Communication and the Construction of the Ideal in the West

by

Adriana Dragomir

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Centre for Comparative Literature
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the conceptualization of the ideal society in Western culture in relation to changes in communication modes. The utopian discourse is defined by a concern with the relationship between language and reality. I explore this concern as a reflection of the theoretical disposition invited by changes in communication modes, which are perceived as crises of representation.

Plato and Thomas More’s enlightened communities in the Republic and Utopia reflect comparable idealistic perspectives on education. In my view, this optimism stems from the social reality of growing literacies with the advent of the alphabet and printing, respectively. I contend that these writers are animated by an ethical impulse to teach their readers that language is representation. From the vantage point of this knowledge, each individual may employ language symbolically in order to create and perpetuate a moral and spiritual mode of thought. I argue that the discourse of the ideal is the symbolic expression of humanity’s engagement with death, the ultimate existential concern made acute by the aspect of historical discontinuity in the crisis of representation. Plato and More exhibit comparable efforts to open to their readers the superior
space of critical reflexivity which they themselves inhabit. From this conceptual, pre-representational space of conscious choice, language is subjected to achieving spiritual progress. I introduce the concept of post-utopia, which describes a pragmatic moment when the relationship between author and the ideal society is brought into the foreground and reinforced as a way of addressing concerns with textual authority. I examine these developments in Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, François Rabelais’s episode of the Abbaye de Thélème in *Gargantua*, and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. These authors draw on the ideologies of representation inherent in utopian discourse, and position the authorial figure as link between scriptural teleology and history, ensuring spiritual and societal betterment in the textual cultures of late antiquity and early modernity. The figure of the author emerges as a symbol of history and of man’s ability to assume the limits of the mind and of language.
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I was seven and ill with scarlet fever when my mother gave me my first epic to read and got me hooked on books. She took responsibility for it and always encouraged my interest in literature. Passionately and unselfishly she helped me care for my daughter who was born as I was starting to write this thesis. I could not have completed this work without her generous help.

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Introduction

“the making is a remaking”

Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking

Historicizing Utopia: Communication, Representation, and the Discourse of the Ideal

In his 1973 Utopiques: Jeux d’espaces, Louis Marin argues that utopia, the self-referential, ambiguous concept meaning both ‘no-place’ (from the Greek ‘outopos’) and ‘good place’ (‘eutopos’) consecrated by Thomas More’s eponymous fiction proposes an equivalence between its referent (“ce dont elle parle, son projet spécifique”) and its codes of emission, reception, and transmission.¹ A utopia, he suggests, engages the reader in a game of significations; it invites him to insinuate his own image of the future in the discontinuities of the discourse. For Marin, the concept of utopia mirrors the change in the modes of representation in early modern Europe. It is “liée au livre, au monde du discours comme articulation du monde et de l’histoire, à l’imprimerie et aux signes que la Renaissance substitue, dans la visualité, au monde de la parole et de l’écoute” (92). This perspective is reinforced in De la représentation (1994), where Marin argues that the books mentioned in More’s text, belonging to both the Old and the New Worlds, are the utopian blind center - the non-place - representing the emerging industrial order.²


Jean-Jacques Wunenburger argued pessimistically that utopia, consecrating “avec évidence la triomphe de l’espace visuel de la page sur le temps millénariste,”\textsuperscript{3} stands for the crisis of the Western imaginary defined as a ludic space for creativity: “… ensemble de productions, mentales ou matérialisées dans des œuvres, à base d'images visuelle … et langagières …, formant des ensembles cohérents et dynamiques, qui relèvent d'une fonction symbolique au sens d'un emboîtement de ses propres et figurés.”\textsuperscript{4} More’s 1516 work marks the moment when printing, ‘confiscating’ the circulation of signs, standardizing them and substituting text to experience, generates a discourse of the ideal that bears in form and content the particularities of a new thinking mode characterized by “la clôture et … l’anesthésie de la pensée vivante, de la rêverie errante” (Wunenburger 2003, 123). Utopia “réduit le bonheur et la perfection à la logique d’un texte, elle la déroule avec la sècheresse linéaire d’une technique” (123).

Despite their different philosophical foci, each discussion conveys the view that the intricacies of \textit{Utopia}, both conceptual and literary, may be understood only when More’s text is read against its historical backdrop. Whether as a discursive space of neutrality between concept and history where affirmation and negation play against each other in fiction (Marin), or as the opposite of myth (Wunenburger), utopia is, more than anything, an intellectual tableau of its own era. Utopian discourse makes apparent the particular visuality associated with the novelistic fiction invited by a culture of print in Western Europe. The utopian representation allows for a temporal symbol such as the moon, for example, to be spatialized in the form of an island:


L’utopie est un discours, mais elle n’est pas le discours du concept: elle est le discours de la figure, un mode figurative particulier du discours: fiction, affabulation, récits “anthropomorphisés” et descriptions “concrètes,” roman exotique et tableau représentative, autant de caractères qui lui sont propres. … Mode figuratif du discours, l’utopie comme produit textuel de la pratique utopique occupe bien la distance écartant le oui du non, et le faux du vrai, mais comme la double figure, la représentation ambiguë, le tableau équivoque de la synthèse possible et de la différenciation productrice; de la réconciliation à venir et de la contradiction agissante; du concept et de l’histoire. (Marin 22 – 23, original emphasis)

Wunenburger argues that the fixity and enclosure of the island and ideal society in More’s *Utopia* reflect the symbolic impoverishment of the printed page:

Le riche environnement d’images et de symboles, substitut du livre dans l’ère antérieure, marquée par la rareté des medias, disparaît au profit du texte imprimé, trace abstraite, écran opaque entre les producteurs et consommateurs des signes, forme interchangeable et sans histoire; les fresques didactiques des églises sont relayées par la reproduction en grand nombre des textes bibliques. L’imprimerie participe ainsi à l’appauvrissement de l’iconosphère traditionnelle, elle-même médiatrice entre l’homme et le cosmos.

(Wunenburger 1979, 121-122)
Marin and Wunenburger’s historical perspective on the relationship between utopian thought and changes in modes of representation informs my discussion of the discourse of the ideal in this dissertation. At the same time, these scholars put forth different views of the relationship between utopia and the imaginary. Marin observes the ‘polysémie’ of the utopian figure that floats “dans l’éther de l’imaginaire” and carries its “couleurs diaprées, les phosphorescences, les surimpressions” (22). His concept of utopia reflects the imaginary’s dimensions of non-realizability and of perpetual reinvention which are projected upon the reader’s experience of the text. In contrast, Wunenburger emphasizes a prescriptivity that, in his opinion, refuses man his natural creative impulse and subsequently the ability to actively and freely harmonize with a universal and productive mythical thought. The subtle tension between these discussions draws attention to the vulnerability of history to theoretical abstraction and generalization. It reveals the difficulty in reaching an agreement over a concept that, I shall argue, speaks equally about historical circumstance and intellectual individuality, about cultural change and the author’s critical engagement with this change.

For a Humanistic Approach to Utopia: Culture and Individual in Dialogue

Wunenburger’s view that utopian discourse reflects the ‘closure’ of the printed page and Marin’s investigation into the textual intricacies of Utopia motivated me to look at possible relations between other visions of ideal societies and changes in communication modes in the West. In light of this perspective, I could envision a historical parallel between Plato’s conceptualization of an ideal state during the transition to alphabetic writing in ancient Greece, Thomas More’s vision of an ideal community constructed through human effort in early modern
print culture, and H.G. Wells’s anti-utopian stories\(^5\) written with the emergence of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century.

