to be able to play his part in the revelries for the purposes of state business.

A few years prior to the Field of Cloth of Gold, Henry had sent More, along with Cuthbert Tunstall, as ambassador to Flanders for commercial negotiations. It is this trip to Bruges and Antwerp that is alluded to in the first pages of Utopia. The reason for mentioning this six-month embassy is to recall that the Low Countries were more thoroughly immersed in chivalric games and fantasies than any other part of Europe. More must have been exposed to many people in courtly circles whose lives were touched by the games of chivalric fancy. Huizinga appropriately refers to the staging of these late medieval escapades in Lille and Bruges as "applied literature" (Huizinga 252). A man of More's sensitivity to role-playing could not help but see one more instance of theatrum mundi or even of the play within the grander play. We know that in the mock tournaments citizens pretended to be characters out of the chivalric romances like Le Morte D'Arthur. More must have enjoyed the irony of watching the crowds turn literature into life while he was about to undertake the opposite task of turning his own life into literature.

More's awareness of the theatricality of late medieval chivalry would have been a certain thing. As knights themselves had become anachronistic, the concept of knighthood had grown escapist, increasingly elaborate, and self-conscious. By More's time, tournaments were, in fact, participatory theatre. We know that heralds, marshals, clerks, and attendants served as part of the drama of make-believe chivalry: "As the display of chivalric splendour increased, such officials [heralds, etc.] were like stage hands whose job was to maintain and create the artificial, theatrical atmosphere in which knights made their appearance before their dazzled public" (Rudorff 170).

The playacting of knights may have been a last unconscious and perhaps desperate effort to hold out for public acceptance those values of chivalry which were best in all times. We know that knights from 1300 to 1500 imitated incidents of the romances and pretended to be characters out of the Arthurian and other legends. The values which they endorsed as they emulated the fictional knights--loyalty, nobility, generosity, love, devotion, sacrifice, and courage---were the best in all times and in all eras of chivalric thought. The feudal warrior, the ecclesiastical soldier, and the homo ludens could all subscribe to certain values which transcend time.

It is hard to exaggerate the extent to which chivalry became a game of acting during the waning of the Middle Ages. The pas d'armes became increasingly theatrical with the mise-en-scene of an elaborate drama: "Wooden model castles, bridges or gateways to fortified towns would be constructed in the lists and, after the customary preliminaries, the knights and their audiences would pretend that real war was being fought" (Rudorff 220). Edward Peters suggests that the knight made a contribution to lay life that satisfied both material circumstances and moral theology (Peters 230). This may seem to be somewhat of an exaggeration when applied to the last stages of chivalry, but it is not altogether wrong. Thomas More may have felt that Greek and Roman models better served as moral exemplars, but he can hardly have objected to the theatricality per se of the late medieval world. Similarly, he surely must have felt that the Church was the proper authority for prescriptive ethics and may have even chafed at the secular evolution of chivalric games, but he was mature enough as an artist to know that his opposition to the waste and destruction of war did not negate his interest in pageantry as long as that pageantry served theatrical imagination.

The court was a rich source for dramatic spectacle of many sorts. When we think of wars and treaties, commerce and politics, marriages and divorces, and official business of that nature, we forget that *homo ludens* never forgets to play and recreate. Dramatic activities of various kinds were very much a part of the times in which Thomas More lived. Sydney Anglo lists in excess of one hundred major processions, tournaments, tiltings, disguisings, plays, jousts, Mayings, pageants, maskings, entries, banquet interludes, mummeries, receptions, and revels during the years 1509-1528 (*Great Tournament Roll* 138-146). These years coincide significantly with the years in which Thomas More's interests and employment were associated with the court. Dramatic activities were an inescapable influence on anyone connected with courtly life.

Drama of Medieval Christianity

In a different sense from humanism, medieval drama, and life at court, the Church, which was always a part of More's life, was another source of theatrical influence. In no sense does this perspective suggest that his faith was an act, nor does it imply that religion for More was not the most profound part of his existence. It is rather to acknowledge the essentially dramatic nature of much of what Thomas More experienced as a Catholic during his lifetime.

Without delving too far into a controversy whose resolution may ultimately reside in a quibble over terms, it is worth acknowledging the debate about the dramatic nature of the Mass characterized by the remarks of Karl Young and O. B. Hardison, Jr. Young argues that although dramatic, the Mass must not be considered drama (85). Hardison asserts "the Mass is sacred drama encompassing all history and embodying in its structure the central pattern of Christian life on which all Christian drama must draw . . ." (79). No doubt More would have agreed with Young, for to him the Mass was the central experience of his faith. Still, he may not have entirely rejected Hardison's claim. The Mass certainly dramatized symbolically for More the most important story he knew, and its didactic purpose was not lost in the celebration. More would never have said that the Mass was role playing, but he would have recognized its importance in the _theatrum mundi_. In intent the Mass is clearly representational, but in form it is presentational. If its symbolic aspects are accepted as symbols, then its reenactment is certainly a kind of drama. However, the fact that its purpose goes beyond the sweet and useful and even beyond the ethical makes it something different from drama. It engages the participant in the life of Christ, which is not otherwordly from one point of view, although it is divine or at least mystical in another sense. But to come down on Young's side of the debate is not to say that More would not have perceived the dramatic elements in the Mass. Every other piece of evidence about More's sensitivity to pageantry and fondness for the dramatic reinforces the idea that his frequent experience with the liturgy would have been one more source of dramatic influence on him.

Other events growing out of the spheres of religion and law but not generally considered to be drama also had their histrionic dimensions. In some sense public punishments were as theatrical in Tudor England as they were in Paris in 1793. Greenblatt points out that "each branding or hanging or disemboweling was theatrical in conception and performance, a repeatable admonitory drama enacted on a scaffold before a rapt audience" (201). An excerpt from William Harrison's Description of England (1587) gives some idea of the potential for drama in the policies which were recorded even after More's lifetime:

> If a woman poison her husband she is burned alive; if the servant kill his master he is to be executed for petty treason; he that poisoneth a man is to be boiled to death in water or lead, although the party die not of the practise; in

> cases of murther all the accessaries are to suffer pains of death accordingly. Perjury is punished by the pillory, burning in the forehead with the letter P, the rewalting of the trees growing upon the grounds of the offenders, and loss of all his movables. Many trespasses also are punished by the cutting off one or both ears from the head of the offender, as the utterance of seditious words against the magistrates, fray-makers, petty robbers, etc. Rogues are burned through the ears, carriers of sheep out of the land by the loss of their hands, such as kill by poison are either boiled or scalded to death in lead or seething water. (Rollins 37)

Likewise, official ceremonies of degradation were theatrical. The description of divestment for a priest has all the characteristics of a carefully rehearsed show: "His hands were scraped with a knife or a piece of glass, as a symbol of the loss of the anointing oil; the bread and the wine were placed in his hands and then taken away; and lastly his vestments were stripped from him one by one, and he was clothed in the garments of a layman" (Greenblatt 108). Even the daily affairs of Renaissance life carried the potential for dramatic display.

Drama in his Last Days

More used the language of drama to talk about the world around him until the very end of his life. In a letter to Margaret dated April 17, 1535, less than three months before his execution, More wrote that the King's men had tried again to get him to swear to the Act of Supremacy. Other men had been brought in and examined about the act and took the oath practically in More's presence. This exercise or rehearsal was to More a mere show, a fabrication without substance. Characteristically, More likened the scene to a pageant: "When they had played their pageant and were gone out of the place, than was I called in again" (SL 219).

For More, pageantry could be a vain show if it glorified the ego of the performers rather than edifying the soul of the observers. Not all that was dramatic was necessarily positive. Drama could indeed be pleasing and useful, but it could also be an empty exercise, a "walking shadow" or a "poor player who struts and frets." More understood the affairs of state and the formalities of courtly protocol. He could use them and participate in them as the need arose, but at a deeper level he was never moved personally by empty pageants. More liked drama when it was acknowledged to be drama or when it was pleasing and useful. He condemned ostentation, display of wealth, and the use of drama for power but approved of drama for education or edification, and valued conscious role playing.

More important than the rhetoric of drama in this letter to Margaret is the way in which the letter itself turns at times from a narrative mode to a nearly dramatic mode. For most of the beginning of the letter More refers to himself in the first person as he reports to Margaret the events at Lambeth Palace, but as the tension mounts, he begins to refer to himself as though the Archbishop were addressing him directly:

> My Lord of Canterbury taking hold upon that that I said, that I condemned not the conscience of them that sware, said unto me that it appeared well that I did not take it for a very sure thing and a certain that I might not lawfully swear it, but rather as a thing uncertain and doubtful. But then (said my Lord) you know for a certainty and a thing without doubt that you be bounden to obey your sovereign lord your King. And therefore are ye bounden to leave off the doubt of your unsure conscience in refusing the oath, and take the sure way in obeying of your prince, and swear it. (SL 220-221)

By the end of the letter he is writing dialogue pure and simple: "Then said my Lord: 'Marry, Master Secretary mark that too, that he will not swear that neither but under some certain manner.' 'Verily no, my Lord,' quoth I, 'but that I will see it made in such wise first, as I shall myself see, that I shall neither be forsworn nor swear against my conscience" (SL 222). A Renaissance humanist would know well that classical convention allows an author to report speeches with authority on the basis of what was probably said under a given circumstance. Surely More's own report on Friday, April 17, of what he had said and what had been said to him on Monday, April 13, can only be an attempt to create an image, foster an impression, or adapt the uncertain truth for presentation on a stage. More may never have said exactly what he quotes, but he quotes himself with a certainty that bears its own truth and that defies alternate interpretation. The same "making a part for himself" which had so much informed his youth was still an element in the "drama" he was composing in his last letters.

Chapter Summary

From his youth until his death Thomas More was exposed to drama in various forms. He acted in plays and wrote his own little dramas while still a schoolboy. His classical humanistic studies exposed him to Greek and Roman drama which he drew upon for his own writing and oratory. He witnessed the still flourishing "medieval" drama and the early Tudor drama, encouraged the writing and performance of drama by his children, his servants, and his friends, and continued to support recreational drama at Lincoln's Inn. He saw first-hand the pageants, mummings, and disguisings associated with court life as well as the posturing, pretense, and role playing of political life.

As humanist, as citizen of England and Europe around 1500, as courtier, and as a Catholic, Thomas More was surrounded with and influenced by examples of drama. As translator, writer, relative, actor, politician, and man of faith, More came into contact with the grand stage of human existence. The theatre of the world had to be part of his world view. To put More's role-playing in its proper light, one must consider the implications for his time of the notion of *theatrum mundi*, the topic of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

THE WORLD AS STAGE: IMAGINATION AND ROLE-PLAYING

A Classical and Humanist Commonplace

Chapter II has examined the events in which More himself had direct contact with drama or dramatic activity. His involvement was that of writer, actor, spectator, and critic. Before looking further at the use More made of dramatic techniques in his own writings and examining More's life and works with role playing as the central focus, I shall in this chapter investigate contemporary humanist sources (namely Pico, Erasmus, and Vives) whose works echo More's sensitivity to drama and the dramatic. Then I shall explore how for More role-playing became a concrete experience which was both a form of self-protection and a form of engaging the world around him.

The sixteenth-century humanists shared common knowledge of a large number of Greek and Latin works. It has been argued that "an educated person of the sixteenth century, whether he was able to read Greek or not, had at his disposal the complete patrimony of classical Greek literature and science" (Kristeller, Renaissance Thought 149). One of the motifs inherited from the ancient world was the idea of life as a stage. The metaphor of the world as a stage, so much a part of the Weltanschauung of the humanists of More's day, was, in fact, a commonplace of classical thought. Ernst Curtius points out that the tradition of the stage as a metaphor for life was a long one evolved by, among others, Plato, the Cynics, Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Petronius, St. Paul, Boethius, and Augustine. He claims that the concept reached the middle ages from both the classical pagan authors and the Christian writers (138-139). We know, moreover, that The Policraticus (1159) of John of Salisbury was very popular in the middle ages. Republished in 1476 and 1513, it too reinforced the idea that after the play of life, the outward splendor is stripped.

In the course of his reading, More encountered the metaphor of the world as stage even at an early age, no doubt before he began serious study as a proponent of the new learning. More encountered the metaphor numerous times in the course of his reading. As a young humanist, one of Thomas More's first literary endeavors while he was still associated with the Carthusian monks at the Charterhouse in London, was the translation from Latin into English of a biography of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola by Pico's nephew Giovanni Francesco. Whether Pico was, as Marius suggests, More's "ideal man" is difficult to say (176). Some think Pico's life may have been for More as much a warning as a model (Fox 29). What is certain is that Pico exemplified virtues which More admired: culture, learning, piety, and industry. Pico's Oration On the Dignity of Man perhaps best illustrates the humanist use of metaphor as a tool of philosophical thought and indicates the universality of the particular metaphor in question: "I have read in the records of the Arabians, reverend Fathers, that Abdala the Saracen, when questioned as to what on this stage of the world, as it were, could be seen most worthy of wonder, replied: 'There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man'" (Cassirer 223).

Pico's text shows both the use of the metaphor of world as a stage and the power of that metaphor for capturing what we know in retrospect to be characteristic Renaissance interest in the potential of man. Some critics have pointed out that one distinctive trait of Renaissance man was his belief that he held infinite possibilities within him "at least in his phantasies and dreams" (Lowenthal 59). There seems to be an arguable link between a view of self-assigned roles and the notion of human potential. Central to Pico's conception of human dignity is man as a creature of indeterminate nature. Pico's interpretation of man's free will allows for, indeed mandates, what Greenblatt has called "self-fashioning." Pico has God address man thus:

> "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine

> own free will, in whose hand we have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power out of thy soul's judgment to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine." (Cassirer 224-225)

For Pico this power of metamorphosis in man is symbolized by Proteus. The value of moral philosophy and the liberal arts is to help man make the right choice about what form he is to take. The notion of the world as a stage whereon each person plays a part that he fashions for himself with free will is one that the Renaissance humanists themselves picked up from the classical world. Pythagoras, Petronius, Epictetus, Lucian, Marcus Aurelius, and Plotinus all gave variations on the Greek commonplace SKENE' PAS 'O BIOS [a stage is all life] (Cassirer 385).[6] The Renaissance humanists followed a truly classical tradition in holding forth this metaphor to characterize the nature of human existence.

An important implication emerges from the <u>Oration</u>. Pico clearly valued the oral tradition for the transmission of values. The intriguing thing about his numerous examples was that by means of the oral tradition certain truths were concealed and thus known presumably only by select initiates. Pico alludes to Romans 1:17 and 1 Corinthians 2:13 in suggesting that "to keep hidden from the people the things to be shared by the initiate . . . was not part of human deliberation, but of divine command." Pico argued that the taciturnity of Pythagoras, the mystic carvings of the Sphinxes, the riddles of Plato and Aristotle, and the parables of Jesus are all ways of insuring that truth is to be passed from one person to another: "This is in the highest degree confirmed by Dionysius the Areopagite, who says that the occult mysteries were conveyed by the founders of our religion EK NOU EIS NOUN DIA MESON LOGOU, from mind to mind, without writing, through the medium of speech" (Cassirer 251).[7] If truths are to be transmitted from one who is initiated in the mysteries to one who is not, one of two things is essential: dialogue or modeling. Both of these partake of elements of drama in the Aristotelian sense of imitation of men in action. Both reflect the standard Catholic idea that scripture must be supported by tradition. The work which the young More translated, in effect, says that man is on the stage of life to act and speak roles of divine mystery.

A more direct intellectual influence than that of Pico would have been More's reading and translation of Lucian's dialogues. Lucian had a profound effect on both More and Erasmus. At one point the two friends engaged in a rather typical schoolboy exercise to see who could write the better declamation in response to Lucian's Sophist. Marius points out that "More, always the actor, happily cast himself in the role of the opposing lawyer before a jury of the townspeople" (86). In another of his dialogues, The Fisherman, Lucian makes a role for himself in a defense against Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers who claim that Lucian has maligned them. In the process Lucian fictionalizes his own reality.[8] More would have recognized in Lucian's Fisherman both a protest against sham and the simultaneous acknowledgement that role-playing is acceptable. In The Fisherman Lucian remarks: "Just because they have long beards and long faces and claim to be philosophers, must this make them like you? I might have put up with it if they were at least convincing in their role. As things stand, however, a vulture could sooner play a nightingale than any of them a philosopher" (353).

There can be no question that More picked up the example of theatrum mundi from Lucian's dialogue Menippus. which he translated from Greek into Latin. In this dialogue Menippus tells Philonides about his recent trip to the underworld to seek wisdom from the philosophers. What he learns is that the common man in the street leads the best life, not the philosophers and not the rich. In the midst of witnessing all the horrible punishments, Menippus suddenly realizes that all life is like a great pageant:

> So as I looked at them it seemed to me that human

> life is like a long pageant, and that all its trappings are supplied and distributed by Fortune, who arrays the participants in various costumes of many colours. Taking one person, it may be, she attires him royally, placing a tiara upon his head, giving him bodyguards, and encircling his brow with the diadem; but upon another she puts the costume of a slave. Again, she makes up one person so that he is handsome, but causes another to be ugly and ridiculous. I suppose that the show must needs be diversified. And often, in the very middle of the pageant, she exchanges the costumes of several players; instead of allowing them to finish the pageant in the parts that had been assigned to them, she re-apparels them, forcing Croesus to assume the dress of a slave and a captive, and shifting Meandrius, who formerly paraded among the servants, into the imperial habit of Polycrates. For a brief space she lets them use their costumes, but when the time of the pageant is over, each gives back the properties and lays off the costume along with his body, becoming what he was before his birth, no different from his neighbour. (*CW*3 I 176)

There is much in Lucian's criticism of metaphysical speculation, clever logic, and idle talk that appealed to More. In many ways More shared Lucian's contempt for wealth, luxury, violence, ostentation, pride, and injustice. What we have here more specifically is a *contemptus mundi* idea that arises from a *theatrum mundi* metaphor: the idea of the variability of roles (as in the case of the goddess Fortuna), the fragility and impermanence of worldly station, the notion that all the world's gifts are merely lent, not given, the idea that stations in life are mere costume and therefore insubstantial. Certainly *Utopia* reflects some of these same social criticisms. The point here, however, is not so much the philosophical similarities between Lucian and More but rather the use of the metaphor of the play to describe the human condition. Significantly in this work the change of costume allows for different roles. The classical world gave More not only the model of man as creator of his own role but also the important suggestion that man may play a variety of roles as the circumstances dictate. There can be no doubt that Thomas More's background and intellectual experience as a humanist reinforced his view of life as a drama.

