Moreana, nos. 15-16 (Nov. 1967): 331-46

THE DESIGN OF MORE'S *DIALOGUE OF COMFORT*

Harpsfield declares that the *Dialogue of Comfort* was "for the moste part written with none other penne in the worlde then with a coale, as was also his Treatise vpon the passion;" (1) and later biographers have echoed the statement. It is a point of some significance, for these alleged conditions of composition have made some readers willing to believe that the *Dialogue* is therefore a rough and uncorrected work, full of flaws that More would have remedied, had time and proper instruments of writing been available.(2) Harpsfield's statement, however, may have no other basis than the fact that some of More's letters from the Tower were certainly written with a coal, as the 1557 edition of the *Works* makes clear.(3) In any case, the recently-discovered Valencia holograph of More's *Expositio Passionis*, 169 leaves in length, makes it plain that More at times had plenty of ink and paper available to him even in the last months or weeks of his imprisonment; Rastell indeed says that More was unable to complete this Latin treatise on the Passion because "all his bokes and penne and ynke and paper was taken from hym, and sone after was he putte to death."(4) Furthermore, the Valencia manuscript is filled with detailed revisions; it is clear that More was here composing with great care.

There is no reason, then, to assume poor conditions of composition for the *Dialogue*, but rather, for More, an unusual opportunity for careful planning and writing--made available by his fifteen months of lonely imprisonment. Furthermore, if we consider that the *Dialogue* bears every mark of being an ultimate spiritual testament, we may well believe that More would have lavished upon it all the care that his time would allow. The *Dialogue* itself bears out this conjecture, for it displays all the signs of More's finest literary skill, both in the details of its language and in the total command of its development. But we must, to appreciate its skill, adjust ourselves to its unhurried, deliberate pace, its highly colloquial style, and its subtle working within a particular

setting and set of characters.

So far as individual sentences or passages are concerned, the peculiar pace and style can be grasped by an oral reading of the quotations that follow here. These are taken from the manuscript of the *Dialogue* belonging to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, a manuscript that seems to be a copy of something very close to More's holograph.(5) Its rudimentary punctuation (chiefly by the virgule, with other punctuation-marks added by a second hand) and the archaic, sometimes phonetic, spelling are highly effective when the treatise is read aloud in a conversational manner. The following discussion will concentrate upon the broader aspects of design in the treatise, but it will be evident that these broader effects arise from, and are constantly conditioned by, the effect of natural, spontaneous utterance by the two speakers of the dialogue.

.1.

Let us start with the setting in Hungary, where two Hungarians, Uncle Antony and Nephew Vincent, discuss the problems of human suffering, under the threat of an imminent invasion of their country by the Turks. Is this device to be read simply as an allegory of Thomas More's situation with regard to Henry VIII during the years of his growing disfavor and imprisonment ? Is the Great Turk to be equated with Henry VIII and the Turkish invasion of Hungary with the threat of new doctrines against the unity of the Church in England and elsewhere ? Surely all this is very important part of the book. We cannot read these affectionate conversations between the older and the younger Hungarian without thinking of More's letters from the Tower to his daughter Margaret, and of the conversations of this kind which we know actually occurred between More and this daughter in the Tower(6)-- and perhaps also with other members of his family, before his imprisonment. Thus at the outset of the *Dialogue* More has the nephew say :

> **You be** not ignorant good vncle what heps of hevynes hath of late fallen among vs all redye / with which some of our pore famely be fallen into suche dumpes, that scantly can any such comfort as my pore wyt can give them, any thing asswage their sorow / And now sith the tydynges haue come hether so brymme of the great Turkes interprise into these parties here : we can almost neyther talke nor thynke of any other thyng els, than of his might & our mischefe. There falleth so contynually before the eyen of our hart, a fearefull imaginacion of this terryble thyng / his myghty strength and power, his high malice and hatryd, & his incomparable crueltie, with robbyng, spoylyng, burnyng, and layng wast all the way that his armye commeth /
>
> * * *
>
> Than send his people hether & his fals fayth therwith / so that such as are here & remayne styll / shall eyther both lese all & be lost

> to / or forcid to forsake the fayth of our savyour christ, and fall to the false sect of machomete. And yet which we more feare than all the remenant, no small part of our own folke that dwell even here about vs, are (as we here) fallen to hym, or all redy confederyd with hym / which yf yt so be, shall happely kepe this quarter fro the Turkes incursion / but than shall they that torne to his law, leve all their neybors nothyng / but shall haue our goodes given them, and our bodies both / but yf we turn as they do, & forsake our saviour to / And than (for there ys no born Turke so cruell to christen folke, as is the false christen that falleth fro the fayth) we shall stand in perill yf we percever in the truth, to be more hardely handelyd & dye more cruell deth by our own countremen at home / than yf we were taken hens and carried into Turkey / [ff. 3-4 : pp. 146-7]