While recognizing the productivity of a historical methodology focused on media change, I observed that both scholars downplay the utopian thinker’s critical engagement with the cultural forces at work in his lifetime. To be sure, generalization and universalization are characteristics of theoretical and philosophical approaches to utopian thought. Ernst Bloch (1918), Karl Mannheim (1936), Tom Moylan (1986), Krishan Kumar (1987 and 1991), and Ruth Levitas (1990) speak of a utopian impulse or imagination. While acknowledging that utopia changes its form and content historically, the philosophical perspective foregrounds some essential aspect of humanity, which is a desire for a better way of life. More recently, Lyman Tower Sargent (2000) described utopianism as a form of social dreaming.

Frank and Fritzie Manuel’s *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979) constitutes an exception in that it attempts to integrate an examination of objective circumstance with an understanding of the author’s intellectual preoccupations. The ‘utopia-maker’ reflects his sociocultural moment and also rises above history in order to communicate something about the permanence of human nature: “The truly great utopian is a Janus-like creature, time-bound and free of time, place-bound and free of place. His duality should be respected and appreciated” (24). The Manuels’ larger scope is to show how the ideal reality was dreamed up in the West. At

\(^5\) In his 1967 *The Future as Nightmare. H.G. Wells and the Anti-utopians* (New York: Oxford University Press), Mark R. Hillegas observes that, many times, the anti-utopian/dystopian tradition is discussed in relation to the development of totalitarian societies in the twentieth century. This explanation, he says, is only partly satisfactory since it ignores the fact that the modern anti-utopian tradition developed in the interval between the 1890’s to World War I, with H.G. Wells’s stories “overwhelmingly the most important influences of this period” (4). He goes further to declare: “to an extraordinary degree the great anti-utopias are both continuations of the imagination of H.G. Wells and reactions against that imagination. […] Altogether, it is doubtful that without Wells the anti-utopian phenomenon would ever have taken the shape it has” (5).
the same time, one of their central arguments emerges from the historical contextualization of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, which is considered the first text to advance the idea that a better society may be constructed on earth through human effort. Interestingly, no connections are made from this perspective between *Utopia* and Plato’s argument, in the *Republic*, that the discursive practices of philosophy, conveying truths, are transformative for individual and society.

This dissertation aims to recover such connections in the history of utopian thought by suggesting that similar perspectives are favoured by comparable circumstances. The focus on changes in the material conditions of textuality in ancient Greece and in early modern Europe allowed me to observe that Plato’s *Republic* (c. 380 BCE), Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* (413 – 427), François Rabelais’s *Gargantua* (1534), Thomas More’s *Utopia*, and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627) are centered upon the idea that self-reflexive engagement with a written model of reality shapes a moral individual and community. Communication theorists and historians such as Walter Ong and Harold Innis and scholars working in the field of book history from Elizabeth Eisenstein to Martin Irvine and Adrian Johns have observed the intellectual effervescence that characterizes media transitions when established and emerging representation modes coexist, interact, and are critically engaged by their users. An intermedial history of communication has not yet been written to describe how the historical interactions between old and new media invited novel ways of self-exploration. Recent scholarship on media transitions by Solomon Marcus (2003) and David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (2004) favours the perspective, which I adopt because confirmed by text-based research, that these changes are defined first and foremost by heightened self-consciousness and critical reflection on the nature of representation. This dissertation argues that utopia’s emphasis on individual and social transformation - a notion
introduced by Plato and reinforced by Thomas More - is informed by a hermeneutic perspective that stems from the utopian thinker’s critical engagement with the Word during communication changes. I contend that new theoretical possibilities in this period facilitate the view that man can transform reality through discursive practices that convey the resilience of reason and the permanence of spirit. In my view, the Republic is the first discourse on the ideal society in the West to explore the limits of representation and exemplify how language can be forced against these limits through a symbolic mode of reading the self. It initiates a literary tradition that links the notion of an ideal society to rational criticism and self-transformative practice.

One important consequence of this approach is that the textual strategies of Utopia identified by Marin can no longer provide the theoretical matrix that makes possible the post-structuralist and Marxist interpretations of the ideal. Plato’s Republic reveals a comparable intricate design of narrative and dialogue, myth and dialectics that explores language’s representational nature. While confirming the appropriateness of the historicist model, this understanding undermines the view that utopia, as a discourse on the constructed nature of reality, was born with Thomas More’s work. My objective is to discuss each literary expression of the ideal against its own cultural context, reconstituted by scholarly studies, and against the author’s ideas on representation as expressed in the larger corpus of texts that constitute his oeuvre. I aim to address the tensions between a historical perspective, focused on the socio-political particularities of each vision of the ideal, and a theoretical prescriptivity that allows the appropriation of utopia for ideological projects.

I draw on Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, emphasizing the emotion-informed process of creation and the interdetermination of individual and culture. I advance a
methodology that allows me to combine the broad-stroke discussion of cultural change with the exploration of individual particularity. Interestingly, Cassirer refuses to read symbolic thought in relation to historical circumstances, an aspect that Gideon Freudenthal attributes to an effort to endow his philosophy with a pregnant idealistic dimension. Nevertheless, the notion of critical reflection, central to philosophical anthropology, allows a discussion of utopia as a mirror of communication changes which, in challenging representation, invite questions concerning the processual nature of thought and of language. As well, Cassirer’s view of cultural form as expression of the creative individual’s take on reality allows for an objectivity that ultimately validates the pedagogical mode seen by the philosopher to permeate all artistic creation.

Thora Ilin Bayer observes that at the core of Cassirer’s phenomenological argument is the perspective that the philosophical investigation of thought must begin with its expression in the written work: “The reflection of productive activity in the work is what creates the new sphere that is characteristically to be distinguished from that of mere ‘theory’ and that of mere ‘praxis’.” Accordingly, my efforts to show how the conceptualization of the ideal reflects cultural change are accompanied by close textual readings that reveal the intricate dynamics of thought and cultural history.

This work is informed by the humanistic view that creation reflects both emotional disposition and intellectual response to significant experiences. Utopia, I argue, reflects such a response to a change in the modes of communication. Solomon Marcus has shown that these

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7 Thora Ilin Bayer, Cassirer’s Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 185 and 190.
changes are perceived as crises because of a tension between the established modes of representation, which define the individual worldview, and the new modes of representation, which transform social reality. In other words, a change in communication enables an awareness of difference: differences between representations, differences between individual and social values. This difference is perceived in various degrees by all individuals. However, for the individual who is theoretically inclined or sensitive to shifts in language practice, awareness of difference causes more than a temporary discomfort and sense of inadequacy: it foregrounds the vulnerability of the inner worldview and of social reality to the instability of language, of representation.

The critical understanding that thought and the relationship between individual and community are vulnerable to changes in the material conditions of culture also allows the possibility, indicative of an ethical thinker, that representation may be used to enable spiritual progress. I shall argue that Plato and Thomas More create symbolic representations perceived to communicate a quality of permanence in the soul. Moreover, the reality of a growing literacy in ancient Greece and early modern Europe invites, for these authors, the vision of a man empowered by the critical reflection that results from learning.