Erasmus used the metaphor of the world as a stage extensively in his <u>Praise of Folly</u>, which he is reported to have written while he was a guest in More's house. Erasmus published his work in 1511, five years after More had finished his translations of Lucian. No doubt More and Erasmus had discussed the metaphor extensively. The influence of Lucian seems obvious in this passage from <u>The Praise of Folly</u> in which Folly mocks the ineptitude of wise men in the affairs of state and illustrates the "imprudence of untimely prudence":

> If someone should attempt to take off the masks and costumes of the actors in a play and show to the audience their real appearances, would he not ruin the whole play? And would everyone not think he deserved to be chased out of the theatre with brickbats as a madman? For, suddenly, a new appearance of things would arise so that the player who played a woman turned out to be a man; who was before a young man is now old; who was before a king is now a slave; who was before a god now suddenly appears as a sorry little man. To destroy the illusion, then, is to destroy the whole play. The masks and costumes are what hold

> the audience's eye. For what else is the life of man but a kind of play in which men in various costumes perform until the director motions them off the stage. The director often orders the same actor to appear in different costumes. At one time he may be a king dressed in purple and at another a servant covered with rags. Everything is done under pretense, but this play could not be performed in any other way. (Dolan 118-119)

Interestingly enough, More appears to have picked up part of this material in his Richard III, which he wrote in 1514. The metaphor seems to have gone from More's version of Lucian to Erasmus and back to More. The similarity in Richard III is too obvious to need comment:

> "And when someone plays an emperor in a tragedy, are the people unaware he might be a mere craftsman? But in such circumstances it shows such ignorance to know what you know that if anyone calls him what he really is, not what he is falsely supposed to be, he risks getting a good beating for a bad joke from that man's make-believe retainers, and quite rightly, since he went about to disrupt the whole drama with his untimely truth." (CW15 483)

A further citation from The Praise of Folly echoes the Lucianic notion again, but gods take the place of Fortune, an inconsequential substitution given a Christian interpretation of free will and Fortune:

> You would never believe the sport and entertainment that your human puppets provide daily for the gods. You are aware that these gods set aside their sober morning hours for composing quarrels and listening to prayers. But after that, when their minds are well clouded from the nectar and they have no desire to transact business, they search for some heavenly dignitary, and they sit there, gazing down at mortal men and watching them argue. There is no show like it.

Good God, what a theater! (136)

Perhaps not atypically, More used a theatrical image in his assessment and defense of The Praise of Folly: " . . . that boke of Moria doeth in dede but ieste vppon the abuses of suche thynges, after the manner of the dysours [jester's] parte in a playe" (CW8 I 178). More refutes Tyndale's accusation that the Folly makes fun of saints' images and holy relics by saying that Erasmus is mocking the abuse of the images and relics, not the things themselves. The context of More's remark in his Confutation of Tyndale's Answer has nothing to do with drama directly, but More knows that the analogy he is creating to the jester--apparently a stock character in some kind of farce--is sufficiently well known to be understood by his readers.

Another humanist who used the theatrum mundi metaphor in a way similar to Erasmus and whose life also touched More's directly was the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives. More and Vives corresponded for several years before they finally met in Bruges in 1521. More praised Vives in a letter to Erasmus, and Vives himself praised More's translations of Lucian (López Estrada 18). Both men shared profound knowledge of and admiration for Augustine's Civitas Dei and both quoted Plautus and Terence frequently. The young Spaniard visited More at Chelsea in 1523. Vives claimed that More's Utopia should be read alongside Plato's Republic and his Laws (López Estrada 20). A more important consideration for this chapter is a little work called Fabula de homine, which Vives wrote some time shortly after he first met Erasmus in Louvain in 1518. The similarity of Vives' use of the stage metaphor to Erasmus's use is readily apparent.

Vives introduces the Fabula with a telling comment: "I should like to begin this essay of mine on man by some fables and plays, since man is himself a fable and a play" (Cassirer 387). The story is this: Juno has a birthday party for herself and invites all the gods. Being carefree from the nectar, the gods ask whether Juno has prepared some plays for after-dinner entertainment. Juno asks Jupiter "to improvise an amphitheater and to bring forth new characters, after the manner of regular plays." What ensues is a creation story--the creation of the earth: "The earth was placed as a stage for the appearance of the actors, along with all the animals and everything else." The gods unanimously praise man as the best actor. Man is such a good actor that he can even appear godlike. The gods are so impressed that they beg Juno to allow man to sit unmasked with the gods as a spectator of the rest of the play. At that moment man begins to impersonate Jupiter himself: "He had transcended the characters of the lower gods and was piercing into that inaccessible light surrounded by darkness where Jupiter dwells, of kings and gods the king." The lesser gods are dumbfounded. They stare back and forth from Jupiter's seat to the stage, unable to tell whether Jupiter himself is masked and playing a part. In the end, man is recalled from the stage to sit among the gods who admire not only the unmasked man but also the stage costumes. Both are considered worthy to be honored by the highest gods with whom man remains in eternal bliss.

For the humanists cited here--Pico, Erasmus, and Vives--the theatrum mundi metaphor had varying significance, but in general, it is congruent with the late medieval view of life as a danse macabre and would have appealed to the Christian humanists both as a reminder of the importance of the spiritual life and eternal reality and as a testimony to the essentially unreal nature of the trappings of a materialistic world. More particularly, the metaphor lent itself to a critique of political life. Given their own immediate roots in the Italian humanistic tradition, the second generation humanists could not have failed to be aware that the new learning was in its origins an eminently practical program aimed at making its beneficiaries useful members of the civis. Eugene F. Rice, Jr., points out that educational programs of the humanists were specifically designed to serve laymen (87). Following their own Roman models, the early Italian humanists were interested in being statesmen and in serving their city-states. Hans Nachod points out that for early humanists like Petrarch, "philosophy meant . . . an exclusively practical discipline teaching the art of living well and happily, the <u>ars bene beateque vivendi</u> as his beloved Cicero had put it" (Cassirer, 24).

Margaret Church's remarks in a different context seem particularly appropriate to this consideration. She is discussing Don Quixote, another actor par excellence, but the description suits the beginning of the sixteenth century as well as the end: "We project our purposes and intentions in life by means of roles. Organized society is a kind of theatre where man chooses a part to play either to promote or to destroy that society" (126). The logical concomitant for the humanists of subscribing to the notion of <u>theatrum mundi</u> is, then, to choose a role. If one really sees this world as a stage whereon we are merely players and have our exits and entrances, then the next step for the intelligent, creative individual who carries within him that infinitude of possibilities of which Pico spoke, is to design his own part and live it out. Greenblatt sees the theatre as the place where for More "the disparate and seemingly discontinuous aspects of existence come together," the vehicle that "pays tribute to a world that it loves--or at the least that it cannot live without--even as it exposes that world as a fiction" (27). More's humanistic grounding provided him with a metaphor to give form to his own life and the life around him. For him, perhaps more than for any other of his contemporaries, the idea that life was a stage was a working definition, an assumption that defined the parameters of everything else that he did. Fox called it the "keystone of his *modus vivendi*" (37). More understood the notion in all of its literal and figurative dimensions, and he embraced it fully.

Safety in Role-Playing

In order to understand the evolution of More's role as martyr, we need to see it as part of that larger project of turning life into art. More put considerable energy into this endeavor, and his life and works abound with evidence of this project. He was constantly creating an image of himself and then playing the part of that fictional character which he had created. As time passed, that process of turning his life into a work of art became his way of distancing himself from the vicissitudes of life. The habit of making himself into a character carried over into his relationships with others, and there are numerous instances where what we know about others from More is the result of his fictions about them. Throughout all this activity, More's characteristic mode of expression was irony. His humor, which is itself a distancing device, is legendary. And in the final analysis, the martyrdom, while inevitable in the Aristotelian sense of tragedy, was not a true tragedy but something closer to a divine comedy.

Role playing protected More from engagement in personal controversy as long as he could cite his role as the source of whatever conflict arose. Greenblatt argues that theatricality both as disguise and as projection arose in Renaissance courts from the struggle for recognition and advancement, a kind of jockeying for position (162). For Thomas More, the role playing was less an adherence to fashion and manner than a means of versatility and flexibility in response to the world around him. Role playing served the same liberating process as the <u>studia humanitatis</u>, the quality that generations of men and women have sought in a liberal education. It gave More a wide range of perspectives from which to respond to issues without prejudging them, a trait incidentally useful to a judge even if he never becomes a king's counselor. But the role playing freed More not only from his own ignorance and biases but also from the constraints of the world around him. He was always less concerned to project his own desires and ideas or to control others than he was to be free from the control <u>of</u> others.

Even when classical scholars are merely reading the ancient authors for pleasure, they extract from those readings the eternal verities which shed light on the human condition at all times. Likewise, in some sense, humanists attempt to transform society by superimposing noble interpretations on value-neutral events. Like poets and lovers, they see the world transformed by imagination. They give depth to life and meaning to existence by bringing to the circumstances of daily enterprises the larger visions of reading and thinking. Northrop Frye saw this process to be the function of the educated imagination: "The fundamental job of the imagination in ordinary life is to produce out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in" (140). More used his imagination, fed by his classical reading, to lead a life that was creative of itself in which the main character, because he recreated the world according to his desire, became in effect the author of the drama of which he was the hero. Greenblatt says that some of More's admirers have been "embarrassed particularly by his own professed theatricality" (30). The word "theatricality" seems out of place in describing More's own attempt to remain true to the vision of himself which he wished to create. More never tells us directly that he knows he is acting a part, but he shows his awareness of the theatricality of life and of the need for fidelity to one's role.

The idea of living in a made-up world is an innocent game that literary minds have always played. Science fiction and fantasy are only current manifestations of various strains of the imaginative mind which erupt periodically in works as diverse as the secret poetry of an Emily Dickinson, the juvenilia of the Brontës, the confessions of a Rousseau or an Augustine, or even the philosophic dialogues of a Plato. Lucian saw in Plato's _Republic_ precisely this sort of imaginary self-indulgence, and in his own dialogue _Philosophies for Sale_, Lucian makes Socrates admit that he lives in a state he made up (323). More's _Utopia_ is unquestionably influenced by _The Republic_ and is in part an exercise in projective imagination. Knowing that Utopia is really no place, More can still fantasize what the world would be like if society were modeled on Utopia. E. E. Reynolds is no doubt right that in _Utopia_ More was criticizing contemporary society (_Sir Thomas More_, 11-12), but there is surely an element of innocent self-indulgence also. In a letter to Erasmus in 1516, More writes: "You have no idea how thrilled I am; I feel so expanded, and I hold my head high. For in my daydreams I have been marked out by my Utopians to be their king forever. . . . I was going to continue with this fascinating vision, but the rising Dawn has shattered my dream--poor me!--and shaken me off my throne and summons me back to the drudgery of the courts. But at least this thought gives me consolation: real kingdoms do not last much longer" (_SL_ 85). More projects an image of himself as one who could readily forego all the benefits of this life including his own prestigious position as judge and statesman in order to frolic in the fantasy of Utopia. He creates an image of an honorable and powerful citizen of the realm who views his own success with disdain and yearns for something simpler, yet nobler. The fact that More was neither idle nor uninvolved in the affairs of state manifestly discredits any interpretation of this material as a platform of his intentions, but it makes of this material part of that fiction that he wants others to believe about him.

In a similar vein, More had to live alongside his literary identity as a man for all seasons which Erasmus had created and which Robert Whittinton had popularized in a grammar exercise for schoolboys. This identity in print enhanced More's image-making. An analogy from Don Quixote may help to make clearer the impact of being "in print." Recall that the first half of Cervantes' work was published in 1605 and instantly became a success. Paintings and statues of Don Quixote and Sancho were found everywhere in Spain within a few years. In the second half of the novel, which appeared in 1615, Sancho remarks that he wouldn't be surprised if soon there were paintings of him and Don Quixote in barber shops and taverns all over La Mancha (II.71). This masterpiece of illusion adds verisimilitude to Sancho and Don Quixote because the reader knows that the paintings which Sancho imagines, in fact, already exist. Reality here makes the fiction seem real. The analogy in More's case is that the reality of being in print as "a man for all seasons" helped to create and make real More's fiction of himself as "a man of marvelous mirth and pastimes and sometime of as sad gravity." More had a model in print, a fictional Thomas More, who became a standard against which he could measure the success of his own performance.

In a more mundane sense, we know from biographers that More could playact when the occasion demanded. Chambers cites Erasmus's letters and colloquies for evidence of More's "high-spirited practical joking, involving a good deal of histrionic talent" (96). More and Jane Colt's father were evidently both good actors, and an episode from More's early life with Jane in which he and his father-in-law contrived a scene in order to "tame the shrew" may have been a source of Erasmus's colloquy The Uneasy Wife. In still another anecdote from Roper we read that More dissembled his nature in order to get away from Henry and Catherine. Apparently More was much sought after by the royal couple because he was such an affable person and witty conversationalist. The demands which they placed on him intruded on his time with his family, and so in order to get away from court, More pretended to be a bore until the king stopped requesting his presence. Neither of these anecdotes illustrates the kind of image which More created for his own model and standard, but both illustrate his capacity to project an image of himself for purposes of making people believe something about him. To this list one could add the attempt in 1523 to avoid being Speaker of the House of

Commons and the request the same year to be exempt from the embassy to Spain. Both involved projecting himself in such a way that he could escape the control of external forces.

Marius is critical of More's image-making and writes of it as if it were a flaw in More's character:

> More looks proud of his humility. And we do not believe him when he tells us that he had not really intended to publish this work or that, that he was forced to take high office against his will, that he cared nothing for the opinion of others, and that he wanted only the simple life. We do not believe him because his acts prove entirely otherwise. Even the public spectacle he made of his real love for his family seems at times overmuch, part of the pageant he performed for an audience. (518-519)

The fact that More published his letter of 1517 to his children in the second edition of his Latin epigrams lends support to Marius's claim, but there is nothing inherently dishonest about image-making unless one is more Platonic than Plato. Marius seems unable to tolerate the success with which More was able to turn life into art. He wearies of More's role playing because he never sees it as part of the larger scheme of turning life into art. He does acknowledge the possibility that what seems dishonest about More may have been "a case of art disciplining life and that the role More assumed . . . was in fact the way he held his inner life in check" (291), but this view of More's role playing diminishes its value and makes it seem a means by which More manipulated his world rather than a means by which More protected himself from a world which he could not control. The images More created for himself were not really dishonest. They were not things that he was not but rather things which he was. But as with any attempt to make life into art, one must be selective because life is always more complex than art. Some biographers and historians understandably resist the notion that fiction has its own truth rooted in verisimilitude. Marius sees More leaving out certain parts of his life in the creation of the fictional More and calls this "self-serving image making" (518-519). A broader view of turning life into art acknowledges that to play a role or to have a style means to make a conscious selection, and this in turn necessitates excluding some parts of life. Either way, the conclusion is the same: the product, no matter how real, is always less than life.

Another way of describing More's project is to suggest that he anticipated what Marcel Proust captured so well when he wrote that people are nothing more to us than the contiguous mental impressions which we form of them in various slices of time. Recognizing this reality of our epistemological existence, More labored to have some say in what those mental impressions would be which people carried with them in their involuntary memories. Since fiction remains static in a way that life does not, More strove to develop a fictional Thomas More who could indeed remain the same man for all seasons.

Making Fictions of Others

More's habit of making himself into a fiction carried over into his relationships with others. As an author of imaginative literature, he was aware of the degree to which what he wrote or did not write in some sense "defined" the character of others. To use a Proustian analogy again, More recognized that all of writing is merely an attempt in words to recreate a reality which no longer exists. Every story, every anecdote, every suggestion committed to paper becomes a reality unto itself. That the literary reality is not fully congruent with the historical reality is of no consequence to the poet. So it is that much of what we know about the people who were part of the legend of Thomas More is the result of what More wanted us to know. Greenblatt is right that "one consequence of life lived as histrionic improvisation is that the category of the real merges with that of the fictive" (31), but those who are critical of More for his role playing are no doubt the same people who do not accept that fiction, while rooted in verisimilitude, has its own truth apart from the reality it imitates.

At least parts of the images we have of Henry VIII and of Dame Alice More are a result of More's characterization of them. In the case of Henry, the early Latin epigrams portray an ideal young monarch, cultured and enlightened.