Yet at the same time, More describes the Turkish threat with such exact reference to the historical conditions that we are never allowed to think of this setting as only a device : "Than hath he taken Belgrade the fortres of this realme / And syns hath he destroyid our noble yong goodly kyng / And now stryve there twayne for vs / our lord send the grace / that the third dogg cary not away the bone from them both." [f. 4v ; p.147] The shock of Belgrade's fall occurred in 1521; the catastrophic defeat of the Hungarian forces, with the death of their young King Ladislaus, occurred on the field of Mohács, 29 August 1526, one of the blackest days in European history. Since Ladislaus died without an heir, the crown was claimed by both Ferdinand of Austria and John Zapolyai of Transylvania, who were both proclaimed king by rival factions. When John Zapolyai was defeated in battle by Ferdinand, he turned to the Turk for aid, and was proclaimed king by the Sultan, who swore to protect John against the Austrian claimant. Hence arose the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1529 and the second dangerous invasion of Austria in 1532, the year in which More resigned the office of Chancellor and retired to await the wrath of Henry. Such allusions to the contemporary situation in Hungary make the setting operate both historically and allegorically, at one and the same time, with a result that is well stated by John Fowler in the preface to his edition of 1573 :

> **The imuention in dede of the Authour seemeth to respect some particular cases, which was of him wonderful wittily deuised, applying his whole discourse to that peece of Christendome, to wit, the land of Hungarie, which hath bene these many yeares (and yet is) sore persecuted and oppressed by Turks. But under this particular case of Turks persecution he generally comprehendeth al kinds of afflictions and persecutions both of body and mind, that may any way be suffred, either by sicknes or health, by frind or fo, by wicked & wrongful oppressors, by Miscreants and Turks, and the very fiends and diuels of**

> hel also. And that was done for this entent (as it may wel seeme) that under this one kind of Turkish persecution, the benefit of the booke might be the more common to al Christen folke, as the which could iustly of none be reiected nor reprooued, but if themselues were very Turkes to, or woorse.

He adds that the book would also be very good for the Turks themselves to read, since they are sometimes taken prisoner by the Christians.

In his universal application of the book, Fowler has the right key to its spirit and its strategy. It is a book of comfort against all kinds of tribulation, not only against that kind which Thomas More himself is suffering. The treatise seems written at random only if we insist on limiting its concerns to the special situation of More's own treatment at the hands of Henry VIII. More is aware of larger issues than his own fate. He sees his plight as involved in mankind's universal condition. At the same time, as Fowler seems to discern, the generalizing tendency of the treatise serves wittily to disguise its personal implications. "What are you writing there, Thomas?" "A book of comfort for those who are sick, or who are tempted by the devil, or who are living in Hungary." So the book escaped suspicion, and somehow made its way out of the prison cell.(7)

This general application and disguise is accomplished by means of deliberate garrulity and conscious digression, with the result that the topic of persecution for the faith is held in abeyance during the first two books of the treatise, while all the lesser kinds of tribulation are being covered. Then in the final book all strands are drawn together in a subtle, surprising, and powerful way that fulfills the underlying design. Let us see how this design is developed.

.2.

Each of the three books has its own peculiar decorum, with a lapse in time before each renewal of the conversation: each book has the effect of a fresh attack upon the universal problem. Book I is chiefly composed of the reassertion of familiar, traditional views. The main point is simply : tribulation is good for you. It cures past sins and prevents sins to come. It is a gift of God, the mark of God's favor. But for all his wise utterances here, Uncle Antony finds his nephew hard to convince. Vincent listens respectfully and seems to be taking in the arguments, and yet about three-fifths of the way through the first book he suddenly enters a startling objection :

> But yet good vncle though that some do thus / this anwereth not full the mater / For we se that the whole church in the comen seruice, vse diuers colletes / in which all men pray specially for the princes and

> prelattes, & generally euery man for other, & for hym selfe to / that god wold vouchsafe to send them all perpetual helth & prosperitie / And I can se no good man pray god send an other sorow, nor no such praers are there put in the prestes portuouse (8) as far as I can here /
>
> And yet yf it were as you say good vncle / that perpetuall prosperitie were to the sowle so perilouse, & tribulacion therto so frutefull / than were as me semeth euery man bound of charitie, not onely to pray god send their neibours sorow / but also to help therto them selfe / & when folke are sike, not pray god send them helth / but when they come to comfort them [they shuld say] I am glad good gossen that ye be so syk / I pray god kepe you long therin / [f.36;pp.182-3]