**From Crisis to Self-Transcendence: The Author of Utopia as Ethical Figure**

I wish briefly to describe my position in this work in relation to concepts of media determinism, given my argument that utopian thought emerges in response to new communication technologies and integrates the conceptualization possibilities these technologies

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invite. I do share with the determinists the view that changes in communication challenge the individual worldview and enable new creative and social practices. However, my discussion of the ideal emphasizes the author’s critical engagement with culture. I take into account the tension between social transformation, on the one hand, and the parallel critical detachment of the media theorist, of the philosopher, that makes the determinist discourse possible in the first place, on the other hand.

The theoretical nature of the discourse in the *Republic* and *Utopia* conveys the reflexive disposition invited by the crisis of representation associated with the communication change. This crisis is perceived as a tension between individual thought and social practice. The vision of community as disintegrating multiplicity invites in an ethical thinker the impulse to project learning as an opportunity for transformation. Reading enables self-reflection as texts make visible the Other’s existential concerns. To practice self-reflection and to understand that the mind creates its modalities of expression is to become an intrinsic part of the spiritual community that is humanity. Such is the teleological, symbolic interpretation of reality that both Plato and More propose as the fundamental social practice underlying the ideal society. Their texts must be read, therefore, not simply for the productive ways in which language informs reality. These utopias convey a similar ethical stance that overcomes the common accusations of escapism; the text self-awardedly draws on the inseparability of language and thought to invite an understanding of how learning transforms life. My emphasis on the authors’ efforts to subject the new media to their intellectual projects echoes Harold Innis’s argument that man observes media’s powerful influence over individual and society and attempts to take advantage of it.\(^9\) It constitutes the main

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point of difference between my perspective in this dissertation and Marshall McLuhan’s focus on the effects of technology on consciousness, for example.

However, there are affinities between the perspective which I have taken and McLuhan’s argument that words are reality-shaping instruments. Like McLuhan, I draw this understanding from Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms. We also recognize a relationship between the emergence of an alphabetic culture and philosophical thought in ancient Greece, and between the printing press and individualism. Finally, we share a belief that interplay exists between established and emerging media during communication changes: this relationship is thoroughly described by Eric Havelock in *Preface to Plato* (1963). McLuhan foregrounds Thomas More’s concern that the “homogeneity of the printed page seemed to inspire a subliminal faith in the validity of the printed Bible as bypassing the traditional oral authority of the Church.”¹⁰ My discussion of More’s critical engagement with a symbolic mode of thought is paralleled by an exploration of the creative and pedagogic opportunities provided by the new medium. In my view, More never loses the humanistic enthusiasm for literacy. I argue that *Utopia* itself is a discourse on the possibility to employ the written word in order to achieve a suprahistorical consciousness of the direct relationship between sin and representation, and therefore as opportunity for spiritual progress.

The focus on reflexivity enabled me to address the problem of visibility of the utopian author in his text. Speaking of More, Wunenburger notes that “L’utopiste se retire de l’œuvre dépersonnalisée et laisse parler un libre jeu de formes” (Wunenburger 1979, 153), while Louis

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Marin argues that More ‘erased’ himself as author by constructing an identity as both “a character in his book and … as a historically existing figure, as a real representation.”¹¹ Stephen Greenblatt takes the middle ground by asserting that More’s intellectual identity is found in the tension-wrought space defined by his private convictions and a fabricated public career, and that these tensions are reflected in Utopia.¹² At the other end of the interpretative spectrum is Richard Marius, who offers a biographical account of More as conflicted person, torn between sexual desire and religious beliefs. Marius sees Utopia as an indicator of More’s puritanism, specific to a medieval mentality rather than to the open-mindedness of the humanist.¹³

With regards to Plato, Norbert Blössner (2007) observes that the philosopher hides behind the fictional characters of the Republic, which makes it difficult to clearly grasp his ideas.¹⁴ Mary Margaret McCabe (2006) argues that, by refusing to appear in the dialogue, Plato distances himself from his characters in order to engage the reader in a more productive dialogue, to make him think for himself.¹⁵ These different perspectives indicate a difficulty, facilitated particularly by post-structuralism, in understanding whether utopia, as product of an individual, conveys the universal values traditionally associated with myth, and if not, identifying the individual views it communicates.


The perspective that I have adopted in this dissertation is that the utopian author is an educator concerned primarily with the reader’s spiritual fate, and that his philosophical allegiance may be read in the existential concerns with meaning, death, and purpose that inform his work. Barry Sandywell observes that the historical and social reconfigurations enabled by communication changes have made clear that man’s engagement with new modes of representation are intrinsically linked to the way he positions himself in relation to the new reality: “As in earlier periods of rapid change, the disruption and creativity released by new communication technologies has instructed theory that ‘sense-making’ activities are inseparable from ‘self-making’ praxis.” Platon and More envision an individual who accomplishes self-realization and sees his strength and his vulnerability reflected in the values that draw together his community. But what reality do these values represent, and how do better critical-interpretative practices address these spiritual preoccupations? The central role that Plato assigns to the afterlife in the Republic suggests that at the core of his philosophical project lies one of the most profound human concerns, the concern with death. The philosophical discourse, he promises, helps its hearer or reader make good choices in life and in the afterlife. The problem of immortality is thus inextricably linked to the notions of happiness and justice. More shows a similar existential preoccupation in Utopia. Drawing upon the scriptural promise of a redemptive immortality and on the potential of interpretation - standing for learning - to pose spiritual challenges, he suggests a perspective that informs a life lived in humility.

Both authors posit truth outside language and its reflection in the soul, an aspect that reflects both belief in an objective metaphysical truth and awareness of the instability of the

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written word. At the same time, they draw upon the epistemological instrumentality of language to argue for the possibility of transcendence. The written discourse, inviting a critical disengagement from the sensible world, enables displacement towards a superior reality. In doing so, this discourse becomes fundamental to the project of the ideal. The author’s withdrawal from the text may have to do with an effort to advance the transcendental mode of thought that informs this discourse as an exemplary social practice. He emerges as a figure of intermediateness at the very moment he proposes a spiritual reality, which is also profoundly human, as a basis for the ideal community.

The view of utopian thought as a response to communication change cannot be separated from a philosophical approach to the creative product in general. For Cassirer, this product is the expression of the human search for truth, meaning, and happiness. I position my work at the intersection of two sociological critical models, as identified by Austin Harrington: the humanistic perspective, using historical contextualization to unveil the layers of signification embedded in the formal structures of the artwork, and the anthropological model, revealing the difficulty of a transcultural approach to utopian thought.\(^\text{17}\) My view of utopia as an ethical gesture that offers an interpretative model in response to a perceived representation crisis echoes George Herbert Mead’s concept of ‘gesture’ as a socially significant act. Utopia is a discourse that speaks of the creative ‘I’\(^\text{18}\) and suggests that it may function as an engine of change and as a symbol of the nature of individual participation in the community of meaning.

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Repeating Histories: Constructing Continuities

The *Republic* and *Utopia* have traditionally been compared because of the powerful influence exerted by their discursive models upon Western social and political thought. Moreover, these works have been individually discussed as reflections of their authors’ progresivist enthusiasm for literacy in their respective transitional contexts. Finally, Plato and More’s theoretical and ethical contributions have been observed by Ernst Cassirer (1953). However, a discussion from a communication perspective, allowing an examination of these authors’ theoretical preoccupations in relation to their educational projects, has not, to my knowledge, been undertaken.