The praise was meant not only for Henry but for More's image of Henry. More described not so much what Henry was as a king--How could he since Henry had not yet served in the position?--but rather what More wanted Henry to be. Alistair Fox points out the drawback to More's fiction: "Its great flaw was that it required the king to remain a humanist fiction rather than the man of red blood and iron will he was soon to prove himself" (49). But More persisted in his fictions long after Henry began to show his nonfictional qualities. More tried as long as it was expediently diplomatic to portray Henry as the Defender of the Faith. Marius recognizes both More's tactic and the way in which this was part of More's tendency to create fictions that fit with his idealistic visions: "It was a rhetorical tactic that he was to use repeatedly afterwards; he would declare that all England and England's king stood firmly on the side of the old faith. In so doing he seemed to be exercising an almost primitive belief that if we say something often enough and firmly enough, it must be true--a sympathetic magic with prose, creating on paper a world that somehow will become real" (420). This interesting notion of the forcefulness of committing an image to writing or saying things vigorously enough calls to mind once again a truly fictional character who did precisely the same thing. Don Quixote repeatedly encountered the world on his own terms: "I believe everything is as I say" (I.25) and "I know, and I am convinced . . . and that is enough for the peace of my conscience" (I.49). Marius said of More that there was always "a tendency to think that if he wrote things vigorously, they must be true" (53). One cannot help thinking that More would have readily taken the mad knight as a model for his own attempt to turn life into art had their chronology been reversed. In a very different way, one thinks of neo-platonic magic and witchcraft as other Renaissance examples of the power of language to conjure spirits and control the world. Marlowe's _Faustus_ is perhaps the best example in the Elizabethan period, but even More himself showed some interest in these matters (Thompson 45-55).

Naturally, much of what remains in print about Henry VIII comes from sources other than Thomas More, but a great proportion of Dame Alice's published reputation is a result of fictions created directly or indirectly by More and passed along by him or Erasmus or William Roper. More married Alice Middleton within a month of Jane Colt's death. Clearly he needed a stepmother for his four children and saw in the widow the kind of matronly figure who could manage a household effectively. There is no basis for supposing that More ever mistreated Alice, but he certainly contributed to an innocent fiction about her boorishness. He apparently referred to her frequently as "neither a pearl nor a girl," acknowledging that she was neither particularly beautiful nor young (R. W. Chambers 109). Harpsfield reports that Alice was "aged, blunt and rude" (93-94), but he bases this on Erasmus's words, and Erasmus had no particular affection for Alice. Doubtless she, in return, had no warm spot in her heart for him. She probably had little basis for being hospitable to any of More's scholarly friends since her background was rustic. One of the other humanists of the time, Andrew Ammonio, who had been a guest at More's house at the same time as Erasmus, wrote to Erasmus that he was relieved to leave the house so that he would no longer have to look at the "hooked beak of the harpy," meaning Alice's nose (R. W. Chambers 111). Among More's circle of humanist friends much candid chatter and many intellectual jokes passed for polite conversation. One suspects that Dame Alice was the brunt of some of that talk because More tolerated or even encouraged this as part of the fiction he wanted to create about Alice. Certainly More's friends would not have been disrespectful of Alice if they had perceived that More took their humor for abuse rather than as part of his effort to create another characterization. Perhaps in still another sense More was merely making of Dame Alice another character in the list of well-known medieval comic shrews that included Noah's wife and Mak's wife. Marius points out that More's desire to talk with Alice during his imprisonment suggests a closer relationship between them than More's fiction about her would lead one to believe. Marius sees this paradox as one further example of the way More's "fictions about his life nudged reality aside and even dissolved it" (481). More must have been conscious of himself as a creator of fiction not merely in writing but also in the sense of turning life into some form of art--often caricatured to be sure as in the case of Dame Alice--but art nonetheless.

Observing the line between life and art was not always easy for Thomas More. Northrop Frye warned that the act of creating literature may distort the creator of the literature: "His [the poet's] life may imitate literature in a way that may warp or even destroy his social personality . . . Life and literature are both conventionalized . . . It's when the two sets of conventions collide that we realize how different they are" (89-90). More's social personality was not destroyed by his role playing; he never forgot who he was. But it would not be wrong to assert that More created a fictional self who was, in part by his very characterization, unfit to meddle in the affairs of this world. The fictional More was destined to meet his doom in this world of pride, greed, and power. As long as the author could keep the fiction at a safe distance, he himself was safe from the dangers of politics; but the more thoroughly Thomas More emulated his own fictional self, the greater the dangers became. Frye points out that "literature belongs to the world man constructs, not to the world he sees" (27). With his passion for transforming his environment to suit his imagination, More lost sight of the fine line between art and reality. He made the mistake of believing that his fictions were somehow truer than they were. The irony in all this is that the very effort on More's part to distance himself from the vicissitudes of life by turning life into art, in fact, caused him to come increasingly into conflict with the world which he sought to avoid. This occurred because he emulated too closely his own fictional model.

For More, role-playing was a form of power. Under normal circumstances artistic creation for Thomas More, as for Plato, was somehow unreal. Writers, artists, and intellectuals generally have a Platonic capacity for holding ideas and forms at an aesthetically safe distance. Writers can disown or disclaim the thoughts of their characters. They can hide behind their creations and mask their opinions and intentions with irony. Certainly More did his share of this kind of writing. But when the fiction of one's own creation becomes the model for his or her life, then turning life into art no longer lends objectivity to experience but rather engages the creator in subjective relationships with the surroundings. "True art," as John Gardner has pointed out is "art which gives expression to--and celebrates--commitments" (33). In some sense one role of art is to enable authors to take stands, to make choices, to commit themselves and to celebrate the experiences of others. As long as authors do not identify themselves too closely with their own creations, they are free from the external reactions that their works elicit in a political environment; but if they do not maintain the proper illusions and distance, then they must pay the price of their endeavors. More paid the price.

Greenblatt seems to argue that More's role playing was a way for him to control his world. In a sense, one could argue that Richard III and Utopia were attempts to influence the world of Tudor politics. This may be what Greenblatt had in mind when he argued that More's involvement with fantasy that could not benefit him directly may have been his own way of exercising "power whose quintessential sign is the ability to impose one's fictions upon the world: the more outrageous the fiction, the more impressive the manifestation of power" (13). In a broader sense, too, More's creation of the fictional self may have been an exercise in power. Power does not necessarily need to be power over another. It can be a form of self protection. Flight is an alternative to fight. To be sure, in matters intellectual and rhetorical More was as ready as the next lawyer to fight. He loved disputation and joined readily in public debates at every university he visited, but in matters of state and the conscience of kings he was no meddler. He was hesitant to share opinions and viewpoints indiscriminately. His letter of 1520 to William Budaeus illustrates his caution:

> But now, as I think the matter over, I see that it would be safer if you would wait a while, at least until I revise my letters. It is not only that I fear there may be passages where the Latin is faulty, but also in my remarks upon peace and war, upon morality, marriage, the clergy, the people, etc., perhaps what I have written has not always been so cautious and guarded that it would be wise to expose it to captious critics. (SL 145)

And, of course, his legendary silence on the issue of the King's Supremacy is the best example of what Chesterton calls the "always divine and wholesome science of minding one's own business" (26). The final assessment will not show More as a man who sought power but rather as one who, albeit fascinated by power, always sought to escape it.

An interesting and ironic corollary of More's own desire to be free from power was the degree to which this endeavor, in fact, empowered the fictional More. There is no doubt that the fictional Thomas More became a powerful figure in Tudor politics and in European thought. Marius suggests that More became for Cromwell and Henry "as much symbol as man" (493). More was in some sense a symbol of all those people in any cause who never protest openly but who are not really supportive. Robert Bolt's Cromwell states the point well: "This 'silence' of his is bellowing up and down Europe!" (57) In the final analysis the real Thomas More posed little threat to the king and his council, but the fictional More was an enemy of a different magnitude.

More always depended on literature as a means to insulate himself from the burdens of political life. Turning his own life into a work of art was the most effective technique More had for holding life at a safe distance. One has to see the irony in life in order to create a fictional version of himself. The irony itself is a mask. Monk or dramatist, lawyer or king's counselor, More had a remarkable ability to distance himself from the vicissitudes of life. What Samuel Johnson said of Shakespeare in The Preface could well be said of Thomas More: "The incumbrances of his fortune were shaken from his mind, as dewdrops from a lion's mane" (Malone 87).

Further Safety in Humor

Thomas More's sense of humor is legendary and was part of that apparatus of irony for keeping the world at a safe distance. It is apparent in his reading and scholarly studies, in his own writing, and in his social behavior. As with other aspects of More's life, he contributed to his own image as a man of wit. So did his contemporaries and his biographers.

We have remarked earlier in tracing specific literary debts that some favorites among More's wide exposure to good authors were Aristophanes, Lucian, Plautus, Terence, and

Chaucer. Up to the middle of the sixteenth century, these were (and for that matter still are) _the_ writers who would be recognized in any canon of great comic poets. More knew the best and loved them. E. E. Reynolds speculates that More's genius for story telling was what appealed to his readers. Reynolds suggests that had More lived only half a century later during Elizabethan times, he would have been a dramatist (_Sir Thomas More_ 28). Clearly, More is better known for his comic tastes than for his other aesthetic endeavors. In fact, with the noted exception of _Richard III_, and to some degree the Tower Works, when More is being serious, he tends to be polemical rather than dramatic. Ortega y Gasset once remarked that "it is only through a comic intention that reality seems to acquire an esthetic interest" (170-171). One could go further to assert that only in comedy is the question of artificiality a central part of the drama. Tragedies never raise this question. Lear, Othello, and Macbeth seem real in a way that comic characters do not. In short, there is something unapologetically contrived about comedy. Comedy is More's natural medium, in part, precisely because it is contrived. It is his way of protecting himself from a world that is already too serious. Fox is no doubt quite right in arguing that More's love for the Lucianic dialogues rests in large part on the fact that these works presented him with a posture for confronting a world in turmoil: "a form of dialogue that dramatized ambiguity as a function of meaning, a demonstration that all aspects of human experience could be comprehended within an ironic view of life, and an active response that was non-despairing, even though it originated in a view of things as sceptical as More's own" (36).

Comedy and story telling were one and the same for More. He rarely told "serious" stories because to tell a story for him meant to engage in a flight of fancy. Serious reflections were reserved for history, serious arguments for polemics. The art of story telling, which More learned in part from his father, was inextricably tied to merry-making. Perhaps this is one reason that Edward Hall perceived More to be forever mocking. More's wit evidently irritated Hall: "For undoubtedly he beside his learning had a great wit, but it was so mingled with taunting and mocking that it seemed to them that best knew him, that he thought nothing to be well spoken except he had ministered some mock in the communication" (34-35). What Hall evidently never understood was that comedy was More's way of holding the world at an aesthetically safe distance so that the crimes and follies, the inhumanity, and the deep ambiguities of life could be embraced safely. Meredith remarked that "the aim and business of the comic poet are misunderstood, his meaning is not seized nor his point of view taken, when he is accused of dishonoring our nature and being hostile to sentiment, tending to spitefulness and making an unfair use of laughter" (46). More was not so much "taunting and mocking" as he was protecting himself and giving form to his natural inclination to see the irony in life.

Irony is a mask, and for More the joking stance was frequently a way of hiding feelings or of retreating to a safe place. Fox talks of a public More projected through a comic persona and a private More characterized by private meditation (27). He argues that the Elizabethan dramatists who wrote the play The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore understood both aspects of More's life. More's wit grew not out of a disdain for humanity but rather from a compassion for the human condition. Meredith's insight seems to characterize well the brand of humor practiced by Thomas More: "And to love comedy, you must know the real world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though you may still hope for good" (24). More's satire is more often Horatian than Juvenalian. In his reproofs More is usually gentle, urbane, and even given to indirection. He often teaches by anecdote. Only in his polemical works is he really vituperative. It is as if he recognized that the aesthetic glue of comedy could not really hold in place the biting anger of a polemical stance. Meredith wrote that "sensitiveness to the comic laugh is a step in civilization . . . we know likewise that the larger natures are distinguished by the great breadth of their power of laughter" (50). De Santillana admires the Holbein portrait of "More's sensitive keen face with its restless eyes" and thinks it shows the sharp wit and readiness to laugh of which Harpsfield spoke (89). I personally do not at all see these traits in the portrait, but in the list of his favorite authors and in his own writings and biographical anecdotes I do see the kind of civilized and intellectual awareness and the quick perception of irony which are the bases for humor of great breadth. I do not doubt that he was quick to laugh. How I wish we had a portrait of him laughing! It might have been his most characteristic pose.

Reputation for Humor

The importance of humor in the script More was writing for himself cannot be overstated. He wanted the world to know him for his wit, and those who knew him best saw it and honored it. Perhaps Erasmus, more than any other of More's contemporaries, was responsible for the picture we have of More as a man of "marvellous mirth." From Erasmus we get a hint of the breadth of More's sense of humor which ranges from warm cordiality to practical joking. The *Praise of Folly* suggests both extremes. In the preface Erasmus refers to More's incredibly affable and likeable ways that make him the man of all hours with all men. From this praise came the appellation "a man for all seasons." Later in the text Folly tells an anecdote of a man "who has the same name as mine." This, of course, is an allusion to the Greek root

MOROS, meaning folly, which plays on More's name in the Latin title of the work as elsewhere. The anecdote shows a rather scheming side to More's humor:

> I know a man who has the same name as mine, who gave his wife some costume jewelry as a present, and convinced her--for he is a credible joker--that they were not only genuine and natural but also of unique and inestimable value. Now tell me, what difference did it make to the girl, so long as she took great delight in having and looking at these imitations, and carefully kept these trinkets close to her person, at all times, and in a very safe place? Still, her husband had avoided a great expense, enjoyed his wife's delusion, and had strengthened their relationship just as though he had given her the most precious of gifts. In your opinion how do those in Plato's cave, who quite satisfied with their existence, look contentedly at the shadows and likenesses of various objects differ from the wise man who emerges from the cave and looks upon reality? (134)

Aside from the questions of honesty and marital relations, the anecdote itself is undoubtedly about Thomas More and just as assuredly is intended as an encomium. The only way one can construe such blatant chicanery as praiseworthy is to view it as a well-conceived and better-executed practical joke. Clearly this is how Erasmus portrays it. More's friends evidently enjoyed his sense of humor even in its extreme forms and valued him all the more for it.

In the next chapter we shall examine More's attempt to adopt a particular role which he hopes will promote the goodness of his society. That his attempt fails and may have been doomed from the outset does not negate his intention to adopt a role.

Chapter Summary

More's contact with European humanists intensified his interest in drama and connected him more directly with classical sources of the metaphor of world as stage, a comparison which was popular among More's literary contemporaries. The importance of the metaphor for More rested in the assumption that man is the author of his own pageant. More took seriously the ephemeral and finite nature of this worldly existence and with his inimitable sense of irony undertook his own life's activities as a series of roles. While he entered into his various roles with commitment, and even took part in the affairs of state, he always tried to keep a safe distance between himself and his experiences by use of his public persona who was, in some sense, a fictional character. The public "More" was a "man for all seasons," playing roles for all occasions, while the private More cared little for the transitory pageant of life.

The habit of making himself into a fictional character carried over to his representations of both of his wives and Henry VIII. His fictions about Jane Colt and Alice Middleton were innocuous, but More's portrayal of Henry as he wished him to be rather than as he was caused More to misjudge the dangers of pride, greed, and power in the affairs of state.

More's sense of humor was probably better known in his own time and in the Elizabethan period than it is in our own. No doubt his humor helped to keep the vicissitudes of life from being overwhelming.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACTOR ADOPTS THE ROLE

Chapter III demonstrated that the notion of life as a stage was a commonplace in sixteenth-century Europe, particularly among the humanists who had read the idea frequently in the classics. For Thomas More, however, role-playing was not just an intellectual abstraction but an experiential reality founded upon his totally serious view of the world as a stage. In this chapter I shall show that Thomas More had decided as early as 1509 to play the role of adviser to Henry VIII but fished for some time to find a way to do this indirectly without joining the court. One form of indirect counsel is _Richard III_, which More intended as a means of advising Henry VIII against the evils of tyranny. Once More had accepted an appointment to the king's council in 1517, however, he began to play the role of the Platonic Man of the Cave, a role which takes its meaning from the fate of death met by the philosopher who escapes from and then returns to the cave in Plato's _Republic_. More had worked out the rationale for this role in _Utopia_.

Richard III and _Utopia_ are among More's best-known writings; both show the use of dramatic elements; both were written about the same time--just before More agreed to enter the King's service. More wrote _Richard III_ simultaneously in both Latin and English, Utopia only in Latin. This often-overlooked fact is a significant one given More's ability and tendency to hide his thoughts on certain subjects. Normally irony was his favorite masking device--and there is plenty of irony in both works--but in this case the choice of language is also a means of restricting the ideas to a more select group of readers. The fact that he composed Utopia only in Latin and the fact that neither version of Richard III was published in More's lifetime may give a prima facie reason to infer some kind of unusual meaning in these works, quite likely something with political dimensions. The timing is also significant. More was working on Richard III in 1513-1514 and on Utopia in 1515-1516. In 1517, after considerable hesitation, he joined the King's Council. No doubt Kendall is right in saying that the Richard III was written by More the humanist, not More the knight or Chancellor or martyr (23). This is true not only in the chronology of More's life but also in terms of the concerns. The humanist was the one who drew upon drama and classical history for moral exempla; the humanist was the one concerned about questions of government and justice; the humanist was the one who hated tyranny and desired to bring philosophy to the service of the state. Probably we shall never know whether More's humanistic studies gave focus to his role as counselor or whether his desire to effect good government caused him to write a history. Maybe the influences are inseparable. What seems clear is that More struggled with himself about the best way to take on the role of adviser to the king. After the "Coronation Poem," his second attempt, Richard III, a moral history, was aborted; his third more cautionary attempt, Utopia, was a fantasy, one that could pass as a joke. Only after those very indirect efforts to caution Henry about the evils of tyranny did More take on the role of adviser and join the court himself. That role will be described in greater detail in the discussion of Utopia, but Richard III itself merits closer reading as one of the best proofs of More's understanding of drama.

This chapter analyzes two major tentative attempts by More to warn Henry of the evils of tyranny and to advise him about humane policies. The analysis of the first attempt falls into three parts: (1) More's view of kingship and tyranny, (2) Richard III as drama about tyranny, and (3) Richard III as More's self-dramatization. The analysis of the second effort falls into three parts: (1) Utopia as a continued search for style, (2) irreconcilable values of philosopher and king, and (3) the role of Platonic Man of the Cave.