Antony quells this and other objections with an effect of main force, since in the end he takes the floor for over ten pages of an unbroken dissertation, closing with a ritual affirmation and "summary comfort" listing all the gracious benefits of tribulation. One might think that after this resounding catalogue (see chapter 20) there would not be much more to say. Yet clearly there is :the uncle has promised more and the nephew seeks more. The wisdom of Book I, however eloquent, however sound, is not enough, we feel, to cover all the experiences of man in tribulation. The positions set forth by Antony remain too theoretical ; too far removed from actual existence. An uneasy felling persists that the basic problem of suffering cannot be adequately met by the delivery of traditional apothegms. Such "wisdom" is a basis to build upon,no more. Book I is appropriately the shortest of the three.

.3.

As the dialogue resumes in Book II, after a lapse of several days, we find ourselves abruptly moved out of the orderly world of moral theory and plunged into the chaotic world of everyday. Now Antony and Vincent begin by swapping worldly jests, and Antony at once signals a drastic change in tone and technique when he apologizes in a jocular way for having talked too much the other day, saying that he wished "the last tyme after you were gone / when I felt my selfe (to sey the trowth) evyn a litell wery / that I had not so told you styll a long tale alone/ but that we had more often enterchaungid wordes / & partid the talke betwene vs, with [ofter] enterparlyng vppon your part / in such maner as lernid men vse betwene the persons / whom they devise disputyng in their faynid dialogues." [ff. 64v-65 ; p.214] He immediately demonstrates the change in tone by an anecdote, comparing himself with the nun who lectured her brother at length at the convent grate,and then berated him for not giving her the benefit of his wisdom. Vincent responds with a "merye tale" concerning a certain "kynswoman of your own", a tale that is worth quoting complete as an introduction to the more concrete and worldly atmosphere of this entire book :

her husband had mych pleasure in the maner and behavour of an other honest man, & kept hym therfor mych company / by the reason wherof he was at his meale tyme the more oft from home / So happid it in a tyme, that his wife and he together dynid or soupid with that neybour of theirs / And than she made a mery quarell to hym, for makyng her husband so good chere out at dore that she could not haue hym at home / for soth mastres quod he (as he was a dry mery man) In my company nothyng kepeth hym but one / Serve you hym with the same, & he will neuer be from you / what gay thyng may that be quoth our Cosyn than / forsoth mastres quoth he your husband loveth well to talke / & whan he sittith with me I let hym haue all the wordes / All the wordes quoth she / mary that am I content he shall haue all the wordes with good will as he hath euer had / but I speke them all my selfe, & give them all to hym / & for ought that I care for them so shall he haue them styll / but otherwise to say that he shall haue them all / you shall kepe hym still rather than he get the halfe [f. 66 ; pp. 215-16]

While they are thus jesting Antony declares that he will from now on force his nephew to talk half the time. This turns out to be quite a jest in itself, since some of Antony's unbroken disquisitions are in fact even longer than in the first book. Nevertheless, Book II works in quite a different way from Book I. It is thirty pages longer, and that extra length, we might say, is filled out with a remarkable array of racy, vivid, colloquial anecdotes. What we are watching here is a gradual process of adjusting moral theory to the world as it is, a process that More wittily heralds in the first chapter of Book II by having the nephew ask whether Antony really meant, in the previous day's conversation, to rule out all forms of worldly comfort, such as "a mery tale with a frend" or proper plesaunt talkyng". Antony allows that his theories cannot in fact be so strictly applied, considering that men are as they are: "A man to take now & than some honest worldly myrth / I dare not be so sore as vtterly to forbyd yt." [f. 67 ; p. 217] True, we ought to find all our joy and comfort in talking of heaven, but somehow men seem to be easily wearied by this topic, as Cassian, he says, shows in one of his *Collations* :

... a certen holy father in makyng of a sermon, spake of hevyn & of hevynly thynges so celestially that much of his audience with the swete sowne therof began to forget all the world & fall a slepe / which whan the father beheld he dissemblid their slepyng & sodenly said vnto them I shall tell you a mery tale / at which word they lyft vp their hedes & herknid vnto that / And after the slepe therwith broken, herd hym tell on of hevyn agayne /