The methodology employed in this dissertation allowed me to unveil more profound similarities between Platonic and Morean thought than previously observed. It also enabled me to provide an original perspective on the relationship between their works and subsequent literary visions of ideal communities. The idea, central to both the *Republic* and *Utopia*, that critical engagement with language enables spiritual progress becomes fundamental for writers who attempt to influence the conditions of authorship in the textual cultures of late antiquity and early modernity. The ideal becomes the authorial promise of meaning, a privileged moment that depends on participation in the textual community. Augustine single-handedly establishes a religious framework for the intrinsic relationship between textuality and self-knowledge in Western thought. The vision of two realms, one defined by the love of God, the other by the love of the self, in *De Civitate Dei*, cannot be separated from the temporal unfolding of the author’s own fallen humanity in the *Confessions* and by the request, in the same work, that he be read according to the scriptural demand of charity.
Augustine’s separation of a textual, history-bound humanity from a metaphysical ideal may be traced back to the Platonic conceptualization of an objective reality of the Forms. However, different understandings of the Word may be read in Plato’s configuration of language as dialectics, creating a symbolic reality of the ideal city, and Augustine’s divinely created City of God. The postponement of truth, recalling Plato’s gradual enlightening of the slave in the allegory of the cave in the Republic VII, forces man - author and reader alike - into a process of unending self-evaluation. This deferral depends on a constant effort to understand the past self, which however is only the unstable representation of a mental representation of an action. Whereas Plato’s dialectics define a forward-oriented intellectual progress that ultimately enables one to recuperate the truth written in the soul, Augustine suggests that reason and language bear the mark of the fall. All progress entails an ability to look back upon oneself through the spiritual authority of Scripture. Ultimately, Augustine subjects spiritual becoming to the divine grace that guided his experience of reading and writing in order to enable the vision of a post-textual illumination and peace.

A similar relationship of continuity-discontinuity is made apparent by a comparison between Thomas More’s vision of a suprahistorical ideal in Utopia, mirroring the practice of critical reflection upon language and man’s nature proposed by its discourse, and François Rabelais’s Gargantua, where the best society, represented by the Abbaye de Thélème, is the interpretative community of Pantagruelists grouped around the first Pantagruelist who is the author himself. As in Augustine, the very existence of this society depends on language’s semiotic instability, demanding that all communication be carried out through an interpretative perspective defined by love. Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis more clearly establishes the historical
dimension of the trajectory of progress that remains implicit in *Utopia*. The beginning and the end of this trajectory depend on the author’s ability to recuperate spiritual experiences associated with man’s privileged status within creation. He achieves this recuperation through exceptional interpretative acts that reinforce language’s inability to represent intellectual content. The unstable textual meaning strengthens the figure of the author who becomes a symbol of mediation between scriptural teleology and man’s historical self-exploration.

It becomes apparent that a methodology that combines an examination of pragmatic aspects of media change, apparent in the works discussed here, and philosophical anthropology’s developmentalism allows the conceptualization of symmetries - of comparable intellectual dispositions that emerge in response to comparable cultural contexts - in the history of utopian literature. It reveals similarities between texts separated by a whole millennium and contrasts between works that follow each other at short intervals. This methodology allowed me to observe that the Western utopia is informed by the idea that reality is constituted by way of interpretation. At all times, the Western ideal speaks of the importance of the Word for self-exploration.

Cassirer notes how Plato’s argument that man may know himself only in his political and social life marks a turning point in Western thought. The interpretative metaphor employed by Cassirer to describe Plato’s unprecedented mode of symbolic knowledge is most appropriate for my argument:

The phenomena we encounter in our individual experience are so various, so complicated and contradictory that we can scarcely disentangle them. Man is to be studied not in his individual life but in his political and social life. Human nature, according to Plato, is like a
difficult text, the meaning of which has to be deciphered by philosophy. But in our personal experience this text is written in such small characters that it becomes illegible. The first labor of philosophy must be to enlarge these characters. Philosophy cannot give us a satisfactory theory of man until it has developed a theory of the state. The nature of man is written in capital letters in the nature of the state. Here the hidden meaning of the text suddenly emerges, and what seemed obscure and confused becomes clear and legible.\textsuperscript{19}

Barry Sandywell recuperates the historical perspective avoided by Cassirer and argues that writing, as “the prototypical reflexive technology” (108), endowed Western philosophical thought with its hermeneutic nature:

…the communicative skills literacy creates facilitate self-analysis and self-reflection by enabling human beings to disengage from their immediate involvements and follow more systematic modes of monitored reflection and individualized praxis. New styles of defining and relating to truth become possible and with these new possibilities of cultural praxis and social life. (108)

Moreover, Sandywell differentiates between reflection, which is an evaluative thinking mode oriented towards observing the ‘naturalness’ of the object-world, and reflexivity, defined as a theoretical, transcendental aspect of thought informed by the understanding that reality is

\textsuperscript{19} Ernst Cassirer, \textit{An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944) 63.
intelligible and knowledge of truth is possible. While evaluation is credited with identifying the historical and phenomenological limits that reflexivity endeavours to challenge, it must not be assumed that reflection necessarily leads to reflexivity. A reflexive attitude is informed by an impulse to question the conventional aspects of existing practices and to empower the individual and community to become responsible actors within their respective realities. The concern with representation is the definitory characteristic of reflexive thought and discourse: “The experience of reflexivity historicizes all points of origin as artifacts generated by the rules and conventions of inquiry. Reflexive discourses make the rules and conventions of representation their topic by viewing objects as a site of rhetorical work, and thus problematizing taken-for-granted attitudes and intentionalities” (8).

The written word, the concept of reflexivity, the problem of representation, and the discourse on the ideal reality thus appear to be inextricably linked in Western culture. I aim to recuperate this dynamics in Plato, Augustine, More, Rabelais, and Bacon’s texts. It is my contention that understanding the cultural conditions under which these authors engage with representation and how they position themselves in relation to new developments in textual culture provides an appropriate basis for reconciling the historical and theoretical perspectives on utopian thought. The Western literary ideal preserves the Platonic view that the written word enables individuality, freedom of spirit, and ultimately self-realization. Moreover, the authorial figure remains, up to the seventeenth century, the mediator of spiritual transformation and a lucid consciousness that this transcendence is not metaphysical but reflects, in Cassirean terms, the expressive impulse that defines human spirit. Man engages with life in order to explore and
challenge his limits. The author, standing for reflexivity and inviting critical consciousness in the reader, affirms this transformative action as the highest expression of humanity.

In Chapter 1, I describe how communication change creates the intellectual conditions for questions that concern the relationships between language and reality and between the individual and society. I argue that utopian thought originates in this theoretical consciousness, which is mirrored by the transcendental nature of the space where discourse produces an ideal, symbolic reality. I introduce the concept of post-utopia, describing a pragmatic moment when the relationship between author and the ideal inherent to utopian thought is brought into the foreground and reinforced as a way of addressing concerns with textual authority. The figure of the author emerges as a symbol of history and of man’s ability to reach the limits of linguistic knowledge. This author reinforces the utopian vision of a post-textual experience of ideality as a way of strengthening the cultural position of the written word and implicitly his own.

In Chapter 2, I discuss Plato’s views on representation in relation to the developments in communication in ancient Greece. I argue that the intricate relationship between the mythical worldview and his philosophy of the Forms and transformative dialectical discourse is informed by the conceptualizing possibilities enabled by the phonetic symbol. My discussion of the discursive strategies of the Republic draws on recent integrative studies that observe the need to explore the relation between the philosophical and literary aspects of Plato’s work. I argue that Plato’s pedagogic stance is visible in the ways that he combines story and dialogue, dialectics and myth, to activate the transformative aspect of language.