More's Views of Kingship and Tyranny

The particular object of More's role as counselor to the king was to warn Henry of the evils of tyranny. What

More attempts to dramatize in Richard III is the rise and fall of a tyrant.

In order to appreciate fully More's concern with tyranny in Richard III, one must understand that the topic was a life-long concern. Biographers remind us that More, while still quite young, opposed a bill by which Henry VII attempted to assess Parliament a sum of money for the marriage of his daughter Margaret to James IV, King of the Scots (Roper 4-5). The bill was defeated, and the chagrined King apparently took his revenge on Thomas More's father through some trumped-up charge that resulted in a fine of a hundred pounds for John More. Thomas, feeling that his relationship with the Crown jeopardized his well-being, considered leaving England to live elsewhere, but Henry VII conveniently died, obviating Thomas's need to relocate. (Roper 8). One suspects that this personal experience with the abuse of kingly power helped to shape More's hatred for tyranny. Some of his Latin epigrams address the subject directly. In the epigram "The Difference Between a Tyrant and a King" More writes: "A king who respects the law differs from cruel tyrants thus: a tyrant rules his subjects as slaves; a king thinks of his as his own children" (CW3 II 163). A variation on this is the epigram "That the Good King is a Father Not a Master": "A devoted king will never lack children; he is father to the whole kingdom. And so it is that a true king is abundantly blessed in having as many children as he has subjects" (CW3 II 163).

The notion of a paternalistic ruler strikes us as both foreign and antiquated, but A. O. Lovejoy, E. M. W. Tillyard, Hardin Craig, and Theodore Spencer all confirm the centrality of this view of Renaissance political life. From these authors we have become familiar with Renaissance ideas of world order, the Great Chain of Being, the parallel orders of the natural cosmos, the body politic, and the individual person. The King was the analogue of God on earth and of the father in the family, a necessary blessing and a tangible sign of order, stability, and Divine Providence. From More to Milton the humanists accepted the legitimacy of the office of kingship even when there were doubts about the man in the position.

While More accepted kingship, he could never reconcile himself to the abuse of power; as he writes in his Latin epigrams, "Great anxiety wears away the waking hours of the mighty tyrant; peace comes at night if it comes at all. But the tyrant does not rest more comfortably on any soft bed than the poor man does on the hard ground. Therefore, tyrant, the happiest part of your life is that in which you willingly become no better than a beggar" (CW 3-II, 163).

If More expressed general views on tyrants in his epigrams, the "Coronation Poem" may have been More's first indirect attempt to advise Henry VIII about tyranny. One of More's oddest statements about tyranny occurs in the two-hundred lines of verse praising Henry VIII on his coronation in 1509. The passage is too long to reproduce in its entirety, but one can begin to appreciate the saccharine quality of More's encomium to Henry even in an abbreviated form. A few phrases make the point: " . . . for this day consecrates a young man who is the everlasting glory of our time . . . worthy not merely to govern a single people but singly to rule the whole world . . . They [Henry's subjects] rejoice, they exult, they leap for joy and celebrate their having such a king . . . this king, than whom Nature has created nothing more deserving of love" (CW3 II 101-103). These excerpts come from the first fifty lines. The praises go on for another one hundred fifty lines. Henry is taller, stronger, braver than others. He has fire in his eyes, beauty in his face, color in his cheeks. He is compared with Achilles. He possess excellence of body and mind and heart. He is wise, judicious, calm, untroubled, modest, chaste, serene, clement, gentle, noble, just, and, of course, loved by everyone.

However, a closer look at the "Coronation Poem" reveals that there are just as many bad things implied about Henry VII as there are good things said about Henry VIII. In fact, the material about the father is based on deeds done; that about the son is purely visionary. Consider these phrases: "This day is the limit of our slavery, the beginning of our freedom, the end of sadness . . . such a king as will wipe the tears from every eye and put joy in the place of our long distress . . . Now the people, freed, run before their king with bright faces . . ." (CW3 II 101-103). Like the encomium of Henry VIII, the criticism of his father continues throughout the poem. The implied abuses include devaluing of the nobility, excessive taxes, overly harsh trade duties, poor laws, unjust administration of good laws, the selling of public offices to evil men, and fear of political intrigue. Under Henry VII there was fear, harm, danger, grief, woe, ignorance, evil, and internal strife.

One paradox seems manifestly obvious: Does any son--King included--really enjoy praise at the expense of his own father? Was Henry really flattered to hear how wonderful he was going to be compared with his abominable father? Was this "Coronation Poem" another trick of More's--his own revenge against the son whose father abused his father? Only one interpretation of this "Coronation Poem" makes sense. More was not writing about Henry VII and Henry VIII in the poem any more than he was writing about Richard III in the History of Richard III. The real subject of the "Coronation Poem" and of Richard III is tyranny. More was not so naive to believe that he could get away with a diatribe against Henry VII under the guise of an encomium for Henry VIII. He intended for Henry VIII to understand the poem as a lesson about tyranny. If it also served the devious purpose of personal retribution, then that would satisfy More's love of irony and double meaning, but he most assuredly had to count on Henry VIII's understanding of the poem as a conventional expression of the dangers of tyranny and the concomitant virtues of good government. In some sense the poem followed the Roman tradition of the slave who followed the great conqueror whispering in his ear "_sic transit gloria mundi_." Already More was beginning to take on the role of counselor to kings. That he would do so with that mixture of attraction and repulsion associated with certain kinds of fascination was something still not clear to him in 1509, but there can be no mistake of his advice to Henry. The barefaced advice rings clear in the poem: _Eneruare bonas immensa licentia mentes/ Idque etiam in magnis assolet ingenijs_ ("Unlimited power has a tendency to weaken good minds, and that even in the case of very gifted men") (_CW_3 II 104-105).

Richard III _as Drama_

Richard III was published by Richard Grafton first in 1543 as the continuation of Hardyng's _Chronicle_ and then in 1548 as the continuation of Hall's _Chronicle_. Finally, William Rastell published the _History of Richard III_ in 1557 in More's _English Works_. Rastell's edition is considered the most reliable text of those early editions, as Kendall has observed (23).

Richard III is the first attempt at Tudor history, as distinct from a chronicle, the genre into which the works of Grafton, Holinshed, Hall, Harrison, and Stow properly fall. However, More inherited a view of history that allowed an author to indulge himself in a great deal of dramatic invention. Using Aristotle's dichotomy between the historian who writes of things as they are and the poet who writes of things as they should be or might be, we would clearly call Thomas More a poet rather than an historian; but the humanists were reluctant to quibble over the difference, and More falls comfortably in the tradition established by Plutarch and Horace, and continued not long after More's time by Sidney. More is concerned about the moral use of history. Historical fact is merely a tool; and like his much-loved models Thucydides, Suetonius, and Tacitus, More is ready for the sake of verisimilitude to alter minor details or to make up speeches.

Unlike a chronicle, history deliberately attempts to impose some meaning or interpretation on a collection of facts. The classical tradition of history which More imitated had always incorporated dramatic speeches which read like mini-dramas imbedded in prose narrative. These dramatic speeches were invented to illustrate what had probably been said insofar as that could be conjectured from the known circumstances. One could argue, then, that every historical work is in some sense imaginative because the very act of choosing a topic and a focus or of selecting and deleting material imposes upon events a particular interpretation. Histories in the classical tradition going back as far as ancient Greece were unapologetically "made up" in places. Recall the explanation Thucydides gives for inventing speeches:

> In this history I have made use of set speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation. (47)

The writers were striving for understanding of the human condition, and their goal was "psychological verisimilitude rather than factual accuracy" (Kendall 25). For Thomas More, drama and history were both merely vehicles for some larger purpose. The telling of the story was important, to be sure, but the reason for telling the story was more important. Literature needed to be both entertaining <u>and</u> useful.

Arthur Kincaid establishes the similarity between More's history of Richard and the popular morality plays and shows that the dramatic structure reveals moral intention (223). Marius sees More as "a genius at setting a scene, a wizard at depicting character" (98); Fox calls <u>Richard III</u> "representational and dramatic in its nature rather than simply expositional" (77 and 84n); Kendall, who was a defender of Richard, refers to More's work as a "dramatic, boldly patterned narrative, soaring beyond actualities into art" (25) and refers to More himself as "a born dramatist and ironist" (25). There is no denying the manifest evidence of the dramatic elements in Richard III, including a modified dramatis personae, alteration of historical fact about certain characters in order to enhance the development of others, and as much as a third of the text on dialogues and speeches. Well over half of the newly-discovered Latin text is comprised of speeches, direct or reported (CW15 clii). A. F. Pollard adds to this list of literary characteristics the avoidance of dates and the development of Richard as a villain (Making of RIII, 230). The only ways in which Richard III does not square with our current notions of drama are the the assignment of exposition to a narrator and the absence of sustained dialogue. Perhaps the best testimony to More's dramatic style was the continuation by Grafton. The opening of the continuation is clear evidence that Grafton understood the dramatic nature of More's account but was unable to sustain it.[9]

To attempt an analysis of every major episode in the history is impractical, but a few well-chosen scenes will make the dramatic content and style of Richard III readily apparent. Probably the villainy of Richard hinges most of all on his alleged murder of the two young princes in the tower. Whether in fact he was responsible or whether Henry VII was responsible is in some sense a moot point. More's Richard III established a legend blaming Richard for the heinous and infamous crime. For purposes of dramatic effect, the historical facts are irrelevant. The worse Richard's character seems to be, the greater the sense of dramatic tension when Richard pretends to be their protector and wrests the young King's brother Richard, Duke of York, away from sanctuary and the protection of Queen Elizabeth. The scene of the parting is made for the stage. Each of the youngsters was the other's defense; and Elizabeth knew that once Richard had his nephews together in one place, their lives were forfeit. Her giving up young Richard to the "Protector" was a kiss of death:

> "Nevertheless, I give this son into your hands, and in him I also give you his brother; I entrust them both to your loyalty, and from you, before God and men, I will ask for them back again. I know you have a great deal of prudence and even more good faith; you have power and resources to spare, nor will there be any shortage of people who will gladly support you in this cause. But in the name of your faith and my late husband's memory, in the name of my care for my children and my trust in you, I beg one thing only: just as I seem to you to be overly fearful, so on your part do not be overconfident." Then, immediately turning to her little boy, she said, "Goodbye, my dear son; may the saints provide someone to care for you, or rather, may they care for you themselves. Hug your mother and kiss her one last time at least as you go, without knowing whether you will ever get the chance again." And with this, touching her lips to his and making the sign of the cross over him, she turned away tearfully, leaving the little boy weeping. (CW15 396-397)

If More had an eye for the inherently dramatic scene, he was also a master of dramatic timing. Every actor and director knows the importance of timing to the successful rendering of a dramatic scene. According to More's account, Richard III and his confederates had noised about the rumor that the two young princes were King Edward's illegitimate children because Edward had been married to Elizabeth Lucy before he married Queen Elizabeth. This would render the boys unqualified for the throne and leave open the possibility for Richard's accession. In order to stage the public acceptance of Richard as the likely heir to the throne, Doctor Shaa was to deliver a sermon on June 22 at Paul's Cross in which he was to remark that God always restores rightful inheritors. The scene was to include mention of the illegitimacy of all of Edward's offspring and to establish the rightful line as that of the late Duke of York, father to Richard III. Only from More's text can one get the full impact of how the timing shows the contrived and staged nature of Shaa's acclamation of Richard III:

> He also said that Edward's degeneracy was a far cry from the duke's noble nature, but that the Protector, the most splendid man on the face of the earth, recalled his father not only in his mode of living but even in his very appearance. "Here," he said, "is that man's well-known face; here is the definitive figure and the very image of that dearest duke who still lives in your hearts."
>
> But it had been agreed previously that while these words were being spoken the Protector would make his appearance, so that the concurrence of that sort of speech with his arrival would make

> the audience think that the preacher had delivered it not through any human device but rather by some sort of divine inspiration, the people would be moved by that thought to acclaim Richard king then and there, and thus it would appear to posterity that he had been chosen by divine guidance and almost by a miracle. But that plan went ridiculously awry, whether by the negligence of the Protector or the excessive diligence of the preacher; for while both feared that the Protector's arrival would anticipate those words of the preacher on which he was intended to enter, he dawdled en route while the preacher spoke so quickly that he had finished with the topic completely and moved on to other matters which had nothing to do with it by the time the Protector finally entered. But on seeing him enter, the preacher abandoned the subject at hand, and abruptly, as if he were stupefied, with no preparation or orderly transition but rather in an utterly tactless reversal, he repeated the words, "Here is the one and only true and indubitable son of the Duke of York," and so on; and at these words the Protector, accompanied by the Duke of Buckingham, went to his place through the midst of the people to hear out the sermon. But they were so far from acclaiming him king that they seemed almost petrified with amazement at so shameful a sermon. Later on, when its author asked a friend what people thought of it and were saying about it, though his own conscience told him to expect nothing good, when he heard nothing but bad it distressed him so terribly that he pined away from grief (CW15 453-455)

More knew well the importance of timing and the destruction of the illusion of verisimilitude caused by poor timing or unmotivated speeches. The repetition in the text of the identical words of that fair-seeming praise is masterful. From his knowledge of drama, More was able to create a play within a play. The inner play was the very unsuccessful staging of a would-be acclamation for Richard III as King. The dramatic frame was the superb rendering of the scene at Paul's Cross where the audience was left speechless by the shameful sermon.

More creates various levels of reality in Richard III in order to make the primary work of fiction seem more real by including within it some work which is fictional even to the characters within the primary work. The various levels of reality function as a device to lend verisimilitude to the work. In the case of Richard III the entire episode of Doctor Shaa's sermon is a rather obvious and artless fiction that enhances the seeming reality of a another fiction--the deviousness of Richard--which More wants to appear real. This work is the creation of a man who knows drama as a writer, an actor, and a critic.

In a similar vein, the dramatist knows the power of silence. One of the most stunning scenes in More's history is the staging by Richard's supporters of what they anticipate will be public acclaim for Richard as King of England. The build-up for this anticipated acclamation is a very long speech in a clear, loud voice by the Duke of Buckingham. The speech in More's work, a full thousand words long, rehearses all the reasons why Richard should be King of England. Only the last few lines are quoted here, but they give something of the flavor and heightened anticipation of Buckingham and his cohorts:

> " . . . and so you have all the more reason to rejoice in your fortune and to thank heaven for kindly providing that the man it has destined to

> rule is not only mature in his age but has also combined admirable prudence with great practical experience and unsurpassed glory achieved by his virtue at home and abroad.
>
> "But even if, as I said, he is reluctant to take such a great burden upon himself, nonetheless, as we hope, it seems likely that he will put up not a little less resistance if you, too, the most honorable citizens of what is by far the most illustrious city in the kingdom, decide to add your prayers to our supplications. And though, in view of your wisdom, we have already conceived no mean hope you will do so, we still vehemently beg you to do so, as well, and we certainly beg you all the more confidently because (quite apart from our prayers, which in view of the love that we bear you we think will have some small effect) by choosing such a prince you will not only be publicly benefiting the realm as a whole, you will also be gaining certain private advantages for yourselves, for whose efforts he will always consider himself as indebted as if you had given him the kingship." (*CW* 15 467-469)

More continues his story brilliantly. The narrative mode does nothing to detract from the dramatic tension:

> When the duke had said this, he expected that there would immediately be enthusiastic applause and that Richard would be unanimously proclaimed king; so well he hoped that the mayor had already conditioned the populace. But despite his high hopes, when the duke noticed the perfect silence everywhere, he drew close to the mayor and asked in a whisper, "What is the meaning of this conduct?" He answered, "Perhaps they had trouble understanding your speech." "That is easily mended," said the duke, and immediately repeated in a slightly more audible voice than before the same points in different words and in a different order, speaking so clearly and elegantly with such decorous intonation, demeanor, and gestures that anyone who was present would readily admit that he had never before heard such a bad cause propounded so well. But whether speechless with admiration or with fear, or whether each man would rather let someone else open the talking than begin it himself, all alike remained silent." (*CW* 15 469-471)

How powerful silence can be the dramatic artist knows from experience. More's history is rich with possibility for stage adaptation in scene after scene.

The coronation proceedings are among the most ironic and dramatic ones in the history. Buckingham and the supporters of Richard have to get the people to voice their approval of Richard and repeatedly have little success in this endeavor. As in the previous example but with only one paragraph's anticipation, the Duke puts the matter more directly to the people: "Come now! Answer with one word at least, whether you do or do not want the mighty Duke of Gloucester to be chosen as king, whom the rest of the nobility and the people are going to elect anyway. For as soon as you give us your answer one way or the other, we shall take our leave, never to trouble you about this matter further" (CW15 473). Once again the response is anticlimactic: "Somewhat roused by this speech, the people began to murmur among themselves, and a sound was heard rather than words, like the sound that bees make when abandoning their hive . . ." (CW15 473). Planting supporters in the audience was the next feeble trick, and when the small group in back shouted "King Richard!" at the top of their voices, "the citizens turned their heads and looked back in amazement" (CW15 473). Although More is setting the scene rather than writing dialogue, the drama of the "stage directions" is clear. The Duke's interpretation is a transparent lie that exposes the irony of the crowd's disaffection: "But though the duke was unhappy . . . he still made the most of what had happened, first calling for silence again and then hailing that shouting as a most pleasant display of enthusiasm in selecting their king and of such perfect unanimity that not even one voice of dissent had been heard" (CW15 473).