* * *

where as you demand me whether in tribulacion men may not sometyme refresh them selfe with worldly myrth & recreacion / I can no more saye / but he that can not long endure to hold vpp his hedd & here talkyng of hevyn except he be now & than betwene (as though hevyn were hevyness) refreshid with a folish mery tale / there is none other remedy, but you most let hym haue yt / better wold I wish it but I can not help it [ff. 68v-69 ; p. 218]

Shortly after this Antony becomes so involved in recounting the strange tale of a tertian fever of his, in which he felt hot and cold at once, that he loses his train of thought : "But se now what age is lo / I haue bene so long in my tale / that I haue almost forgotone / for what purpose I told yt / Oh now I remember lo." [f.73; p. 223]

We are moving ever more clearly and concretely into the world of actuality -- the story of the fever includes an allusion to a young woman trained in medicine that almost certainly is a reference to More's adopted daughter, Margaret Clement. Now the world's stage opens out suddenly with two long and brilliant tales involving religious satire. The first occurs when Vincent narrates at length his recent experiences in Saxony, during the early days of Luther's revolt ("nor Luther was not than weddid yet"). Vincent proceeds to give a brilliant parody of a Lutheran sermon that he had heard, in words that bring directly home the powerful appeal of the Reformers :

He cried euer [owt] vppon them to kepe well the lawes of christ / let go their pevysh penence & purpose them to amend, and seke nothyng to saluacion but the deth of christ / for he is our iustice, & he is our saviour, & our hole satisfaccion for all our dedly synnes / he did full penance for vs all vppon his paynfull crosse / he wasshid vs there all clene with the water of his swete side, & brought vs out of the devilles daynger with his dere preciouse bloude / leve therfore leve I besech you these invencons of men, your folysh lenton fastes & your pevish penance, minysh neuer christes thankes not loke to save your selfe. It is Christes deth I tell you that must save vs all. Christes deth I tell you [yet] agayne & not our own dedes. Leve your own fastyng therfore & lene to christ alone good cristen people for christes dere bitter passion.
Now so lowd & so shirle he cried christ in theire heres (9) & so thikke he came forth with christes bitter passion, & that so bitterly spoken / with the sweate droppyng down his chekes, that I marveylid not though I saw the pore women wepe / For he made myne heare stand vp vppon myne hed / And with such prechyng were the people so brought in, that some fell to breke the fastes on the fastyng dayes / not of frayltie or of malice first / but almost of deuocion, lest they shuld take fro christ the thanke of his bitter passion / But whan they were a while noselid in that poynt first, they could endure & abyde after many thynges mo / with which had he begone, they wold haue pullid hym downe. [f. 76 ; pp. 226-7]

Less than twenty pages later, however, we find the other side of the picture in the longest and most brilliant tale of the entire treatise, the five-page beast-fable which Antony says he heard from his old nurse, Mother Maud. This is among other things, a hilarious piece of anti-clerical satire, presenting the Ass who suffers from an excessively scrupulous conscience, the worldly priest,

Father Reynard the confessor, who never worries about fasting, and the Wolf, who represents the utterly unscrupulous and rapacious tendencies of man. When the Wolf comes late to his lenten confession, on Good Friday, he explains :

> I durst come no soner / for fere lest you wold for my glotony haue givyn me in penance to fast some part of this lent / Nay Nay quodth the father Fox I am no so vnresonable / for I fast none of yt my selfe / For I may say to the sone (10) here in confession betwene vs twayne / it is no commaundement of god this fasting, but an invencion of man / The prestes make folke fast & put them to payne about the mone shyne in the water, & do but make folke foles / but they shall make me no such fole I warrant the sone / For I eate flessh all this lent my self I. Howbeit in dede because I will not be occasion of slaunder, I therfor eate it secretely in my chamber out of sight of all such folysh brethren as for their weke scrupulouse conscience wold wax offendid with all / And so wold I counsayle you to do. [f. 92v ; pp. 246-7]