20 While writing the introduction to this thesis, I have come across Miriam Byrd’s 2007 article “The Summoner Approach: A New Method of Plato Interpretation.” In the Journal of the History of Philosophy 45.3 (2007): 365-381. In contrast to the ‘dramatic’ and ‘doctrinary’ traditions, Byrd argues for a necessity to include the literary aspects of Plato’s work in order to understand the philosopher’s effort to stimulate active learning in his readers.
Chapter 3 explores the conceptualization of the ideal society as body in Thomas More’s *Utopia* as a response to a concern with interpretation in the context of early modern print culture. I draw on Gerard Wegemer (1996) and Jennifer Summit’s (2008) observations on More’s preoccupation with pride to argue that, in this period of increasing educational opportunities, *Utopia* warns of the difficulties that learning may pose to salvation. It reflects More’s critical views on Pico’s esoteric hermeneutics particularly as they apply to scriptural reading. The preoccupation with interpretation and pride remains visible from More’s early writings, when he chooses to re-present Pico through his piety rather than through his exceptional learning, to More’s later involvement in the Reformation debates. Revalorized through Thomas Linacre’s translations in early sixteenth century Europe, the Galenic model of the dual body, matter and soul, conciliates secular learning and piety. Language is turned against itself in the fiction of the body that is *Utopia* to construct a discourse of humility that strengthens the spiritual community.

In Chapter 4, I examine Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, François Rabelais’s episode of the Abbaye de Thélème in *Gargantua*, and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. I propose that the ideologies of representation inherent in utopian thought gain full expression in textual practices which foreground the questions of knowledge and authorship that inform the construction of the ideal in these works. Augustine’s theology integrates Plato’s demarcation between two realities, the suprasensible and eternal and the sensible and changing. Against the backdrop of early Christianity, an earthly ideal becomes downright impossible. In early modern print culture, Rabelais moves the ideal into the alternate space of fiction, while Bacon projects it into the future where it marks the end of a trajectory of scientific discovery. The gap between meaning and representation reinforces scriptural authority and defines a parallel space of action for the author,
who facilitates the reader’s spiritual self-exploration. Central to the three texts are the ideas that human condition is defined through the limits of representation, and that man’s interpretative struggles are directed towards recreating an experience of grace.
Chapter 1

Reflexivity and Transcendence: The Symbolic Production of the Ideal

I begin this methodological chapter with Solomon Marcus’s observation that changes in communication invite an intellectual mode of crisis best described as a sense of alienation resulting from a temporary difficulty of integrating the old modes of representation (permeating an existing worldview) and the new modes of representation (defining emerging social realities). This transition creates the conditions for a reflective consciousness focusing on the nature of language and implicitly upon the relationship between individual and society. This intellectual mode finds exceptional expression in Plato’s Republic and Thomas More’s Utopia, which are discussed as ethical efforts to reconcile language’s social function with its ability to convey truth-values pertaining to a universal humanity.

I integrate this image of media transition with Ernst Cassirer’s argument that consciousness operates symbolically through a synthesis between life and spirit, between universal value and its constructed expression in signs. Plato’s understanding (also perceived in the Sophists) that language is representation describes the theoretical moment observed by Marcus. Thomas More’s concerns with representation and interpretation in Utopia convey this reflective mood. I argue that the Republic and Utopia address the transition, marked by a critical consciousness of a tension between a metaphysically-conceptualized truth and its multiple representations, through the ‘vision’ of a suprahistorical ideal state of reflexive, transformative interpretative practice. I contend that both works are informed by the view that the limits of language may be confronted in a state of critical reflexivity. The processual nature of this reflexivity gains conceptual
expression as intermediateness, characteristic to a space between mind and language – ou-topos - where spiritual truth may be conveyed through symbolic expression.

At the same time, the symbolic ideal cannot be disentangled from the politics of self-legitimation in the emerging textual cultures. Plato’s vision of a learned community reinforces the difference, brought to fruition by Christian theology, between the author, who remembers truth, and reader, whose spiritual transformation occurs within the symbolic parameters defined by a creator. Thomas More presents himself as a fallible writer but also as superior consciousness whose role is to remind the reader that man’s spirituality consists particularly in the effort to constantly engage with fallibility. I draw on the ideologies of authorship inherent in the utopian discourse to theorize a post-utopian stance in Augustine, Rabelais, and Bacon. Their efforts to position the author as link between scriptural teleology and history reinforce the relationship between man’s spirit and societal betterment in the textual cultures of late antiquity and early modernity. Building upon the utopian view of the word as instrument of change, they advance an understanding of textuality as expression of grace and interpretation the sign that man is on the path towards the recovery of an ideal, post-textual experience of the divine.
1. Crisis: Individual versus Community

Solomon Marcus observes the media user’s sense of alienation and catastrophe and the acute perception of language’s representational nature during communication change:

Consider … the big change in the process of representation brought about by the development of speech and then by the invention of writing. At the moment of the appearance of any of such changes, it is perceived as a crisis; it is the crisis of the old means of representation that can no longer comply with the social needs, but it is also the crisis of the new means of representation, to which people are not yet adapted. The current lamentations over the rise of the information-computation are an example of this kind of crisis. … in the course of history, all great transformations of the means of representation were initially perceived as a catastrophe. They were accompanied by feelings of frustration and alienation. The new mode of representation then became gradually a routine until this routine also conflicted with new human and social needs, leading, with the evolution of human cognition, to new types of representation. (18 – 19)

David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins assert that during these intervals man tends to cling to the established media, felt to be expressively more appropriate:

…the introduction of a new technology always seems to provoke thoughtfulness, reflection, and self-examination in the culture seeking to absorb it. Sometimes this self-awareness takes the form of a reassessment of established media forms, whose basic
elements may now achieve a new visibility, may become a source of historical research
and renewed theoretical speculation. What is felt to be endangered and precarious
becomes more visible and more highly valued.\textsuperscript{21}

The disengagement from established and emerging representational modes allows the realization
that the process of representation is one of mediation in which an object gains expression through
the interpretative action of the mind.

But as soon as one becomes aware of the non-identity between truth and its unstable
reflections, the understanding that mediation occurs through a mental image makes
representation suspect of “infinite regression” (Marcus 17, referencing Peirce). At the same time,
the self-consciousness allowed by this disengagement of the mind from the representation-
mediated reality invites the conceptualization of “an absolute object” at the limit of
representation.\textsuperscript{22} Without the intuition of a relationship between object and its representations,
says Peirce, signification could not occur:

It must in the first place like any other object have qualities independent of its meaning. It
is only through a knowledge of these that we acquire any information concerning the object
it represents. Thus, the word 'man' as printed, has three letters; these letters have certain
shapes, and are black. I term such characters, the material qualities of the representation. In

\textsuperscript{21} David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, “Toward an Aesthetics of Transition,” in Rethinking Media Change: The

\textsuperscript{22} Charles Sanders Peirce, Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce volume 1, edited by Charles Hartshorne
the 2nd place *a representation must have a real causal connection with its object.* If a weathercock indicates the direction of the wind it is because the wind really turns it round. If the portrait of a man of a past generation tells me how he looked it is because his appearance really determined the appearance of the picture by *a train of causation*, acting through the mind of the painter. If a prediction is trustworthy it is because those antecedents of which the predicted event is the necessary consequence had a real effect in producing the prediction. In the third place, every representation addresses itself to a mind. It is only in so far as it does this that it is a representation. The idea of the representation itself excites in the mind another idea and in order that it may do this it is necessary that some principle of association between the two ideas should already be established in that mind.23