Although the rest of the scene in which Buckingham and his group solicit Richard for the kingship is written in the narrative mode, the potential for drama is enormous because of the extensive irony. Richard feigns ignorance of why the solicitors are approaching him and shows no interest in being king. In an almost doubly ironic way, he protests with valid reasons what he hopes to mask by his very protest. For example, he claims that people in other countries will think that it is his own ambition, not the concern for the commonwealth that leads him to the kingship. He says the public would not understand that he was responding to the request of knowledgeable counselors rather than merely deposing the young Prince of whom he was the Protector. In fact, what he says is right. The reason he gives would be enough to keep any honest man from doing something which could not appear proper. The first level of irony lies in the fact that Richard does not mean what he is saying. The second level of irony lies in the fact that

Richard's prophecy is precisely right. So there is irony in the "drama" and irony in the "history." More makes his readers an audience to a performance, and as the audience, the readers detect the dramatic irony even in the narrative mode.

The potential for dissimulation on the stage is evident in More's language when Richard finally seems to have been persuaded to be King: "These words much moved the Protector--who else, as every man may know, would never of likelihood have inclined thereunto!" (Kendall 99) Even the most obtuse reader could not miss the sarcasm.

Richard III as More's Self-dramatization

Richard III shows both More's talent to write dramatically and his skill to use drama through which to assume the role as adviser to the king without actually joining Henry's government. The association of Richard's accession to the throne--and by extension of all royal affairs, including the destinies of advisers--with a stage performance is made explicit in Richard III. The public marveled at what was clearly to them a prearranged performance but one in which the principal actors pretended to be fully genuine in their actions in spite of the fact that everyone knew the whole act had been rehearsed well ahead of time. More explains the anomaly by calling attention to the fact of ritual, dramatic convention, and what Coleridge would later call "suspension of disbelief":

> Howbeit, some excused that in reply, and said all must be done in good order, though. And men must sometimes for the manner's sake not seem to know what they know. For at the consecration of a bishop every man knows well by the paying for his papal bulls that he purposes to be one--though he pay for nothing else. And yet must he be twice asked whether he will be bishop or no, and he must twice say nay and at the third time take it as if compelled thereunto by his own will. And in a stage play all the people know right well that he that plays the Sultan is perchance a shoemaker. Yet if one should have so little sense, to show out of season what acquaintance he has with him and call him by his own name while he stands in his majesty, one of his tormentors might hap to break his head, and rightly for marring of the play. So they said that these matters be Kings' games, as it were stage plays, and for the more part played upon scaffolds. In them poor men be but the lookers on, and they that wise be, will meddle no further. For they that sometimes step up and play with them, when they cannot play their parts, they disorder the play and do themselves no good." (Kendall 100-101)

In his gloss on the passage just quoted, Paul Murray Kendall says that there is "for the reader a bitter irony unintended by the author" (101). He refers, of course, to the fact that More later stepped up to play with kings and did himself no good. The historical facts will, perhaps, bear that interpretation, but there is also the possibility that More knew perfectly well that he had already chosen for himself the role of counselor to a king and that he could not play that role without marring the charade at court. Like the jester, which perhaps he would like most to have played, he was destined to expose the other courtly roles for what they were--pretense and pride--and thereby to do himself no good.

The English version of the Richard III ends, unfinished presumably, about ten pages after this passage. Whether More had reached a point where he could say nothing further without exposing the role of the Howards, or without impugning the character of his benefactor Cardinal Morton, or without treading on the toes of the Tudor dynasty is not clear.[10] These various arguments will continue to be part of the great debate about More's Richard. It is significant to note that the Latin version of the history ends a mere thirty lines after the passage in question. Having talked about the need for the public to act as if they did not notice certain pretenses, More seems to have said everything he wanted to say.

Whatever else is true, Alistair Fox is no doubt right in saying that for More "Richard's reign merely manifests in extreme form circumstances that pertain in all political situations" (81). The place of the History of Richard III in this analysis is that More was trying to find a voice for his own role as counselor to the king, a role he had decided to take on as early as the "Coronation Poem" in 1509. A major part of what he was doing in Richard III and in Utopia was reaching back to his classical studies and articulating for himself the details of the role he had decided to play. He was examining the script in closer detail and was beginning to realize that his decision to play the part of counselor to the king involved the possibility of doing himself no good. At least for the time, he set the history aside. Both the criticism of tyranny and the danger to the counselor may have been too transparent. In his typical fashion of humor and irony More retreated to a deeper level of subtlety in Utopia and in that work found another metaphor for his own role: the Platonic Man of the Cave, the would-be philosopher in a world of intellectual prisoners. More knew that the enlightened man in Plato's Allegory of the Cave accomplished nothing when he returned to the cave to share his new-found wisdom. He must have felt the paradox between the obligation to try to enlighten others and the knowledge that the philosopher often meets his doom at the hands of people who will kill rather than give up their old ways of thinking.

Utopia as a Continued Search for Style

After abandoning both the Latin and the English versions of his history, More turned to another work, the Utopia--this time only in Latin--as his one last tentative literary attempt to play the role of adviser to the king. Interpretations of Utopia have emphasized everything from economics and history to philosophy and imaginative literature. Each sheds light on the work and on the man who wrote it. Our particular interest in Utopia is to see how it illuminates the role that Thomas More chose to play in the world of Tudor politics. The question of role is inseparable from the question of style, for in some sense Thomas More was playing himself. He had by this time already seen himself as an actor playing the role of a character in history. Erasmus had referred to him in the *Folly* as the man who could *cum omnibus omnium horarum hominem agere*, and, based on this phrase, Whittinton had given More a literary identity in his grammar book exercises. Schoolboys in his own day were familiar with the man for all seasons. More, thus, had a fictional reputation to live up to. He began to see himself as a fictional creation. He had his own peculiar style, and was conscious of that style and just as true to it as he was to his faith. Indeed, that style may have been part of his faith or more likely his faith was a part of his style. Such a distinction in More's life would be subtler than in the lives of most men. It is precisely because More was forthright and because his actions harmonized with his beliefs that his "style" appears to be natural and in some sense no style at all; and yet his style is unmistakable and everywhere to be seen.

To speak of "the style of the man" does not imply some kind of cheap theatricality nor anything sensational. The phrase is not meant to lend support to a modern psychoanalytic view that More was living out a death-wish

(Rudat 38-48), nor does it explain why More married the eldest of John Colt's daughters instead of the second daughter to whom he was "most inclined" and whom he thought "fairest and best favored" (Roper 211), nor why he wore a hair shirt (R. W. Chambers 80). All these things are no doubt intriguing and at some level part of More's personality, but we are looking specifically for those remarks in the _Utopia_ which reveal some larger vision, some ultimate purpose for the life and destiny of Thomas More. This notion of style is an enlargement and an application to all of life of what Nietzsche called style in his own writing:

> To communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs--that is the meaning of every style; . . . _Good_ is any style that really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures. (721)

More was conscious of creating a style that suited some larger vision of his own purpose on earth. In the last half of the twentieth century many people find themselves largely unsympathetic if not hostile to the notion of a vision of purpose. In a world that is overwhelmingly complex and in which any one person is microscopically irrelevant, individuals have a hard time seeing their lives as making any significant statement. Indeed, they may readily label "eccentric" any person who is obviously conscious of his own style. But More was an intensely religious man, and more significantly he was a man of the Renaissance, a period that was highly conscious of the difference between being and seeming. One need think only a moment to realize that Machiavelli and Erasmus and later Shakespeare and Cervantes, among others, treated this very theme extensively. The suggestion here is that both as a product of his literary education and as a man keenly attuned to the intellectual vibrations of his time, Thomas More was conscious of having a style and could discuss or portray that style as objectively as he might the actions of another person. In short, he was capable of playing a role if doing so suited some larger purpose or if playing the role was itself the larger purpose. In such circumstances, he could play himself. My thesis, then, is that as early as the writing of _Utopia_ (1515-16), Thomas More foresaw the climax of the role that he was to play in the drama of Henry Tudor's England and that that role is foreshadowed in _Utopia_ through what I have chosen to call the Platonic Man of the Cave.

Irreconcilable Values of Philosopher and King

J. H. Hexter has established very convincingly the scheme of composition for _Utopia_. His conclusion in summary is this: Book II was written first (1515) in the Netherlands along with a brief introduction that now appears in Book I; a preface and what Hexter calls the "Dialogue of Counsel" in Book I were written later (1516) in England along with a conclusion, now in Book II. Much of what Hexter has uncovered is valuable for this consideration of More's consciousness of role, but for the moment we shall deal only with that section of _Utopia_ which Hexter calls the "Dialogue of Counsel," that part which begins with Peter Giles' suggestion that Raphael enter some king's service and which treats the question of the Christian humanist's duty to serve his king.

Giles suggests that Raphael's advice would be both entertaining and useful to a prince. One thinks of the Horatian maxim _miscuit utile dulci_. Giles argues that by serving the prince, Raphael might advance his own interest and be useful to all his relatives and friends. Raphael says that he has already distributed his possessions to relatives and friends and that they "should be content with this gift of mine, and not expect that for their sake I should enslave myself to any king whatever" (_Utopia_ trans. Adams 9). Giles puns on the difference between servitude (_inservias_) and service (_servias_), but Raphael's insubstantial reply that "The difference is only a matter of one syllable" seems to suggest that More intended something other than a linguistic quip.

Giles then argues that by being the king's counselor Raphael could be useful to friends or the general public and make himself happier. Raphael rejects the claim of happiness: "Happier indeed! Would a way of life so absolutely repellent to my spirit make my life happier?" (9) Critics have argued whether Raphael is More's persona in this section of Utopia. It depends on whether Raphael's position is taken to be doctrinaire or speculative. The point may be moot. Either way More presents the disadvantages to a free-thinking, disinterested intellectual of joining with a prince who, unless he be the philosopher-king of Plato's Republic, is bound to have biases and ambitions repugnant to an other-worldly soul. Just how repugnant court life would be to More might be imagined if we take the Discourse on Utopia (Book II) to represent More's views against ostentation and luxury. Erasmus's letter to Ulrich von Hutten suggests that More would find court life repellent for many of the same reasons that Raphael rejects it:

> He [More] likes to be dressed simply, and does not wear silk, or purple, or gold chains, except when it is not allowable to dispense with them. He cares marvellously little for those formalities, which with ordinary people are the test of politeness; and as he does not exact these ceremonies from others, so he is not scrupulous in observing them himself, either on occasions of meeting or at entertainments, though he understands how to use them, if he thinks proper to do so; but he holds it to be effeminate and unworthy of a man to waste much of his time on such trifles. (Nichols, III 390)

The fictional "More" then enters the dialogue: "It is clear, my dear Raphael, that you want neither wealth nor power . . . yet I think if you would devote your time and energy to public affairs, you would do a thing worthy of a generous and philosophical nature, even if you did not much like it" (9). But in response to "More's" suggestion that Raphael might incite some prince to "noble and just actions," Raphael counters first that the public would not be any better off through the destruction of his peace and then that princes are not disposed toward good counsel because they are essentially warlike, greedy, obstinate, and proud. Again, Erasmus's letter to Ulrich von Hutten sheds light on the degree to which Raphael is expressing More's own reservations about court service:

> He [More] was formerly disinclined to a Court life and to any intimacy with princes, having always a special hatred of tyranny and a great fancy for equality; whereas you will scarcely find any Court so well-ordered, as not to have much bustle and ambition and pretence and luxury, or to be free from tyranny in some form or other. He could not even be tempted to Henry the Eighth's Court without great trouble, although nothing could be desired more courteous or less exacting than this Prince. (Nichols, III 390)

Erasmus was writing in 1519, long before he realized the part Henry was to play in More's life and death, but not before More foresaw the part that he himself was to play. More already understood by 1519 that he would meet his doom in the same way as the philosopher in Plato's cave.

The Platonic Man of the Cave

More's awareness of the dangers of advising a king stand out particularly in the dialogue between the fictional "More" and Raphael. In a lengthy "digression" from the debate about counsel, Raphael comments on his visits to several countries, including England, and he lists the specific abuses he has observed: unjust punishment of thieves, the enclosure system, hideous poverty side by side with wanton luxury, and the waste of warfare. The fictional "More," however, maintains that precisely because of these insights Raphael could be of great advantage to mankind. "More" cites Plato's desire for the philosopher- king and adds: "No wonder we are so far from happiness when philosophers do not condescend to assist even kings with their counsels" (22). But Raphael knows his Plato too and gives a response which echoes the grim message of the Allegory of the Cave: "If I proposed wise laws to some king, and tried to root out of his soul the seeds of evil and corruption, don't you suppose I would be either banished forthwith, or treated with scorn?" (22-23). More is not suggesting through Raphael that philosophers should not assist their kings. Raphael says, "They are not so ill disposed but that they would gladly do it; in fact, they have already done it in a great many published books, if the rulers would only read their good advice" (22).

The perspicacious reader of this fictional dialogue could see another level of reality in which the "digression" itself is precisely the sharing of good advice--and very specific advice. There is no doubt that a philosopher's advice will benefit a king, but there is also a strong possibility that the sharing of that advice may harm the philosopher. Raphael might have added to his concern for being banished or treated with scorn a much graver consequence, the one in fact mentioned by Plato: death. The fact that there is a hint of danger in the "Dialogue of Counsel" is echoed in the letter of Erasmus cited earlier:

> He [More] had made up his mind to be contented with this position [civil judge], which was sufficiently dignified without being exposed to serious dangers. He has been thrust more than once into an embassy, in the conduct of which he has shown great ability; and King Henry in consequence would never rest until he dragged him into his Court. 'Dragged him,' I say, and with reason; for no one was ever more ambitious of being admitted into a Court than he was anxious to escape it. (Nichols, III 396)

What was the advice that More hesitated to give Henry or that he felt would be dangerous to give? There is no evidence to suggest that More foresaw Henry's divorce from Catherine or the conflict that would arise over the issue of Papal supremacy. Furthermore, any specific opinions about the evils of enclosure or of the royal ambitions for the acquisition of territory were given already through Raphael, who is candid about his criticism of England. Whatever gave More pause was a more fundamental issue. It had to be a position that More felt was irreconcilable with the life of kings. That obstacle was something that no amount of advice could eliminate. There seems to be no doubt that what More recognized above all was that man is proud and therefore greedy and that his pride and greed are manifested in the societal institution of private property. What Book II of _Utopia_ is about is the conviction that private property acts as a social evil, and what Book I is about is the impossibility of ever advising a king of this truth. To believe such a thing and to accept a position as adviser to a king would be to play the role of the enlightened Platonic figure who returned to share his new truth. The role would incontrovertibly include the grim finale of the Allegory of the Cave--death for the philosopher.

Assuming for a moment that Hexter is correct about the order in which More wrote the books of _Utopia_, let us consider what More had said about private property when he had written Book II, the discourse on the island of Utopia. The first mention of private property is tied to a description of the houses in Amaurot:

> Every house has a door to the street and another to the garden. The doors, which are made with two leaves, open easily and swing shut automatically, letting anyone enter who wants to--and so there is no private property. Every ten years, they change houses by lot. (38)

This is an unusual description. The "and so" clause seems somehow to be a non sequitur. In this definition private property is functionally that which excludes other people. This may seem simplistic, but in fact it is at the heart of what More detests. Property determines the quality of the relationship between men; private property separates men from one another and feeds the sin of pride, making some people think they are better than others because of their possessions. All people work in Utopia, and the needs of all are met. Significantly, a distinction is made between needs and wants. Societies based on money exchange are condemned: "For where money is the standard of everything, many superfluous trades are bound to be carried on simply to satisfy luxury and licentiousness" (42). It is worth remarking that More's criticism of private property has been given a Marxian interpretation, most prominently by Karl Kautsky, but such an interpretation is a retrospective one.

More's study of Ovid or Plato or the Apostles may have influenced his thinking. Our purpose is not to account for the genesis of his thoughts on private property so much as it is to establish the centrality of this issue in Book II of Utopia. We must remember, however, that private property is only the social manifestation of the deeper evil of pride: "Fear of want, no doubt, makes every living creature greedy and avaricious--but only man develops these qualities out of pride, pride which glories in putting down others by a superfluous display of possessions" (45-46). Further examples of More's contempt for material superfluity are seen in the Utopian use for gold and silver: chains for prisoners, toys for children, and chamber pots.

It is the Utopian practice of community of goods that disposes the Utopians so readily to Christianity. More is explicit on this point: "But I think they were also much influenced by the fact that Christ had encouraged his disciples to practice community of goods, and that among the truest groups of Christians, the practice still prevails" (79). This aspect of Christianity seems to be the only one worth any mention in a consideration of how a society should function. One notion of a deity among the Utopians--"a single power, unknown, eternal, infinite, inexplicable, far beyond the grasp of the human mind, and diffused throughout the universe, not physically, but in influence"--could well describe the deity of many religions. There is nothing distinctively Christian about it. And of all aspects of Christianity which More *might* have mentioned, the only one he *did* mention was community of property. It is significant that a man as devoutly Catholic as More, who himself nearly took holy orders after four years with the Carthusians and who was undoubtedly well versed in scripture and familiar with dogma and rituals and many other particularities, would mention nothing more about Christianity than the fact that Christ had urged his disciples to practice community of goods. It is this and this alone that makes Christianity acceptable to the ideal commonwealth of Utopia. And it is this which the adviser to a prince--even a Christian prince--could never say with impunity.