Thus far, nearly half-way through the second book, we have been within the realm of comical satire, but now , with chapter 15,we move into a darker realm of tales concerning self-destruction. Some of these are savagely comic in their way, such as the opening anecdote of the carpenter's wife who was so fiendish that the devil tempted her to taunt her husband into chopping off her head with his axe : "There were standyng other folke by / which had a good sport to here her chide / but litell they lokyd for this chaunce till it was done ere they cold let it / They said they herd her tong bable in her hed & call horson horson twise after that the hed was fro the bodye." [f.98v; p. 255] Although some of the examples are thus touched with grim humor, the major part of this thirty-page discussion of suicide or self-destruction is given over to a very serious discussion of the ways by which a man can distinguish the illusions of the devil from the true revelations of God. One may wonder why More devotes so much space to this problem of devilish delusions, with special reference to the temptation of self-destruction. It may be relevant to remember that More was, in his last years, very closely concerned with the question of the truth or falsehood of the revelations allegedly experienced by the Nun of Kent. This question of temptation by demons was a real and pressing issue for More, as we may see from the frequent notation *contra demones* which More wrote in the margins of the book of Psalms which he had with him in the Tower.(11) (In this connection it is interesting to note that here in the *Dialogue* More says:"Speciall verses may there be drawen out of the *psalter* / against the devilles wikked temptacions" [f. 116 ; p. 280]). I do not think that More was tempted toward suicide, in the ordinary sense of that word ; but in a subtler way the possibility of such a devilish temptation may indeed have been close to More's mind. He dwells at some length (chapter 16) upon the case of the "very specall holy man" who was by the devil "brought into such an high spirituall pride", that he became convinced that it was god's will that he should destroy himself, "& that therby should he go strayt to hevyn." [f. 101 ; p. 258] More in the Tower had chosen a course that was almost certain to lead to his death.How could he be sure that he was not being assailed by the temptation of spiritual pride ? (One thinks of the temptations of Thomas à Becket in Eliot's play.) But of course the whole section on self-destruction is part of More's effort to make his book useful in comfort against all tribulations for everyman.

Finally, for the last twenty pages of Book II, the discussion turns toward a very practical examination of the role of *business* in this world, a term under which More includes the busy search for pleasures of the flesh, along with business in the sense of seeking worldly wealth. In this connection More takes the occasion to explain the necessity of having men of substance in this world, in a passage that sounds like a rebuke to those who would take his *Utopia* as a blueprint for social equality :

> Men can not you wot well lyve here in this world, but yf that some one man prouide a meane of lyvyng for some other man. Euery man can not haue a ship of his own, not euery man be a merchaunt without a stoke / And these thinges you wote well must nedes be had / nor euery man can not haue a plough by hym selfe / And who [might]live by the taylours crafte yf no man were able to put a gowne to make ? who by the masonry / or who could live a carpenter, yf no man were able to bild neyther church nor howse ? [f. 131 v ; p. 302]

It is appropriate that after this reconciliation with the ways of the busy world, Book II should end with the bringing in of a good dinner.

.4.

I have reviewed these materials at length in order to stress their rich variety. In Book II nearly every aspect of the world as More knew it is vividly brought before us, in colloquial terms, until we may feel that the turmoil of human existence is in some danger of overwhelming the unity and the direction of the dialogue. But as this danger threatens, More quietly and firmly brings in the counterforce of reason to control these follies and evils . About a quarter of the way through the second book, he brings in the great central text from Psalm 90 which runs like a refrain throughout the rest of Book II and on throughout Book III,forming the basis for a sustained set of considerations on the comfort to be found in "the truth of God" :

> The prophet sayth in the psalme / *Scuto circumdabit te veritas eius / non timebis a timore nocturno / a sagitta volante in die, a negocio perambulante in tenebris, ab incursu & demonio meridiano :* (12) The trouth of god shall compasse the about with a pavice, thow shall not be aferd of the nightes feare, nor of the arrow fleyng in the day, nor of the bysynes walkyng about in the darknesses / nor of the incursion or invacion of the devill in the mydde day

The intricacy of the discussion that lies ahead is at once shown here as More now proceeds to repeat, eleven times in one page, that key word *pavis :* the ancient term for a long shield protecting the whole body :

> as god hath faythfully promisid to protect & defend those that faythfully will dwell in the trust of his help / so will he truly perform yt / And the that such one art, will the trouth of his promise defend, not with a litell round buckeler that scant can couer the hed, but with a long large pavice, that couereth all along the bodye, made as holy saynt Barnard sayth brode above with the godhed, & narrow beneth with the manhed / so that this pavice is our saviour christ hym selfe.
>
> And yet is not this pauice like other pauices of this world, which are not made but in such wise, as while it defendith one part, the man may be woundid vppon the tother / but this pavise is such / that as the prophet sayth / it shall rownd about enclose & compase the / so that thyn ennymye shall hurt thy sowle on no side. For *Scuto* sayth he / *circumdabit te veritas eius* / with a pauise shall his trouth environ & compase the round aboute. [ff. 85-6 ; pp. 237-8]

Using this winding, repetitive method of discourse, More then dissects the text, part by part, seeing in it four kinds of temptations or tribulations by which we are beset by the devil.