The representation crisis may, then, be conceptualized as understanding of a tension between language’s signification and representation functions, between thought and its material expression, and between individual and the environment that endows this expression with signification. This tension emerges from an awareness of incongruence between the permanence that is perceived to be our inner world, in which truth is seen to reside, and a changing external reality. Brian O’Shaughnessy observes two dimensions to consciousness: cognitive, concerned mainly with the knowledge of the external reality, and self-reflexive, described as awareness of a power of self-determination that shapes possibilities to respond to that external reality. The two properties depend on each other: perception invites the epistemological impulse, whereas the

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self-determinative aspect of consciousness ensures that the knowledge that results from this process reflects the values associated with an inner, authentic truth. In O’Shaughnessy’s (self-described) ‘interiorist theory,’ the world as we perceive it exists only insofar as we validate it in our inner world, simply because awareness of reality (w-consciousness) is intrinsic to self-awareness:24

… there is one sector of the world, a domain which one cannot conceivably perceive, harbouring phenomena which are in the world, suitable awareness of which is a logically necessary condition of awareness of the world - and that is one’s inner world! …

Consciousness, which is the correct epistemological posture on the part of an experiencing subject, is at the same time the condition of a rational creature actively engaged in thinking; and that in turn is the obtaining within of an overall condition of mental self-determination or mental freedom - which is a further necessary condition of present rationality. In short, w-consciousness consists in having a certain type of inner life: a continuity of (partially, but nonetheless overall) active experience such that the inner life at that point is suitably (i.e. rationally) responsive to reality. Then here in this formulation we have a summary statement of what it is for a self-conscious being to be conscious. And so, as we earlier observed, the criteria of consciousness prove to be wholly internal in character. W-consciousness, which is awareness of reality - it is a useful truism to affirm -is a (purely) psychological and (completely) internally validated state with a (merely) physical cause.

(117 – 118)

O’Shaughnessy’s view of perception as a pretext for consciousness to manifest its self-determinative nature by engaging with the difference of reality echoes Ernst Cassirer’s neo-Kantian argument that consciousness creates the sensory content of perception. I will shortly explain in detail the difficulties of Cassirer’s particular idealism, with its refusal to take into account the necessary material basis of the perceptual and constructive acts. The inability in reconciling signification and representation is, it becomes apparent, a temporary incapacity in translating the unified reality of truth into the difference-based concept of meaning, which constitutes community. To put this situation in the non-deterministic terms which it requires, communication change is a time when man feels he can no longer make sense of the world because he does not yet master its new constitutive practices. The freedom associated with one’s inner life, with the ability to conceptualize the real-object that is the ideal, is threatened by one’s very existence in community. Language no longer aligns individual and society but tears them apart. In concluding this brief discussion I would like to point out, firstly, that I depart from Cassirer’s idealism in my argument (informed by Marcus, Thorburn and Jenkins) that changes in the material conditions of representation trigger the individual’s engagement with reality. I remain in full agreement with Cassirer through the view that this engagement is an effort to conciliate the established and emerging representations with one’s inner world by conceptualizing an affinity between their materialities and a need to find new modalities of expression in response to man’s self-exploratory impulse.

2. Reality in the Making: Ernst Cassirer’s Symbolic Ideal

Ernst Cassirer’s concept of symbolic thought explains how the understanding that language is representation addresses the representation crisis. He describes the Sophists’ awareness, the first of its kind in the West, that words define a conceptual space of meaning between man and things. The struggle between the Sophists and Plato takes place in this intermediary interval where the universal values of reality come into being:

In defending their thesis that all knowledge is relative and that man is the ‘measure of all things,’ the Sophists would therefore seem to have drawn their most effective weapons from the study of language. From the first, they were very much at home in that middle region of words that is situated between man and things; there they entrenched themselves for the struggle against the claims of pure, allegedly universal thought. Their audacious play with the ambiguity of words did indeed put the world of things at their mercy, enabling them to dissolve its determinateness in the free movement of the spirit. … this reflection on the meaning and origin of speech also gave rise to the reaction which brought about a new fundamental approach and a new methodology of the concept.  

Plato reaffirms the absence of a natural relation between thing and word. He does so in order to challenge the mythical worldview and to reinforce the view that man’s relation to reality is mediated. At the same time, Plato argues that the Idea may be conveyed through dialectics due to an affinity between its reflection in the mind and language:

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With unsurpassing irony Plato tears down the thesis that there is a ‘naturally’ correct term for every existing thing … eliminating it forever in this naïve form. But for Plato this insight does not end all relation between word and knowledge; rather, the immediate and untenable relation of similarity is replaced by a deeper, a mediated relation. In the structure and development of dialectical knowledge the word retains a unique place and value. The fluid boundaries of the word, the fact that its content at all times is only relatively fixed, spur the dialectician to raise himself, through opposition and the struggle with opposition, to the postulate of the pure concept with its absolutely fixed signification, to the … realm of the ideas. … And yet a certain relation between word and idea remains: just as sensory contents are said to ‘strive’ toward the ideas, a direction and spiritual tendency towards the ideas to be discerned in the formations of language. Plato’s system was eminently suited to this appreciation of the relative value of language, because for the first time it fully recognized a basic principle essential to all language. All language as such is ‘representation’; it represents a specific ‘meaning’ by a sensuous ‘sign.’ (Cassirer 1953, 123 - 125)

Again, Cassirer stops short of explaining the nature of this ‘sensuous sign.’ But what takes shape is the vision, seen to have emerged with Plato, that self-knowledge itself depends, just like social representations, on the mind’s ability to create symbols:
No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net. No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man’s symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves, man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself.²⁷

In his symbolic metaphysics, Cassirer contrasts human spirit to a life seen as “undifferentiated unity, the unity of the ‘natural world-picture.’”²⁸ Spirit is culture, life is nature. Spirit stands for differentiation and change, whereas life stands for a primary identity and lack of differentiation, and ultimately for death. Most importantly, the tension between spirit and life is that between performing interpretations and pursuing possibilities, on the one hand, and accepting that life itself must remain “more fundamental than its productions,” on the other hand: “… subjective experience of life is the experience of fate. No alternate explanation of events is available for the creature that cannot move between interpretations, between possibilities for given, stable occurrences. ... Life moves according to fate. Life is movement without conscious choice; choice requires the consciousness of spirit” (Bayer 42 – 43).


Interpretation is not a destabilizing activity but describes a universal particularity of human spirit which is a need to create constantly new modalities of expression that may appropriately address fate. Cassirer associates the consciousness of spirit, whose primary function is to lead “away from ‘mere’ life” (Cassirer 1996, 230) through the symbolic forms, with a particular reflexivity. The conscious creation of symbolic forms implies a critical evaluation of the given and an interpretative effort to transcend the closed system of life, of instinct, and of undifferentiated (and thus unrecognized) individuality and to achieve multiplicity, choice, and an ethical stance associated with the recognition of coexisting representations.