The only other point about religion touching on societal peace is that in Utopia no man's religion is held against him. This, of course, has ironic overtones in retrospect considering Thomas More's martyrdom twenty years later. Although there is no way to read any kind of prophetic notion in this passage, it is likely that More could foresee a religious conflict--not the one that brought his death, but a more fundamental one--a conflict between a religion that espouses humility, charity, and peace, and a government which seeks to conquer other lands or to sanction the greed and pride of its leaders. The thoroughgoing conflict between More's values and those of the government which sought his counsel is expressed near the end of Utopia when Raphael Hythloday condemns all the governments of the world except the one in Utopia:

> After the state has taken the labor of their best years, when they are worn out by age and sickness and utter destitution, then the thankless state, forgetting all their pains and services, throws them out to die a miserable death. What is worse, the rich constantly try to grind out of the poor part of their meager wages, not only by private swindling, but by public tax laws. It is basically unjust that people who deserve most from the commonwealth should receive least. But now they have distorted and debased the right even further by giving their extortion the color of law; and thus they have palmed injustice off as "legal." When I run over in my mind the various commonwealths flourishing today, so help me God, I can see nothing in them but a conspiracy of the rich, who are fattening up their own interests under the name and title of the commonwealth. (89)

To Raphael's entire discourse "More" gives a weak response, but one which in fact characterizes the reality of the kingly world and its cherished values: " . . . my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy. This one thing alone takes away all the nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty which (in the popular view) are considered true ornaments of any nation" (91). It does not take a great leap of imagination to reconcile Raphael's condemnation of a society of materialistic values with the real More's own values and to see the fictional "More" as a foil.

The big question, of course, is how, knowing all this about the evils of private ownership and nature of governments, could a man like Thomas More, who believed so strongly in other irreconcilable values, make a decision to join the court of Henry VIII? One would either be forced to play a role contrary to his beliefs or he would consciously adopt a role utterly consistent with his belief, even if an inescapable part of that role was banishment or scorn. It is unlikely that Thomas More had any hope that his role would, in fact, change the values of the world or even of his country: "Yet I confess there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia which I wish our own country would imitate--though I don't really expect it will" (91).

To the question of why More chose to join Henry's court, J. H. Hexter offers an interesting thesis. Hexter argues that at the very time Henry and Wolsey were pressuring More into court service, the counsel More would have given was materializing as policy: foreign imperial conquests were being abandoned, the harms of enclosure were being redressed, and equity law was being practiced in the courts (Hexter 150-153). Hexter argues, in short, that by April of 1518, the grounds on which Raphael had spoken against court service were no longer in reality objections. Hexter's arguments may explain as well as any can why a good person would place himself in the midst of a situation so potentially repugnant to many of his values, but they brush aside too easily More's more fundamental opposition to entering court service--the belief that a rejection of private property, so necessary for the good life, is irreconcilable with the power structure of kingly realms and poignantly that the counselor who offers unpopular advice is doomed to suffer. The state of affairs in 1518 could not possibly have changed so dramatically since 1516 to cause More to believe that he would have any support in speaking out against private property. But our task here is not to determine why More, in fact, decided to join Henry's court but rather to see how Utopia foreshadows the role that a counselor with More's personal convictions would play in such a court.

Book I of Utopia clearly does something different from Book II. Book II might have stood on its own as an imaginary discourse on society and human behavior with only a brief introduction. The fact that Book II was written first leads one to believe that it was meant to stand on its own until it came to be something else for Thomas More than what he had originally planned. In Erasmus's letter to Ulrich von Hutten there is a suggestion that More discovered some use for Utopia Book II after he had written it which he had not anticipated. Erasmus writes:

> He published his Utopia for the purpose of showing, what are the things that occasion mischief in commonwealths; having the English constitution especially in view, which he so thoroughly knows and understands. He had written the second book at his leisure, and afterwards, when he found it was required, added the first off-hand. Hence there is some inequality in the style. (Erasmus in Adams 134)

Erasmus's comments suggest that Book II contains the things that occasion mischief in commonwealths. Those things are not the specific abuses listed in Book I: punishment, enclosure, warfare. Instead, Book II cites pride and greed as manifested in private property as the things that cause problems for commonwealths. It is possible that Thomas More did not realize how thoroughly opposed he was to private property and the "legal" exploitation of the poor by the rich through government until he had made the explicit connection between pride and property in the writing of Book II of Utopia. It is also possible that when he realized how irreconcilable such a position was with government service, he felt he needed to explain why a person holding such a philosophical position would never be able to enter a king's service without great risk.

Book I, then, becomes a specific retelling of Plato's Allegory of the Cave in which the enlightened individual returns to share the truth about the evils of pride, greed, and private property. Beginning with Giles' and "More's" suggestion to Raphael that he enter the service of some king, Raphael's responses follow a pattern: discourse on some particular point of political advice based on opposition to pride, greed, or acquisition of property followed by a request for "More" to acknowledge that this advice would not be well received by other counselors or the king. We have already mentioned the first of these: "If I proposed wise laws to some king, and tried to root out of his soul the seeds of evil and corruption, don't you suppose I would be either banished forthwith, or treated with scorn?" (23). Others follow this pattern: RAPHAEL: "How do you think, my dear More, the other counsellors would take this speech of mine?" "MORE": "Not very well, I'm sure" (25). RAPHAEL: "Summing up the whole thing, don't you suppose if I set ideas like these before men strongly inclined to the contrary, they would turn deaf ears to me?" "MORE": "Stone deaf, indeed, there's no doubt about it" (28).

The only intelligent rebuttal "More" can offer to Raphael is a moderate suggestion that a reformer must strive tactfully to influence policy indirectly: " . . . and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make less bad" (29). But Raphael responds directly to this point in a way that foreshadows what was to happen to More some years later:

> "When you say I should 'influence policy indirectly,' I simply don't know what you mean; remember, you said I should try hard to handle the situation tactfully, and what can't be made good I should try to make as little bad as possible. In a council, there is no way to dissemble, no way to shut your eyes to things. You must openly approve the worst proposals, and consent to the most vicious decisions. A man who went along only halfheartedly even with the worst decisions would immediately get himself a name as a spy and perhaps a traitor." (30)

Raphael then gives the traditional Platonic argument that the wise man should avoid politics and public service. He reiterates his conviction that as long as private property and money are the measures of all things, it is not possible for a nation to be governed justly:

> "But as a matter of fact, my dear More, to tell you what I really think, as long as you have private property, and as long as cash money is the measure of all things, it is really not possible for a nation to be governed justly or happily. For justice cannot exist where all the best things in life are held by the worst citizens; nor can anyone be happy where the property is limited to a few, since those few are always uneasy and the many are utterly wretched." (30)

"More" gives a standard rebuttal to all socialist arguments: Men will not keep working if they do not have the incentive of personal gain; people will become lazy; if man cannot legally protect what he has gained, there will be bloodshed; how can authority gain respect if everyone is equal? (32). At this point, interestingly enough, the argument stops. Raphael says he is not surprised that "More" can not envision such a state. Then Raphael shares a peculiar but significant piece of information about himself:

> "But you should have been with me in Utopia, and seen with your own eyes their manners and customs as I did--for I lived there more than five years, <u>and would never have left, if it had not been to make that new world known to others</u> [emphasis mine]. If you had seen them, you would frankly confess that you had never seen a people so well governed as they are." (32)

Raphael's only reason for leaving Utopia was to make Utopia known to others. Another way of reading this is that his only reason for "returning to the cave" was to enlighten those within. In other words, Raphael himself was playing a role too, the role of the one who has a higher truth to share and intends to do so but who is aware that some people, because of other fundamental values (or perversities) are likely to be hostile to his new ideas. Nothing could more fully characterize Thomas More around 1516 than the description of Raphael who has seen some higher truth (Book II) but who is aware that sharing that higher truth can be dangerous (Book I). Nevertheless, Raphael recognizes that his destiny or purpose in some sense is to impart this truth, to leave Utopia, to return to the cave. Like Raphael, Thomas More has a larger vision of his purpose, but he too knows that that can mean danger. Nevertheless, More opts for the role of adviser knowing what he is likely to have to sacrifice.

There remains one connection to establish: More's use of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. What does that allegory represent to Thomas More? First and foremost the allegory represents the nature of philosophic truth and the unwillingness of the masses of people to accept truth if it means having to give up old beliefs or habits. Specifically it shows the danger faced by anyone who tries to free others from their ignorance. More can not have overlooked the ending of the Platonic allegory: the fate of the enlightened man was not merely scorn or banishment; it was death. Raphael's statement that he "would never have left Utopia if it had not been to make that new world known to others" is directly reminiscent of the cave allegory. Erasmus, too, uses the Platonic cave allegory in his Praise of Folly to illustrate the prejudice and sense of subjective truth which people cling to in spite of higher realities. Of course, Folly is arguing in Erasmus's satire that the truth of those prisoners in the cave is just as good as the truth of the enlightened man for no reason other than that is what they believe:

In your opinion how do those in Plato's cave, who,

> quite satisfied with their existence, look contentedly at the shadows and likenesses of various objects differ from the wise man who emerges from the cave and looks upon reality? (Dolan 134)

Certainly Erasmus recognizes higher philosophic truth, but he also acknowledges that the masses of people do not want to see any truth besides that which they already know. The pertinence of the Erasmian passage is twofold. First, we know that Erasmus wrote The Praise of Folly while he was at More's house in the autumn of 1509. It is likely that two humanists who read Greek and discussed philosophical ideas had discussed Plato's allegory. The allegory articulates what would be one of the clear dilemmas for the would-be civic humanist. Second, Erasmus cites the cave allegory immediately following an anecdote which alludes to Thomas More. Of course, contiguity of the anecdote about More with that of the cave allegory is not proof that More and Erasmus had discussed the allegory, but the chances are good that they had.

If we believe J. H. Hexter's account that More and Erasmus had discussed Book II of Utopia before More finished Book I, then it is likely that the topic of the cave allegory would have resurfaced. Hexter argues that More's letter to Erasmus (September 1516) which accompanied the finished Utopia and which begins "Nusquamam nostram, nusquam bene scriptam, ad te mitto" [Our nowhere, nowhere well written, to you I send] indicates that somehow More includes Erasmus (nostram) as having something to do with the finished Utopia. If More had much earlier finished Book II, then the only part with which Erasmus could have had anything to do was the "Dialogue of Counsel," not as author but as friend in dialogue (Hexter 99-102). Hexter's theory supports my claim. If indeed More and Erasmus had discussed More's problem of whether or not to enter Henry's service--and Erasmus's letter seems to imply that they had--then almost certainly the old topic of the Allegory of the Cave would emerge. And because the "Dialogue of Counsel" and Book I (the real end of More's writing) terminate just as Raphael takes on the role of the wise man in the allegory, we may assume that More then and there foresaw the role to be played. It is irrelevant whether he hesitated another eighteen months before accepting Henry's appointment--not irrelevant historically, to be sure, but irrelevant philosophically.

More knew what role he would play by the time he finished Utopia, and he knew how that role would end. His higher truth about the social evils of private property would result in his death. The fact that he was wrong about the issue of conflict does not diminish the quality of his personal style. He continued to communicate his deepest values, and showed in his steadfast adherence to his position the degree of commitment to his values. Beliefs for More were not something lightly held and discarded but part of his self concept, part of who he was and who he told the world he was. It turned out that his adherence to the Catholic faith and his unwillingness to take an oath which he did not believe were the real points on which he would take a stand rather than his belief in the evils of private property, but since Jesus was the source of both of these beliefs, we would be hard pressed to discriminate very subtly on this point. A person's beliefs are ultimately subsumed under his style if he acts consistently on those beliefs. That Thomas More acted on his beliefs seems to be universally agreed.

One last point may confirm still further the likelihood that More adopted his role with full consciousness of its probable fatal outcome. More had reason to be fearful of royal power. He never forgot Henry VII's mistreatment of his father. While More hailed Henry the Eighth's accession to the throne as the end of tyranny, there is no reason to think him so naive as to believe that he would never again clash with the royal powers. Even later when Henry VIII had shown great favor toward More, More knew that that esteem went only so far. An often quoted passage from Roper's biography which some use to illustrate More's loyalty to Henry is often misunderstood. After seeing Henry treat More so familiarly during a surprise visit to Chelsea, Roper rejoiced and told More how fortunate he was to have the

King's great favor. More's response was:

> "I find his Grace my very good Lord indeed, and I do believe he does as singularly favor me as any subject within this realm. Howbeit, son, Roper, I may tell thee, I have no cause to be proud thereof. For if my head would win him a castle in France . . . it should not fail to go." (Roper 223)

The last sentence is sometimes quoted out of context to illustrate More's loyalty to Henry. There can be very little doubt that <u>in</u> context it shows More's knowledge of the real stuff of kings--that same pride and that same greed which manifest themselves in private possessions or worldly conquest. Perhaps, too, it reveals a touch of fear or perhaps it is one further acknowledgement of what his role might require.

The best evidence of More's fear that his values might conflict with those of the King is his plea as Speaker of Parliament for freedom of speech. More argued publicly that the king could get good advice only if the members of Parliament were free to speak their minds without recrimination. Tacitly he could hardly have forgotten how Henry VII punished his father John More for how Thomas had opposed taxation for the marriage of Henry's daughter Margaret to James IV of Scotland. The pertinent lines of More's address to Parliament are these:

> "It may therefore like your most abundant Grace, our most benign and godly king, to give to all your Commons here assembled your most gracious licence and pardon, freely, without doubt of your

> dreadful displeasure, every man to discharge his conscience, and boldly in everything incident among us to declare his advice . . . ." (R. W. Chambers 193)

The request for pardon in advance for what might offend the king had been for some time a formulaic request of the Speaker of Parliament. What was new was the request to be allowed freely to speak one's mind. While such a request could be construed as the logical necessity of any enlightened government, More's request was the first recorded appeal for freedom of speech in Parliament (R. W. Chambers 193).

Even with the assurance of freedom of speech from Henry, More can hardly have considered himself free from potential conflict holding, as he did, fundamental attitudes toward property in contradistinction to those of the Crown. The words of his _Utopia_ must have made the new freedom of speech a small consolation: "This is why Plato in a very fine comparison declares that wise men are right in keeping clear of government matters" (30). More knew _The Republic_ too, and into Raphael's mouth he put the prediction of his success in government affairs: "You wouldn't have a chance" (30). Success was not what More sought. He knew better. His role was predicated on something nobler than success. We may never know for certain why More finally joined Henry's court. What is clear is that More did so knowing where this role could lead and how it could end.

Chapter Summary

The world as stage was not just a commonplace for Thomas More. It was a working hypothesis of how people engage the world and enter into it. Role playing was therefore More's natural way of responding to the circumstance that faced him in 1509 when the young Henry Tudor was crowned King. More knew he wanted to contribute to the education of his prince in the role of adviser and rehearsed for some time various indirect means of doing so. His "Coronation Poem," History of Richard III, and Utopia were all attempts to find the right voice for his role as adviser. Finally he set aside these indirect means and reluctantly accepted a position in the King's Council. For about fifteen years he served Henry VIII. When Henry's desire to divorce Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn resulted in a split between England and Rome and Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy making Henry head of the church in England, More resigned his position as Chancellor and prepared himself to take on a new role. His subsequent imprisonment under the administration of Thomas Cromwell helped to define this new role more thoroughly. More was to play the martyr.

CHAPTER V

THE SCRIPT OF THE COMEDY IS WRITTEN

More's last role, that of a martyr for the Catholic faith, was a necessary step in what had become a much larger scheme of turning life into art. More was completing the part of a fictional Thomas More whom he had been creating for years. As I have shown, from the time of the Coronation poem of 1509, More had decided to play the role of advisor to the king. After several years of trying to find the right voice for the part, including writing both a history and a fantasy, he finally engaged in the project directly, despite his knowing that the philosopher who seeks to influence the king may minimally do himself some harm and may well even destroy himself. In fact, the necessary supposition of the Platonic Man of the Cave at court is that he will eventually be killed because the values of the philosophic life inevitably conflict irreconcilably with the pretenses of royalty. Socrates, Seneca, and Boethius would have been familiar examples to More. Although birth had been the basis on which kings and nobles claimed superiority over commoners, in some sense the acquisition of material goods had become an emblem of their status. Thomas More loathed the suggestion that possessions make one person superior to another. Greed and pride are sins no less for kings than for anyone else, and these sentiments are directly repugnant to both Christian values and classical virtues. More's role as a counselor to the king could evolve into only one other role in time--that of martyr for some higher belief.

This chapter will show how More had been writing the scripts for his martyrdom for some years and how the roles he played changed from secular to spiritual drama. Finally, before concluding with an assessment of More's death as a divine comedy rather than a tragedy, I examine in a kind of coda More's reputation among the Elizabethans to establish that his immediate successors clearly saw both the formative part that drama played in his life and his indomitable sense of humor.

More Writes his Script

As More moved toward his last role and his personal circumstances became harsher, the drama of his life became increasingly spiritual. He never fully lost his characteristic humor, but the themes and characters of his fictions were identifiably spiritual rather than secular. One connection remains to be established: that between the Platonic Man of the Cave and the Christian martyr. Having early on decided to serve as counselor to the king and having attempted to find a suitable voice first with a celebratory poem, then with an unpublished history, and finally with a fantasy in Latin, More abandoned these oblique methods of giving advice and joined the king's council. He did so knowing that to "mar the play" was always dangerous and that the "philosopher of the cave" was inevitably doomed. To assert that More wanted to meet his doom seems largely unfounded. First, he loved life too much to want to leave it; second, he was not rash nor even particularly brave where physical harm was possible; and finally, his religious belief prohibited suicide. The influence of his classical studies probably accounts for the inclusion of suicide as an acceptable means of euthanasia in Utopia, but one wonders whether his own predicament in prison at the end of his life accounts for the frequent discussion of suicide in <u>The Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation</u>. About all that one can say in the final analysis is that More's Christian beliefs superseded his classical studies. The Church forbade suicide, so suicide was not an option for More.

Quite apart from the prohibitions against suicide, there are no other particular reasons to suppose that More sought disaster in his decision to join the court. Seeking conflict and danger is very different from recognizing that they may well come about. More was not looking for trouble, but he was wise enough and learned enough to know that the historical record did not augur well for philosophers and religious men who came into conflict with governments. Strong beliefs voiced in the wrong context can be dangerous.