1) "*Non timebis a timore nocturno,* thow shalt not be aferd of the fere of the night" [f. 86 ; p. 238] - which includes temptations that come from an overly scrupulous conscience, from the "pusillanimity" of a "timorous mind." This is a fear that in its worst form leads to the temptation of suicide.

2) "*a sagitta volante in die*" :"from the arrow fleyng in the daye" -- that is, "the arrow of pride, with which the devill temptith a man" in prosperity. [f. 117; p.281]

3) "*negocium perambulans in tenebris*": "bysines walkyng in the darknes[sys]" [f. 122 ; p. 289] -- business which, as I have said above, includes both the busy seeking after fleshly pleasures and the busy seeking after worldly wealth.

Such are the three lesser fears that constitute the matter of Book II. This whole part of the treatise is pursued in a tantalizing manner of deliberate digression and casual divagation that is foreshadowed in chapter 11, where the basic text is introduced, with Antony saying: "And therfor I shall peraduenture / except any ferther thyng fall in our waye, with treatyng of those ij verses fynysh & end all our mater." [f. 85 ; p. 237] What falls

in our way from here on happens to be about two-thirds of the entire treatise ! This consciously ambling and rambling manner is openly maintained by many different asides, such as the explanation that occurs in the middle of the discussion of devilish delusions : "That were somwhat out of our purpose Cosyn," says Antony, "sith as I told you before, the man were not than in sorow and tribulacion wherof our mater speketh / but in a perilous mery mortall temptacion / so that yf we shuld besid our own mater that we haue in hand, entre into that to / we might make a lenger warke betwene both, than we could well finish this day / How be it to be short..." [f. 102 ; p. 260]; and so he continues the admittedly "irrelevant" discussion for a dozen more pages. Similarly,Antony promises to "touch one word or twayn of the third temptacion... & than will we call for our dener." At this suggestion Vicent, always concerned for his uncle's health, pleads: "for our lordes sake take good hede vncle that you forbere not your dener ouer longe." "Fere not that cosyn I warrant you, "Antony replies," for this piece will I make you but short ." [f. 122 ; p. 288] The piece of course runs on for twenty more pages.

The whole of Book II thus serves as a variegated interlude, or as a leisurely prologue, before the main event, which now rushes upon us in the form of the fourth temptation, to which More devotes the whole of Book III, the longest book of all :

> The fourth temptacion Cosyn that the prophet speketh of in the fore remembrid psalme... ys playne open persecucion / which is touchid in these wordes / *Ab incursu & demonio meridiano* / And of all his temptacions this is the most perilouse, the most bittre sharpe, & the most rigorouse /
>
> ******
>
> for in this temptacion he sheweth hymselfe such as the prophet nameth hym, *Demonium meridianum* / the midday devill / he may be so lightsomely seen with the yie of a faythfull soule by his fierce furyouse assawt & incursion / for therfor sayth the prophet, that the trouth of god shall compasse that man round about / that dwellith in the faythfull hope of his helpe / with a pavice *Ab incursu & demonio meridiano* from the devill of the mydday / [f. 145 ; pp. 319-20]

Here, ten pages along in Book III, is the climax of the mode of repetitious winding by which More pursues his tenacious explication of the basic text ; we are now some eighty pages away from the point at which the text was introduced, and yet the word *pavis* is still ringing, and will continue to ring, as the keynote of the faithful man's belief. In this way the last two books are firmly tied together, while More's explication of the text gradually develops, through its network of repetitions, into an abiding proof that the *pavis* of God is always present to protect the faithful amid the apparent chaos of ordin-

ary life. As the explication weaves its way among the illustrative, gossipy anecdotes of Book II, we come to feel that the disorder of life is being brought under the steady control of reason. More's biblical explication, we might say, gradually weaves a net that subdues the unruly world of anecdote. Yet even this is not enough for full comfort. The reasoning mind of man may do much, More seems to say, but the most difficult problem and the richest comfort remain to be explored.

.5.