What is recognized by the exceptional thinker exemplified by Plato is that nature and culture, life and spirit, exist within a dialectical relationship, constantly informing and transforming one another: “Cultural forms of spirit … spring dialectically from life and resolve themselves back into life. That the differences between cultural forms of spirit are resolved in life’s unity does not stop the dialectic; instead, “it pushes it back further into the concept of life itself” (8). Symbolic thought is, therefore, the interpretation of reality that is informed by life and, in its turn, constantly transforms life. As such, life, refusing finality and individuality, cannot be grasped in a finished symbolic form, only in the very process of symbolic configuration: “The infinity which is denied to the finished configuration lives in the pure process of configuration. This does not become solidified in any individual creation, because it is the eternally productive act” (31).

This situation allows for the possibility that the expressive basis of symbolic thought is, in fact, informed by the cultural configurations that make up life at each moment. The different meanings acquired by symbols throughout history speak to the symbol’s teleological nature, a
point to which Peirce’s semiotics and Cassirer’s philosophy converge: “… pure indeterminacy having developed determinate possibilities, creation consisted in mediating between the lawless reactions and the general possibilities by the influx of a symbol. This symbol was the purpose of creation. Its object was the entelechy of being which is the ultimate representation.”

Peirce’s (and, for that matter, O’Shaughnessy’s) refusal of metaphysics needs not affect our understanding of symbol as result of a process that, for Cassirer, remains identical with itself and all the while generates products that convey, despite the challenges posed by history to interpretation, a recognizable human intuition of the possibility of permanence.

Plato’s engagement with writing and his discussion on the nature of language in the *Phaedrus* immortalizes the moment of reflexivity associated with communication change, when the expressive appropriateness of different modes of representation is evaluated. At the same time, his understanding that language bears a relation, through its mental images, with an objectively-conceptualized truth, allows the possibility that culture stands for man’s constant engagement with life, whose ultimate fateful conclusion is death. The construction of new realities gains, at this point, a critical existential dimension: we may know ourselves only insofar as we engage with this existential limit which is the ultimate refusal of differentiation. This is the interpretative perspective that informs, I argue, Plato and Thomas More’s symbolic discourses and which constitutes the core of their pedagogical projects. Their ideal societies convey the view that all (interpretative, social) action must be carried out in accord with an unchanging reality. The fundamental characteristic of man, they seem to say, is not his mortality but the

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ability to shape his own life, to challenge the fear of death - which shows its face in the historical discontinuity of crisis - through the work of the spirit.

3. The Missing Materiality of Cassirer's Synthesis. Technology and Reflexivity

Gideon Freudenthal subtly notes that Cassirer never fully develops the material aspect of his concept of synthesis, a characteristic he attributes to a concern to define a pregnant idealistic dimension to his work. The refusal to discuss technology, which would have been the natural outcome of the emphasis on the use of ‘tools’ for the conceptualization of objectivity and subjectivity (215), results in a difficulty to acknowledge how media developments, inviting reflexivity, participate in shaping ideas and the symbolic content itself: “… in [Cassirer’s] treatment of language, we find not a word on the special contribution of written as opposed to oral tradition, on print as opposed to handwritten manuscripts” (220 – 221). Freudenthal concludes that by leaving the material aspect of the symbol undeveloped, Cassirer does not bring his philosophy of culture to the status of system (222), and that this aspect has yet to be realized. My discussion reflects the extraordinary potential of Cassirer’s principle of synthesis for understanding how the historical event that is a communication change may be explored in order to explore similarities in the history of utopian thought.

Robert E. Innis offers an enlightening reading of Cassirer’s 1930 article “Form und Technik” (“Form and Technics”) to observe that, for the philosopher, “the semiotic ‘ascension’ of consciousness away from and through the concrete and intuitive toward the abstract ‘signification’ dimension” is mirrored by a view of technology as instrument through which man may act upon the world in a symbolic manner that overrides biologic limit: “Technics is ... a
distinctive ‘way of worldmaking’ and a multileveled ‘symbolic form’ in its own right. It actively
inscribes a pattern of intelligibility upon the world.”30 Innis’s article allows a clearer view of the
instrumentality that Cassirer assigns to symbolic form in the construction of meaningful reality.
Cassirer locates the idealistic impulse associated with the beginning of a philosophy of language
in early Greek philosophy. It is “Form and Technics” that fully enables the interpretative
framework for a direct relation between the changes in the material conditions associated with
the phonetic alphabet and the problematization of representation by Plato, which I posit at the
foundation of my inquiry into utopian thought.

In Cassirer’s philosophy, technology stands for the very process of symbolization, for
man’s action upon life with the help of tools such as language, for example, transforming reality
by endowing it with meaning. Yet its use, enabling man to acknowledge himself as the creative
source of transformative action, orients attention outwards, towards the aesthetic, political
aspects of self-representation, a move detrimental to his interiority: “Why can the living spirit not
appear to spirit? When the soul speaks, alas, it is no longer the soul that speaks!”31 The regressive
aspect of language may, then, be spiritually detrimental to both sender and receiver.

Moreover, technology conditions its user to define his individuality in terms of the
‘possible’ associated with the particularities of the tool. Cassirer attributes the realization of this
limitation to great thinkers and visionaries, who become aware of the difficulty to communicate
the vision of truth through the existing means: “So long as he [this thinker] is still inspired and


filled with the inner force of vision, these are nothing other than symbols for him. But for those
to whom the proclamation is imparted, the symbols will once again become dogmas” (125).

Through this perspective, critical reflection during media transition implies awareness of
the limits and possibilities associated with the use of language. At the very moment it enables
critical questions regarding the nature of the real, language reveals itself as unable to
communicate that real other than through the limited means of the available tool. This realization
takes thinkers such as Plato or Thomas More, understood by Cassirer as individuals of
exceptional intellectual, moral, and imaginative power (1944, 66 – 67), to the very root of the
problem, which is that the act of communication, enabling community, implies the
reconfiguration of language as ‘technology’ or discourse, a mode of usage subjected to history
and particularity.

Plato and More are confronted with the reconfiguration of intellectual and social practices.
New discourses emerge from attempts to explain and explore the nature and function of
language. They compete for man’s engagement with the world in response to a perceived need
for social coherence and for opportunities to shape the new worldview. Martin Irvine observes
this development in early textual culture: “… Plato is representing a battle among the emerging
arts of discourse - grammar, rhetoric, dialectic - for control of written culture…. 32

The politics of self-representation, reflecting the transitoriness of history, are intrinsically linked with the
genuine preoccupation to communicate truth. Plato makes this point most clearly in the Phaedrus
275b-c:

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32 Martin Irvine, The Making of Textual Culture: ‘Grammatica’ and Literary Theory, 350-1100 (Cambridge and
Oh, but the authorities of the temple of Zeus at Dodona, my friend, said that the first prophetic utterances came from an oak tree. In fact the people of those days, lacking the wisdom of young people, were content in their simplicity to listen to trees or rocks, provided these told the truth. For you, apparently, it makes a difference who the speaker is, and what country he came from; you don’t merely ask whether what he says is true or false.33

Media transitions are times of cultural renouvellement best understood through the metaphor of youth as interval of reflection and potential for transformation. Plato proposes that the ethical discourse is the one that ensures that higher-order, universal values define the individual’s engagement with the world at each point in time. His argument for the ‘good rhetoric,’ in Book II of the Republic (378d), emphasizes the critical importance of the formative years (referring to the individual interpreter and by extension to the emerging literate community) to communicating the advantages of virtue: “A young thing can’t judge what is hidden sense and what is not; but what he takes into his opinions at that age has a tendency to become hard to eradicate and unchangeable. Perhaps it’s for this reason that we must do everything to insure that what they hear first, with respect to virtue, be the finest told tales for them to hear.”34 Plato speaks of the dangers that are associated with meaning-constructing practices and of the necessity to approach and, as educator, shape such practices responsibly. The subject of his discourse is no longer the simple, mundane happening of everyday life, but the nature and workings of reality. This


discourse is offered as unique mode of critical reflexivity that acknowledges the immutability of life against which all reality must be read. Plato is no longer content to focus on himself and admit ignorance, like Socrates. He aims to show to others that language may be used not just to know *about* the workings of the soul but to change how the individual acts in belief that the symbols it creates convey a higher, permanent humanity. A similar ethical and idealistic impulse may be observed in Thomas More, who no longer seeks an indication of man’s superiority in the ability to accept the non-identity with the divine, like Pico della Mirandola does. The meta-consciousness associated with critical thought shines through in the moment when this thinker rises above the veil of representation to observe that Word and Image lie at each other’s core, that language springs from, and aims towards, an imagistic truth which cannot be conceptualized without words.