More cannot have overlooked the risk of his decision to enter the king's council, but there is no basis for saying that he was looking for a quarrel. In fact, even when the "quarrel" arose out of Henry's desire to change his wife, More remained as flexible as his beliefs would allow. Up to the end, he was willing to recognize the heirs of Henry and Anne Boleyn as legitimate successors to the throne and was even willing to swear to this recognition since Parliament had declared them to be heirs to the throne. What he was not willing to do was to take an oath affirming the Act of Succession because the preamble to the act contained statements disavowing the unity between Rome and the Church in England (Scarisbrick, 332). Even though More himself was always a conciliarist rather than a papist (Marius 432,458, 517; Rogers SL 213-214), he would not commit perjury by swearing before God what he in fact did not believe. The vast legend of his integrity in the face of death reduces to this simple fact.

Whether others considered More's position to be grounded in integrity or willfulness or even stubbornness is beside the point. For More, it was quite simple: Henry wanted to be named Head of the Church, and More could not concede. If at any point up to his execution More had agreed, he would have been pardoned; but damnation, the punishment for perjury, was a very real thing to this man who held strong theological beliefs about Hell and who, moreover, saw Hell dramatized on the medieval stages around him all the time. Faith and good deeds would follow him to the grave, but nothing else. All the rest of life was more expendable than his love for God. This position may seem heroic to a nonbeliever, but for someone like More who believed in eternal damnation, the thought of the relatively brief time of a painful death was much less frightening than the thought of unending torture in Hell. Such is the reasoning apparent in the Dialogue of Comfort: Anthony reassures Vincent that although there is inevitably pain, especially in death suffered in the name of the faith, affection for Christ and long and deep meditation can "tourne into an habituall fast & depe rotid purpose, of pacient suffryng the paynfull deth of this body here in earth, for the gaynyng of euerlastyng welthy lyfe in hevyn, & avoydyng of euerlastyng paynefull deth in hell" (CW 12, 294). In some ironic sense, More's choice to remain silent must have seemed to him anything but heroic. Heroism was not a choice. To concede to perjury would have meant eternal damnation; to refuse meant death. Neither choice was pleasant, but More took the one that was least objectionable. There is nothing heroic about that. Perhaps any religion which promises eternal reward ultimately robs people of heroism.

The events leading from More's resignation of the Chancellorship to his execution are not remarkable in themselves. More retired to private life, continued to write against heresy, corresponded with friends, and tried hard to present a picture of himself as a man who left his public duties for reasons of health against the king's wishes but with his blessings and appreciation. The King, for his part, was not satisfied with More's silence on the issues of his marriage to Anne Boleyn and his title as Supreme Head of the Church in England. More's silence, which extended even to his own family, became a crucial part of the role he was playing--that of the loyal philosophical counselor who had given his frank opinion to the king but to absolutely no one else. The silence was, to be sure, More's protection in law--or so he thought, basing his reasoning on the maxim qui tacet consentire. But in an even more important sense, the silence became part of who he was, of the role as he envisioned it. One marvels at how much More did say while he guarded his silence, and nowhere was he more eloquent than in the relatively uneventful sequence of his epitaph, his imprisonment, his trial, and his execution. I call these things uneventful not because they are without momentous consequence for More but because More himself worked through the sequence with an apparent serenity and calmness of mind. It was as if he were following a script, projecting an image that he wanted to leave behind as part of the legend of Thomas More.

More created a story about his resignation from the

Chancellorship by composing the epitaph for his own tomb. He included the epitaph in a letter to Erasmus of June, 1533, and stated openly that the epitaph was in direct response to a rumor that he had resigned his office unwillingly. He seemed anxious to show that his departure from office was his choice and no doubt felt that by publishing the epitaph before his death, the public's scrutiny would confirm its truth. The epitaph is intriguing for several reasons including the oddity that he hopes he and his two wives will be together in heaven even though fate and morality prevented it on earth; but the real importance of the document is its value as a script. It is part of that corpus of written material in which the legend of Thomas More becomes the script for the man who was acting the role of himself. It is as if More had already written his own history before he acted it out.

Even more remarkable in this regard is More's letter to William Warham of January, 1517. Along with the letter More sent a copy of <u>Utopia</u>, his last indirect attempt to find the right voice for his role as counselor to the king prior to joining the council. If Hexter is right about More's internal debate regarding the joining of the king's council, then the letter to Warham is especially interesting as another example of the script More was writing for himself. The first two-thirds of the letter is reproduced here:

> I ever judged your Paternity happy in the way

> you exercised your office of Chancellor, but I esteem you much happier now that you have laid it down and entered on that most desirable leisure, in which you can live for yourself and for God. Such leisure, in my opinion, is not only more pleasant than the labors, but more honorable than all your honors. To be a judge is the lot of many, and sometimes of very bad men. But you possessed that supreme office which, when relinquished, is as much exposed to calumny as it formerly conferred authority and independence; and to give this up willingly as your Paternity has with great difficulty obtained permission to do, is what none but a moderate-minded man would wish, and none but an innocent man dare.
>
> I do not know which to admire the most, your modesty in willingly laying down an office of such dignity and power, your unworldliness in being able to despise it, or your integrity in having no fear of resignation; but in any case together with many other men I give to your action my most cordial approval as most excellent and wise. Indeed I can hardly say how heartily I congratulate you on your singular good fortune and how I rejoice in it for your sake, for I see your Paternity retiring far away from secular affairs and the bustle of the courts, and enjoying a rare glory by the honorable repute of your tenure of the Judgeship and your resignation from it. Happy in the consciousness of duty well done, you will pass the rest of your life gently and peacefully in literature and philosophy. This happy state of yours my own wretchedness makes daily more brightly attractive; for although I have no business worth mentioning yet since feeble powers are readily oppressed by paltry affairs, I am always so distraught that I have not a free moment in which to visit your Paternity or excuse my remissness in writing--indeed I have scarcely been able to get ready this present letter. (SL 88-89)

A better script for an actor could hardly be imagined. It is as if with an odd shift of time, More is looking back on his own future which has yet to take place. He says all the things that he hopes others will say of him: honorable in office but happier out of office than in it, freed from duty with great difficulty, esteemed as a moderate-minded and innocent man, modest, unworldly, full of integrity, leading an almost monastic life. All the encomiums are there. That More was really writing this letter as his own future script rather than as a congratulatory piece is confirmed by its timing just prior to his joining the Privy Council and more significantly by the fact that his letter is dated January, 1517, and Warham resigned the Chancellorship on December 22, 1515. Thirteen months is a long time to wait to congratulate someone on a decision. Had the letter dealt exclusively with Warham's new style of life in retirement, the delay would be insignificant, but the letter emphasizes the resignation, the willingness with which the supreme office was relinquished, the positive assessment of the public, and the virtues necessary for a man to take such action.

The letter to Warham was a model for More's own resignation and the epitaph was the continuation of the script. Together they record all of his own public role that More ever cared to have remembered by his audience. More reluctantly accepted the Chancellorship which he never really wanted only to be able to show by his resignation how little he valued such eminence. Had More been able to be king, he would no doubt have accepted only in order to abdicate. The philosopher-king must not want to be king. His disinterestedness is a critical part of his success in the position. Mark Van Doren's comment about Don Quixote's role playing seems to apply well to More. The thesis of Van Doren's book Don Quixote's Profession is that Don Quixote was a skillful and conscious actor who wrote his own play as he proceeded, knowing perfectly well at all times what he was doing. More's letter to Warham and his epitaph are parts of the script of an author who was also the main character in the play he was composing. More may have shied away from arbitrary political power and distrusted it, but he was fascinated by the power of the imagination and of the pen. Greenblatt remarked that "one of the highest achievements of power is to impose fictions upon the world and one of its supreme pleasures is to enforce the acceptance of fictions that are known to be fictions" (141). As long as More's fantasies and wished-for legends involved only himself, he was free to "enforce his fictions" and remain relatively safe from the vicissitudes of life, but in the world of politics, Machiavelli's observation seems to characterize well what More overlooked: "the man who neglects the real to study the ideal will learn how to accomplish his ruin, not his salvation" (44). As long as More was left alone at home to read and write, he may genuinely have thought that his role was to be what he described in the letter to Warham. The imprisonment would change his mind and cast him into a new role--that of martyr.

<u>From Secular to Spiritual Drama</u>

At the time More was taken into the Tower he was still in control of his role as the retired adviser, the counselor freed from duty, esteemed, modest, unworldly, full of integrity. And his undaunted sense of humor prevailed. When Richard Cromwell, Thomas Cromwell's nephew, advised More to send his gold chain home, More quipped that he would not do so "for if I were taken in the field by my enemies, I would they should somewhat fare the better by me." Marius remarks of this scene that "the More of stage and drama was still alive and well" (464), but Chambers felt the jest was forced (292). Even if Chambers is partially right, there can be no doubt that More embraced his imprisonment willingly in at least some sense. The confinement was one further step in being freed of duties. Now he could set aside not only his professional burdens but also his personal obligations. Roper says More reassured Meg that his confinement was nothing but what he would have chosen for himself years before had he followed a monastic life: "if it had not been for my wife and you that be my children, whom I account the chief part of my charge, I would not have failed long ere this to have closed myself in as straight a room, and straighter too" (76). Here again, at least for as long as he felt his life in no real danger, More saw his imprisonment in the Tower as one more scene in the script that he had sketched almost twenty years earlier in the letter to Warham and then subsequently in the epitaph. In the latter document he had written the following:

> Now sated with the passing things of this life, he resigned office, and through the unparalleled graciousness of a most indulgent Sovereign (may God smile favorably upon his enterprises), he at length reached the goal which almost since boyhood has been the object of his longing--to have the last years of his life all to himself, so that he could gradually retire from the affairs of this world and contemplate the eternity of the life to come. (SL 182)

No one would seriously suggest that More preferred prison to his home in Chelsea, but in the first months of his confinement when his family was allowed to visit him and he had his books and writing materials, conditions were not all that uncomfortable, particularly for a man who had seriously considered taking vows after a four-year apprenticeship with the Carthusian monks.

As time wore on and successive acts of Parliament made clear that More would never be released from prison, and as his health deteriorated, More began to prepare himself rigorously for his death. He realized that the various commissions appointed to examine him regarding his position on the succession and on the supremacy meant that he would not be left alone. His family suffered as their property was confiscated, and his role as the silent and loyal but rejected adviser became a burden on those he loved. Dorothy Donnelly has observed that the fifteen months of confinement finally brought More "agony, passion, weariness, dread, and suffering" (20). She considered that the long imprisonment induced the change in roles toward that of the martyr:

> Actively and passively, More's soul grew martyr-size in those crucial months of final conversion. Characteristically, and all-of-a-piece with this whole life, More in his common-sense piety and faith, literally wrote his way through them! He shored up his fear by presenting himself with the fruits of his fifty-six years of preparation for just this pass: years of working, observing, reflecting, meditating, listening to God's spirit, studying and writing." (20)

In one sense Dorothy Donnelly is correct. More did write his way through the ordeal of realizing he was to be imprisoned until he was condemned to death. What seems not quite accurate is the implied tone. In fact, the so-called Tower Works are lighter than many of More's earlier polemical works. The Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation in particular shows More's characteristic sense of humor. The two protagonists Anthony, the old wise man, and Vincent, his militant nephew, are foils of one another and show the two dominant postures More was taking toward his circumstances. On the one hand, he was reaching resolution and acceptance as is portrayed in the uncle who calmly awaits death. On the other, he still feels a degree of anxiety and combativeness as is portrayed in the personality of the nephew. In some sense The Dialogue of Comfort is More's version of Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy. The author prepares himself to confront the terrifying prospect before him and works through his desperation to a state of equanimity.

Kenneth Wilson has remarked that "The Dialogue of Comfort has real claims on us as spiritual drama" (277). Calling the work "spiritual drama" seems somehow fitting in a larger sense, for in it we see More returning to drama (or at least to dialogue) which was always his natural tendency and characteristic mode. Moreover, the personal drama in which More was playing his own main character was becoming increasingly a spiritual drama. Once again More was writing a script for himself. That script was to be more fully worked out in the last of the Tower Works, his De Tristitia Christi. At one level, De Tristitia seems unfinished, but at another level, the work is thematically complete in the same sense that the Latin Richard III was complete. More had said all he needed to say about the passion of Christ. He had meditated upon the passion and had reconciled himself to dying. Fox argues that More supplied the ending with his own death in the sense that he had "superimposed the image of his own passion upon that of Christ" (253).

Through a series of writings More had outlined a script for himself that allowed him to play in succession the parts of the philosopher at court, the much-respected and sought-after counselor in retirement, and finally the martyr. Martyrdom became the teleological last stage in the evolution of his role once he realized that he was not going to be allowed to live. All this does not argue that More sought martyrdom. Clearly, he did not; but he knew how to play the part when the circumstances cast him in the role. As with many of the roles in More's life, he never studied for the part, but once he saw that there was a role to be played, he busied himself writing the script. It is as if his efforts as the playwright might protect him as the actor. He might not be able to control the rest of the cast, but he could always alter the script to hold tribulations at an aesthetically safe distance.

Even in the last weeks and days of his life More turned to drama as the ubiquitous metaphor by which he understood his circumstances. In a letter to Margaret he began to describe his role of martyrdom in general terms: "But I am very sure that if I died by such a law, I should die for that point innocent afore God" (SL 237). Later in the same letter he describes the behavior of the faithful Christian as a part to be played. Referring to his fears of the death which seemed increasingly likely, More remarked:

> In devising whereupon, albeit (mine own good daughter) that I found myself (I cry God mercy) very sensual and my flesh much more shrinking from pain and from death than methought it the part of a faithful Christian man [emphasis mine], in such a case as my conscience gave me, that in the saving of my body should stand the loss of my soul, yet I thank our Lord, that in that conflict the Spirit had in conclusion the mastery, and reason with help of faith finally concluded that for to be put to death wrongfully for doing well (as I am very sure I do, in refusing to swear against mine own conscience, being such as I am

> not upon peril of my soul bounden to change whether my death should come without law, or by color of a law) it is a case in which a man may leese his head [emphasis mine] and yet have none harm, but instead of harm inestimable good at the hand of God. (SL 237)

The mention of "the part of a faithful Christian man" in this context is another example of More's readiness to view life as a drama with roles to be played. Here again More is writing the script--this time of the Christian martyr. Ironically, he anticipates the method of his own execution. Or perhaps he was recommending it as an alternative considering that the normal method was drawing and quartering. One suspects that More was fully conscious of his role near the end and was writing his script in hopes that Henry would commute the sentence as in fact he did.

One or two words about the trial and the execution confirm that they too were structured by More as further scenes for the playing out of his last role. Fox's remarks are interesting on this point: "Through literal self-sacrifice he could proclaim himself ultimately right in the face of manifest defeat. Thus in some respects he needed and longed to die as much as he shrank from it. Perhaps, unwittingly, he even contrived it" (255). The correspondence confirms directly what the Tower Works illustrate--that More had thought about his death extensively, had reconciled himself to it, and was ready for it. In this sense Fox is right to assert that More longed to die. No doubt, too, More "needed" to die in order to complete his project of turning life into art. Only by structuring one's own death can a person make the final statement in his own story. Recognizing that the role of martyr was the necessary outcome of all that had gone before, More was prepared to play the martyr at his trial and at his execution.

The trial became a stage for More as had so many other places. He had no doubt that he was innocent and falsely accused or for that matter that he would be found guilty, his innocence notwithstanding. After the perjured testimony of Richard Rich, More was indeed found guilty. When the judge started to sentence him without asking if he had anything to say, More interrupted the proceedings using the motion in arrest of judgment to deliver a dramatic speech. Anyone who has seen Bolt's A Man for All Seasons recalls the artistry and dramatic tension of the final trial scene. Bolt has incorporated into his text many of More's own words from a letter to Margaret. More's rhetoric in his letter is made for the stage: "I am, quoth I, the King's true faithful subject and daily bedesman and pray for his Highness and all his and all the realm. I do nobody harm, I say none harm, I think none harm, but wish everybody good. And if this be not enough to keep a man alive in good faith I long not to live" (SL 247-248). Bolt uses artistic license to put into the trial words which More used elsewhere, but the words themselves are indisputably More's own and they are dramatic. Here again we encounter one of those intriguing examples in which More records for Margaret his words spoken several days earlier with an authority that makes them appear to be taken from dictation. Clearly, they were composed after the fact for their dramatic effect. More used the same technique in Richard III, and considered material about himself no different in some sense from other literary endeavors. More's letter reads like the dialogue of a play. With the artist's eye for natural drama, Bolt seized on the words from the letter for his own version of the trial scene. In the real trial, with judgment rendered against him and his death all but a *fait accompli*, More chose this highly dramatic and public moment to discharge his conscience on the matters so eagerly sought from him earlier. Likewise, on the morning of his execution, July 6, 1535, More turned the scaffold into his last stage and in his brief speech to the crowd who had gathered to witness his execution, left the last memorable picture of himself or rather of his legendary self (for they were both the same then) as a humble martyr dying "the King's good servant but God's first." More's last role was indisputably that of a martyr.

The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore

The reputation of Thomas More among those who lived relatively soon after his lifetime confirms much of what has already been identified as his interest in drama and his inimitable sense of humor. Outside the biographical and hagiographic tradition, which in effect were all one tradition until the present time, one of the best sources of impressions is the Renaissance play The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore. Ignoring the debates on authorship as irrelevant to this consideration, and putting aside the rough, unfinished quality of the work, we are still able to confirm some important impressions about Thomas More by those who lived about half a century after him. In fact, the multiple authorship and the unpolished quality of the work may support the idea of using this piece as confirmation of general impressions instead of those of a single author who had crafted the play for a single artistic vision. In short, recognizing the general caveat that literature cannot be taken as history and acknowledging the admittedly fictional elements in the play, we still encounter a collectively conceived portrait of a man full of wit, practical jokes, irony, and a keen interest in drama.