As the third book opens, the problem is abruptly brought before us, as Vincent enters with the news (just received in a letter from Constantinople) that the Turk is preparing a mighty army which may in all likelihood be aimed at Hungary. We have returned with a jolt to the threat with which the treatise had begun, a threat whose imminence has gradually receded as More's discourse has turned to lesser matters. But now the historical situation, both for the Hungarians and for Thomas More, is brought in hard upon us, especially when Vincent says: "I here at myn eare some of our owne here among vs, which with [in] these few yeres could no more haue born the name of a Turke than the name of the devill, begyn now to fynd litle faute therin / ye and some to prayse them to, litle & litle as they may / more glad to fynd fawtes at euery state of christendome, prestes, princes / rites / ceremonies / sacramentes laues and custumes spirituall temporall & all." [ff. 139v-140 ; p. 312] And there are, he says, even some who "talke as though they loked for a day whan with a turne vnto the Turkes fayth, they shulbe made maisters here, of trew christen mennys bodies, & owners of all their goodes." [f. 142 ; p. 315]

Here, then, in this incursion of the mid-day devil lies the ultimate temptation by which the soul of a man will stand or fall. In such a plight the theoretical wisdom of the ages, as presented in Book I, will not suffice; nor will the toughest reasoning powers of man, struggling to subdue the world about him, as represented in Book II. There is, in this ultimate danger, only one resource : to turn within the self and give the mind to meditation on the great central facts of the faith : the vanity of worldly things, the facts of death, judgment, hell, and heaven, and above all the great central fact of Christ's Passion.

Thus in Book III More presents what might be called a treatise on the art of meditation. He advises what topics to seek out, and he shows by brief examples how to meditate upon these ancient themes : *contemptus mundi*, the Last Things, and the Passion. By such meditation, More

shows, a man may move with the help of reason into a realm that includes and yet transcends reason: the realm of the affections, the emotions, where man may find his ultimate comfort in his love of God. All this More explains in two powerful passages : one, very early in Book III (chapter 3), and the other near the end, in chapter 24. These two passages enclose all the intervening matter within the love of God and sum up the culminating purpose of More's final book :

> yf a man had in his hart / so diepe a desiere & love longyng to be with god in hevyn to haue the fruicion of his gloriouse face, as had those holy men that were martires in old tyme / he wold no more now styke at the payne that he must passe betwene / than at that tyme those old holy martirs did / But alas our faynt & feble fayth, with our love to god lesse than luke warm, by the fyery affeccion that we bere to our own filthy flesh, make vs so dull in the desiere of hevyn, that the sodayne drede of euery bodely payne, woundeth vs to the hart & strikith our devocion ded / And therfor hath there euery man Cosyn/ as I said before, mich the more nede to thinke vppon this thing many tyme & oft aforehand, ere any such perell fall/ & by mich devisyng thervppon before they se cause to fere yt, while the thing shall not apere so terrible vnto them / reason shall bettre entre, & thorow grace workyng with their diligens/ engendre & set sure, not a sodayne sleyght affeccion of sufferaunce for godes sake / but by a long contynaunce, a strong depe rotid habit / [ff. 147v-148 ; p. 324]

> why shuld not than reason I say thus fortherid with fayth & grace, be mych more able, first to engendre in vs such an effeccion / and after by long & depe meditacion therof, so to contynew that affeccion, that it shall tourne into an habitual 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 / [f. 193v ; p. 400]

For this purpose, then, he proceeds to develop these affections : contempt of the world, leading gradually to a withdrawal of the mind into its interior citadel, where it is free to meditate upon the three most important facts : the pains of hell, the joys of heaven, and the Passion of Christ. The Passion, indeed is never out of More's mind, from beginning to end of this final book. Meditation on this theme is briefly mentioned in the first chapter, as the essential exercise to fortify the heart, with the result that the theme thus lies in the background of the discussion of the *contemptus mundi ;* and then it comes forward into dominance throughout the latter half of Book III, beginning with the sixteenth chapter and culminating in the detailed memorials of the Passion, the mental communion, of chapters 23 and 27 :

> So say I now / for paynefull deth also, that yf we could & wold with dew compassion, conceyve in our myndes, a right Imagynacion & remembraunce of Christes byttre paynefull passion, of the many sore blody

strokes [that] the cruell tourmentours with roddes & whyppes gaue hym vppon euery part of his holy tendre body/ the scornefull crowne of sharp thornes beten down vppon his holy hed, so strayght & so diepe, that on euery part his blyssid blode yssued owt & stremyd down / his lovely lymmys drawen & strechid out vppon the crosse to the Intollerable payne of his forebeten & sorebeten vaynes and synewes/new felyng with the cruell strechyng & straynyng payne far passyng any crampe in euery part of his blyssid body atones / Than the greate long nayles cruelly dryven with hamers thorow his holy handes and fete / & [in] this horryble payne lyft vpp & let hang with the payce (13) of all his body beryng down vppon the paynfull woundid places so grevouly percyd with nayles ... yf we wold I say remembre these thinges in such wise, as wold god we wold / I verely suppose that the consideracion of his incomparable kyndnes, could not fayle in such wise to inflame our kay cold hartes, & set them on fire in his love / that we shuld fynd our selfe not onely content, but also glad & desierouse to suffre deth for his sake [ff. 202v-203 ; pp. 415-16]

As the minds of uncle and nephew move toward this affectionate meditation, we notice that the nephew comes to play a greater part throughout the final book. He does not talk half the time, but he comes near to sharing a quarter of the talk ; and there is throughout the final book much more true engagement and "enterparlyng" of minds than we have seen in the first two books. There, Vincent was presented as callow, naive, badly in need of instruction. But here in Book III we note that it is the nephew who tells, with subtle insight, that story of the great man of the church who was never "saciate of heryng his own prayse." (ch.10) One has the feeling from this tale of flattery, and from the nephew's frequent, vigorous, and highly intelligent intervention in the last-book, that his mind has been aroused and strengthened, and that young and old have been truly brought together within the flexible and all-inclusive movement of the dialogue. This final accordance of human minds, within the pavis of truth, represents the carefully designed fulfillment of the anguished plea for help with which the nephew has first entered upon the scene :

O my good vncle, even these same selfe wordes wherwith ye well prove, that because of goddes own gracious presence, we can not be left comfortles / make me now fele & perceve, what a mysse of mush comfort we shall haue, when ye be gone.

* * *

And sith that I now se the lyklyhod, that when ye be gone, we shalbe sore destytute of any such other lyke / Therfor thynketh me / that god of dewtie byndeth me to sew [to] you now good vncle, in this short tyme that we haue you, that yt may like you agaynst these grete stormes of tribulacions / with which both I & all myne are sore beten alredy / And now vppon the comyng of this cruell Turke, fere to fall in ferre mo / I may lern of you such plentie of good councell & comfort, that I may with the same layd vp in remembrauns, gouerne and staye the ship of ower kyndred, & kepe yt a flote from perill of spirituall drounnyng [ff. 2v-3 ; pp. 145-6].

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NOTES

This essay represents a revision of materials presented in two lectures : one delivered at the conference held by the Compagnons de Thomas More in Brussels, December, 1962, the occasion on which Moreana was founded ; and the other at the annual meeting of the St. Thomas More Project at Yale University, December, 1963.

1) Nicholas Harpsfield, The Life and Death of Sr Thomas Moore, ed. E. V. Hitchcock, Early English Text Society, vol. 186, (Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 134.

2) See Leland Miles, "With a coal ? The Composition of Thomas More's Dialogue of Comfort," Philological Quarterly, 45,(1966),

3) See The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton University Press, 1947), letters numbered 201, 204, 209, 210, 217, 218.

4) See the commentary at beginning and end of the treatise in More's Workes (1557), pp. 1350, 1404. It is not clear whether Harpsfield is referring to the English or the Latin treatise on the Passion ; probably he is not distinguishing between them.

5) Quotations are given from the text, based upon this manuscript, now being prepared for publication in the Yale Edition of the Works of St. Thomas More. Quotations are here given by permission of the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, who have generously granted permission to use this manuscript as the basis of the Yale text. Bracketed words in the quotations represent the work of a second, correcting hand in the manuscript. Abbreviations have here been silently expanded. Folio-numbers refer to the Corpus Christi MS. For convenience, page-references have also been given to the modern edition most easily available, that in the Everyman Library. Occasional estimates in terms of pages are made according to the Everyman edition.

6) See the famous letter in which Margaret reports the long dialogue with her father in the Tower : Correspondence, ed.Rogers, letter 206, esp. p. 516 : "Doughter Margaret, we two haue talked of this thing ofter than twise or thrise."

7) I am assuming that Rastell is right in saying,in the heading to the Dialogue in 1557, that it was written in the Tower of London ; the whole tenor of the work would lead one to think this must be true. But in fairness we should note that Rastell also says that the English treatise on the Passion was written in the Tower ; this cannot be wholly true,since a letter written by More from Willesden refers to this treatise : see More's Selected Letters, ed. Elizabeth Frances Rogers (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 185-8.

8) portuouse : see OED, portas : a portable breviary.

9) heres : ears ; such aspirated spelling occurs frequently in the Corpus Christi MS.

10) the sone : thee, son.

11) Now in the Beinecke Library of Yale University ; it is bound up with the Book of Hours in which More wrote his well-known English prayer. A facsimile reproduction of the pages in which More wrote his marginalia will soon be published by the Yale University Press.

12) In the Corpus Christi MS. abbreviations of the Latin are here filled out by the second hand.

13) payce : see OED, peise : weight.

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