"Moore" appears first in the second scene counseling with a cutpurse named Lifter whom he, in his role as sheriff, has just brought before the magistrate. For purposes of exposing some of the arrogance and folly of Justice Suresbie, Moore contrives a practical joke in which he gets Lifter to pick the judge's pocket assuring Lifter that he will protect him if the plan fails. The prank works flawlessly in spite of Lifter's understandable hesitance. Moore shows himself to be good to his word--even to a pickpocket--and to delight in playing elaborate jokes on others.

Moore contrives another joke to greet Erasmus on what is supposedly their first encounter by exchanging clothes with his servant Randall:

> The learned Clarke Erasmus is arriu'de within our Englishe Courte, this day I heare, he feasteth with an English honoured Poett the Earle of Surrey, and I knowe this night the famous Clarke of Roterdame will visite Sir Thomas Moore, therefore Sir, act my parte, there, take my place furnishte with pursse and Mace. Ile see if great Erasmus can distinguishe merit and outward ceremonie: obserue me Sirra, Ile be thy glasse, dresse thy behauiour according to my cariage, but beware thou talke not ouermuch, for twill betray thee. who prates not oft, seemes wise, his witt fewe scan, whilste the tounge blabs tales of th'imperfect man. [Fol. 11b, Sc. viiia] (ll. 743-756)

Unfortunately, some original leaves are lost from the text at the point when Erasmus meets Randall playing Moore and Moore playing the servant, so the outcome of the scene is not known, but the scene serves ideally to illustrate More's readiness to play a part, to toy with the notion that external appearances make the man, and to play a practical joke on even the most honored of guests. The image here is highly consistent with the most frivolous episodes outlined in the early biographies but goes even beyond them. At the same time the Moore of this play is no fool. He is, quite the contrary, "the honorablest Scholler, the moste religious Politician, the worthiest Councellour that tends our state" (ll. 781-783). Much is made of his "wisedome and deseruing meritt" (l. 535). Elsewhere a warder of the Tower remarks "A wiser, or more vertuous Gentleman/ was neuer bred in England" (ll. 1613-1614), and Catesbie says that More's "sweete soule [will] liue among the Saintes" (l. 1707). The play comes close to showing Thomas More as a man for all seasons, but puts heavy emphasis on More's sense of humor and on his interest in drama.

A scene of particular interest for this study is one in which the Lord Cardinal's Players come unexpectedly to Moore's house while he is entertaining the Mayor of London, some aldermen, and their wives. Lady Moore reports "Ther's one without that stayes to speake with ye,/ And bad me tell ye that he is a Player" (ll. 890-891). Moore is instantly eager to talk with him: "A Player wife? one of ye bid him come in,/ Nay stirre there fellowes, fye, ye are to slowe" (ll. 892-893). The leader enters, explains that the actors are the Cardinal's Players, and lists the repertoire from which Moore chooses "The Marriage of Witt and Wisedome": "To marie wit to wisedom, asks some cunning,/ Many haue witt, that may come short of wisedom" (ll. 926-927). The next two hundred lines are a discussion and a quasi-rehearsal among More and the players reminiscent of scenes from _Hamlet_ or _A_

Midsummer Night's Dream wherein some of the conventions and limitations of Elizabethan acting are exposed and discussed on stage as part of the play. Throughout all this Moore plays the gadfly and enjoys his own witty verbal repartee and his obvious knowledge of acting.

When one of the players enters anxiously to announce that Luggins has not yet returned with the beard for his part, Moore himself steps in among the players to fill the role of Good Councell in Luggins's absence: "Nay, and it be no more but so, ye shall not tarie at a stand for that, weele n<ot haue our play marde for lack of a little good Councell: till your fellowe co<me Ile geue him the best councell that I can, pardon me my Lord Maior, I lo<ue to <be> merie" (ll. 115-118). Luggins finally returns and the entertainment is temporarily suspended until after the banquet. Moore remarks:

> Art thou come? well fellowe, I haue holpe to saue thine honestie a little,/ Now if thou canst giue witt any better councell then I haue doone, spare no<t/ there I leaue him to thy mercie./ But by this time, I am sure our banquet's readie,/ My Lord, and Ladyes, we will taste that first,/ And then they shall begin the play againe,/ which through the fellowes absence, and by me,/ in sted of helping, hath bin hindered./ Prepare against we come: Lights there I say,/ thus fooles oft times doo help to marre the play. (ll. 1137-1146)

The last line may be a conscious allusion to the passage in More's Richard III about getting a good beating for "marring of the play" and may be a recognition by the authors that

More himself in some metaphorical sense had marred Henry's play. The Elizabethans would have enjoyed the embedded pun. The chance that the phrase "marre the play" is coincidental seems remote. There is more going on here than just the Renaissance commonplace of a play within a play or even the shop talk of "actors" who by juxtaposition with other characters lend verisimilitude to the other characters. There is in this episode reflection of the reputation of Thomas More as a man much interested in drama and well qualified as actor and critic. The last lines in the scene address More's reputation directly:

Witt. ffye fellowe Luggins, you serue vs
hansomely, doo ye not thinke ye.
Lug. why, Oagle was not with in, and his wife
would not let me haue the beard, an<d by
my troth I ran so fast that I sweat
againe.
Incli. doo ye heare fellowes? would not my Lord
make a rare player? Oh, he would vpholde
a companie beyond all hoe [sic. "hope"?],
then Mason among the Kings players: did ye
did ye marke how extemprically he fell to the
matter, and spake Lugginses parte, almost
as it is in the very booke set downe.
Witt. Peace, doo ye knowe what ye say? my Lord a player?
let vs not meddle with any such matters . . .
(ll. 1147-1155)

One could argue, perhaps, that the Elizabethan authors were giving their own kind of Encomium Moriae by characterizing More as an actor. Certainly they recognized the irony in the compliment. If there were no basis in the legend for this characterization, one could dismiss the portrait as the fancy or airy nothing of the poets' eyes.

The overwhelming logic of literary analysis would dismiss such material as pure fiction not grounded in fact and serving no end but an aesthetic one. However, the basis for the description of More as a talented player rested firmly outside the play. The authors of The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore were not creating a new image of More. They were merely holding the mirror up to nature--or should we say art?--portraying More as the legend already ubiquitously described him--a man of keen wit and dramatic talent. The reputation must have been part of the oral tradition about More quite independent of later efforts to sanctify him. In fact, what one realizes is that the Thomas More we are discovering here--the man whose life was overwhelmingly influenced by drama in many ways, the man who was a consummate actor, who acted in plays, wrote little pieces, studied classical examples, alluded to dramatic works for rhetorical purposes, the man who saw life as a stage and was forever acting roles sometimes for the good of the commonwealth and always for his own protection--this Thomas More was the one known widely immediately following his own lifetime. The sober, saintly More was a much later product of the hagiographic tradition. Surely the Elizabethans knew him better.

One suspects that The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore almost overstates More's sense of humor. A few examples set the tone. By tradition the porter at the Tower claims the cloak of the prisoner. When the Gentleman Porter asks for Moore's "vpper garment," Moore deliberately takes him literally and gives him his cap. This anecdote was already in the biographical accounts and cannot be attributed to the dramatists, but they used it in the play. Other humorous material _is_ part of their invention. Moore complains of "grauell in the water"--another biographical fact--but when the lieutenant asks Moore if he wants him to consult the doctor, Moore jests "No, saue thy labor, weele cossen him of a fee,/ Thou shalt see me take a dramme to morrowe morning,/ shall cure the stone I warrant, doubt it not" (ll. 1757-1759). Later he tells his wife that he had planned to have a barber trim his beard but "now I remember, that were labour lost,/ the headsman now shall cut off head and all" (ll. 1827-1829). Moore says his memory has grown so ill that "I feare I shall forget my head behind me" (l. 1889). As Moore ascends the scaffold, he remarks "In sooth, I am come about a headlesse arrand,/ ffor I haue not much to say, now I am heere" (ll. 1913-1914).

Among the jests is the one from the biographies about More asking to be helped up the scaffold but "as for my comming downe, let me alone, Ile looke to that my selfe" (ll. 1918-1919). The silliness continues in the final fifty lines of the play almost to the point of embarrassment. Moore says "Ile take a sound sleepe heere" (l. 1928); "my doctor heere telles me it is good for the head ache" (l.

1941); "doo it [the beheading] hansomely, or of my woord thou shalt neuer deale with me heerafter" (ll. 1951-1952). Moore also refuses to take off his doublet at his beheading because "I haue a great colde alreadie, and I would be lothe to take more" (ll. 1958-1959). In his penultimate line he jests still: "Point me to the block, I nere was heere before" (l. 1975). Read against the subsequent saintly tradition, all this comedy seems almost frivolously overdone and out of place, certainly out of character. In fact, it is very much _in_ character. Thomas More was a jester. What annoyed Edward Hall was not some affectation; it was More's natural lightheartedness and readiness to see the humor in all the little ironies of life. What strikes us as flippancy in the characterization of Moore was in fact that all-encompassing winsome and wry sense of humor that was forever both More's salvation from taking the things of this life too seriously and his means of embracing this life fully. The indomitable sense of humor was his means of maintaining his disinterested calmness of mind and the genuine expression of his joie de vivre. It was his unique way of turning life into art. It was the essence of his script.

The End of the Divine Comedy: A Summary

The real More's death was not a tragedy in the literary sense of the word, but he worked hard to portray an image of his own persona's story as a tragedy. Ortega y Gasset argued that the tragic does not originate in fate but in the will of the hero: "All the sorrow springs from the hero's refusal to give up an ideal part, an imaginary role which he has chosen . . . as entirely free volition originates and produces the tragic process" (154). In a theatrical sense More's will to create a role for himself defined a new set of literary realities, one of which was a character named Thomas More who indeed experienced tragedy because of an inability to give up his ideals. One could argue, I suppose, in a different way that the real Thomas More experienced tragedy because he could never face reality without rewriting the script to suit his ideals and dreams. This is the same More who forever saw Henry as the Defender of the Faith instead of as a man of flesh and blood. But in the last analysis, this view of More does not hold up. The real Thomas More did not experience tragedy, nor was his death tragic. It was more of a comedy in the medieval sense of that word--perhaps a divine comedy. He, as author of his own script, was always in control of the drama. His control was the same that any author experiences who holds the world at a distance. But this author also decided to be an actor and to play the part of himself which he and others had fabricated. The legendary More, then, has something of the tragic about him, certainly much of the heroic, but we must never forget that he is a fictional product of the author

Thomas More who attempted to turn life into art, an endeavor ultimately doomed to failure because art is always less comprehensive than life. One cannot turn life into art while it is yet being lived because producing art means being selective, choosing a certain style; and all styles are less flexible than life itself. More's unique accomplishment was to guarantee that he had so thoroughly made a fictional character of himself by the time he died that that character would live on. That he accomplished this is manifestly clear. I cannot think of another author who has perpetuated his own literary and historical identity to the same degree.

NOTES

1 There is reason to believe that the source of Medwall's play is an English translation by John Tiptoft, the Earl of Worcester, of Jean Mielot's French version of a 1428 Latin work _Controversia de Vera Nobilitate_ by the Italian humanist Bonaccorso of Pistoja (Reed 97-98 and Happé 79). The latter is itself an imitation of Cicero inspired by Petrarch. Collard Mansion published Mielot's version in Bruges, and Caxton printed Tiptoft's translation at Westminster in 1481. This anecdote of literary history is an excellent illustration of several currents of humanistic influence with the return _ad fontes_ inspired by Petrarch in Italy and subsequently disseminated across national boundaries in some of the earliest secular drama, first in Burgundy and then in England.

2 One sees here the germs of ideas that would take root in the fictional world of _Utopia_ and in the real world of Thomas More's "Academy" where he trained his own children and his foster children--the girls equally with the boys.

3 Smith's book and another called _A Hundred Merry Tales_, which is reputed to be the first of the famous Tudor jest books, were published by Rastell (Reed 17). Here again is another connection within the More circle where things literary were the common intellectual property of all the men and women who were sharing their reading and writing of plays, verse, and letters.

4 This excerpt may help to corroborate Marius's comment on More's fascination with things scatological (341). The important point here seems to be that Walter Smith felt at liberty to jest about the crudities of wanton women and to associate the bawdy tale with Thomas More's household. That a household servant would first of all be literate enough to write tales in rhymed couplets is remarkable in itself. That he could jest with impunity at the expense of More's household is testimony to the expansive good humor and magnanimity of Sir Thomas More.

5 John M. Headley gives considerable attention to More's use of Terence and Plautus in his introduction to the Responsio in the Complete Works (CW5 II). Headley's remarks illustrate the ubiquity of the allusions in the text and in the glosses and confirm the extent to which More knew and used drama for his rhetorical ends.

6 The gloss on Jacques's "All the world's a stage" in the variorum edition of As You Like It provides additional confirmation of the commonness of the metaphor and of its classical origins (Knowles 130).

7 Cassirer adds the words "without writing" in his translation.

8 Thomas More would appreciate such a literary device for turning life into art. One suspects that Erasmus was likewise inspired by this idea. The quality of verisimilitude which was so important to later sixteenth-century writers like Cervantes and Shakespeare was also important to Thomas More. In an almost Aristotelian response to the Platonic objection to art, More considered that verisimilitude is what made drama believable and what made role-playing legitimate. He would also enjoy Philosophy's remark "You see, I know that jokes never do any harm" (Lucian 341).

9 The first paragraph of Grafton's work begins with a modifying phrase referring to the last words of More's History. The last of More's words are part of a dialogue between Morton and the Duke of Buckingham in which they are conspiring to overthrow Richard. Morton is planting in Buckingham's mind the idea that Richard is lacking some of the essential virtues for kingship which Buckingham himself possesses: " . . . it might yet haue pleased Godde for the better store, to haue geuen him some of suche other excellente vertues mete for the rule of a realm, as our lorde hath planted in the parsone of youre grace" (CW2 93). Grafton's first paragraph is worth examining in its entirety:

> With which words the Duke, perceiving that the Bishop bore unto him his good heart and favour, mistrusted not to enter into more plain communication with him, so far that at the last the Bishop declared himself to be one of them that would gladly help in order that Richard, who then usurped the crown, might be deposed, if he knew how it might conveniently be brought to pass that such a person as had true title of inheritance unto the same, might be restored thereunto. Upon this, the said Duke, knowing the Bishop to be a man of prudence and fidelity, opened to him all his whole heart and intent, saying, 'My Lord, I have devised the way how the blood both of King Edward and of King Henry the Sixth, that is left, being coupled by marriage and affinity, may be restored unto the crown which, by just and true title, is due unto them both.' King Richard he called not the brother of King Edward the Fourth, but his enemy and mortal foe (Kendall 112-113).

The first thing to notice is that Grafton picks up the narrative in mid-sentence as it were. Tudor syntax was somewhat looser than ours, influenced no doubt by Latin syntax. Phrases such as Grafton's first one which we would consider to have no antecedent were, in fact, common in Renaissance prose. The continuity is achieved not so much by syntax, however, as by Grafton's one attempt to copy More's style in the use of dialogue. Nothing is more typical of the History than the almost-formulaic classical pattern: "So-and-so, knowing such-and-such, then spoke as follows:" More is not unique among the writers of his era for imitating the classical authors. Indeed, a fine example of the same authoritative quoting is to be found in William Roper's biography of More. The words Roper attributes to Thomas More can hardly have been recorded stenographically or remembered with the exactitude that is reflected in the text. Nonetheless, the style studied and copied by all the schoolboys was precisely this one used by More in Richard III. And so, Grafton's sentence copies More's style: "Upon this, the said Duke, knowing the Bishop to be a man of prudence and fidelity, opened to him all his whole heart and intent, saying, 'My Lord, . . .'" (Kendall 113). And there, in that first paragraph so singularly imitative of the standard style, the similarity between More and Grafton ends. Not once after that single sentence is there a glimpse of dialogue or a recorded speech in all of Grafton's continuation. The opening paragraph shows without a doubt that Grafton understood More's rhetorical format for creating dramatic style but could not or would not sustain it.

10 Marius points out the fact that because More was no Tudor propagandist, his picture of Richard is probably reasonably accurate (110). He agrees with More that Richard probably had the little princes killed. What he does suggest is that John Howard had reason to ally himself with Richard in the matter of the deaths of the little princes. Little Richard was not only Duke of York but also Duke of Norfolk, and John Howard was next in line for that inheritance. John Howard was also in charge of the Tower until July 17, 1483--quite possibly at the time of the murder of the little princes (111). As far as Morton is concerned, one need only recall that he had been loyal first to Henry VI and then to Edward IV and was by implication of More's History the one who planted the idea of insurrection in the mind of Buckingham--not a particularly laudable trait in the minds of kings. More probably felt he owed his benefactor the discretion of silence.

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APPENDIX

GENEALOGICAL CHART

John More=Agnes Granger

Joan=Richard Staverton
1475-1542

Sir Thomas=(1)Jane Colt
1478-1535 d.1511
(2)Alice=(1)John Middleton
1471-?

Elizabeth=John Rastell (SEE BELOW)
1482-1538 1475?-1536

Margaret=William Roper
1505-1544 1495?-1578

Elizabeth=William Daunce
1506-?

Cecily=Giles Heron
1507-?

John=Anne Cresacre
1509-1547 1511-1577

Elizabeth More=John Rastell
1482-1538 1475?-1536

William Heywood

Richard
1509-1570

Thomas
?

John=Joan
1497-1580 1504?-1574?

William=Winifred
1508-1565 1527-1553

John Clement=Margaret Giggs
d.1572 1505-1570

Thomas

Margaret
1540-1612

Ellis
1530-1578

Jasper
1535-1598

Elizabeth=(2)John Donne
d.1577