At the same time, the discursive self-consciousness of the *Republic* and *Utopia* indicates, in my view, a comparable authorial effort to awaken in the reader the reflexivity that allows him to engage with the limits of representation. Plato and Thomas More are of course writers and we may choose to discuss the irony conveyed by their textual strategies. I prefer, however, to focus on what I see as a genuine intellectual attitude on their part, providing a more solid basis for their complex philosophical explorations of language and explaining the sense of urgency felt in both utopias. I contend that their critical engagement with speech and writing reflects, on the one hand, the theoretical disposition invited by media transitions, and on the other hand the understanding that a discourse on learning must be informed by the effort to bring true intellectual and spiritual empowerment to man. This belief in the power of human spirit to
challenge life’s trajectory towards dissolution is echoed by the transformative nature of Cassirer’s concept of synthesis.

I have already mentioned Thorburn and Jenkins’s observation that, during such transitions, the media user gains a renewed appreciation for the established representation modes. This reactive impulse may have to do with an understanding that these media, enabling a shared worldview, convey a dimension of human permanence that is not immediately apparent in the new media. At the same time, the new media promise change: the fundamental role attributed to textual learning by both Plato and Thomas More describes the inextricable relation between the enlightened individual and the ideal society. Moreover, this media, generating new possibilities of self-expression, carry a transcendental promise. It stands as expression of man’s engagement with the existential concerns brought to the fore by the aspect of discontinuity inherent in historical change. I suggest that the Republic and Utopia are offered as examples of how the limits of the instrumental ‘possible’ may be challenged through a symbolic mode of thought that conveys the values of a higher humanity.

4. **Conceptualizing the Utopian Intermediateness: Reflexivity, Symbol, and Immortality in Plato’s Republic**

In the first volume of his Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Ernst Cassirer observes the difficulty in disengaging a philosophical reflection on language from an existential outlook on life: “Philosophical inquiry into the origin and nature of language is as old as that into the essence and origin of being” (1953, 117). Cassirer acknowledges that, as more cultural forms emerge throughout history, an ever more complex theoretical grasp of the workings of the human mind becomes possible. Theoretically inclined and historically aware minds build their
anthropologies on the understanding that culture conveys man’s effort to achieve self-knowledge. The materiality of culture functions to enable a spiritual communication between individuals over time and space, in order to demonstrate a shared humanity. Moreover, Cassirer observes that, with the evolution of culture, language moved from a mimetic to an analogous and finally to a symbolic stage, from the ‘sensuous’ towards the ‘intuitive’ expression. This implies that language, like all symbolic forms, feeds on its existing material expressions in media in order to move towards an ever more abstracted expression that does not simply convey meaning more appropriately, but continues to suggest new ways to organize experience.

The understanding that culture informs thought’s trajectory of expression is empowering for the theorist of language, who either gives in to the temptation to abuse this power or adopts the moral position of trying to address what is perceived as vulnerability. In the *Myth of the State* (1946), Cassirer cites the case of the Hitlerist state to argue that technology can be, and has been, employed to manipulate individual and collective consciousness through imagery and the emotionalization of language, among other strategies. The difference between the Sophistic and the Platonic positions in ancient Greece, mentioned above, is closely related to that between National Socialist ideologies and the philosophy which for Cassirer epitomizes reflexivity.

The coexistence of established and emerging media during communication transitions foregrounds the difference between truth and representation. It forces upon the thinker the realization that, through the materiality of language, spirit is vulnerable to history, to the fateful nature of life. Self-knowledge gains a critical importance when awareness of time evokes death as the ultimate reality. To engage with history, then, is to refuse to accept inevitability and, capitalizing on the instrumentality that defines the change paradigm, to engage with the
‘interface’ of representation in order to foreground a continuity that makes apparent the spiritual permanence of being. The representation that conveys continuity is ideal in that it reinforces man’s position as creator of the cultural form, of himself, and of reality.

The theoretical thinker insinuates himself in the conceptual space between mind and reality which becomes critical to the ethical project. This is a space of conscious transformation where man remains aware of truth and of the possibility to achieve spiritual progress. I propose that the notion of intermediateness is critical to understanding how utopian discourse attempts to empower its readers in relation to reality. Intermediateness foregrounds the imperative value of critical reflexivity and conscious choice demanded by the representational heterogeneity of transition in communication. The ideality of utopia is defined by the reflexivity associated with the process of symbolization and by the supra-temporal spiritual continuity made apparent by this process.

In Plato’s lifetime, the established medium was speech, characteristic of mythological and poetic discourse, and the emerging medium was writing. Writing, foregrounding language’s representational nature, invites a critical evaluation of myth and makes clear the necessity for a more appropriate discourse of truth. Kathryn A. Morgan offers a succinct description of the challenges and opportunities associated with a textualized reality:

The textualisation of mythological material led first to criticism, then to the opportunity to manipulate and play against this material considered as a fixed entity… Plato will react against the authority of the cultural texts of Homer and Hesiod. It is no accident that philosophical abstraction and the critique of poetic discourse are thus connected. The
intellectual project of philosophy implicates itself from the start with the manufacture and interpretation of texts. So it is that the philosophical manipulation of myth will be a profoundly literary phenomenon.\footnote{Kathryn A. Morgan, \textit{Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 24.}

In the \textit{Republic}, Plato creates a synthesis of the two media to create a discourse that addresses fate. Cassirer observes that at the core of myth lies the negation of death, reflecting the origin of myth in emotion: “In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death.”\footnote{Ernst Cassirer, “Time,” Chapter 6 of \textit{Yale Seminar on Symbolism and the Philosophy of Language}, 1941–1942 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2005) 292.} In contrast, philosophy offers the possibility of immortality: “Man who is capable of conceiving an eternal truth, who is able to intuit an unchanging intelligible world, cannot be deprived of an eternal existence. That is one of the principle reasons that Plato, in the \textit{Phaidon}, offers for the immortality of the soul.”\footnote{Ernst Cassirer, “Time,” Chapter 6 of \textit{Yale Seminar on Symbolism and the Philosophy of Language}, 1941–1942 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2005) 292.}

Plato also foregrounds an immortality of a more physical nature, revealing philosophy as the true pedagogy. In the same way people bear children for the sake of immortality, the soul pregnant with philosophical wisdom will strive to impart it:

\begin{quote}
... the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice. And he who in youth has the seed of these implanted in him and is himself inspired, when he comes to maturity
\end{quote}
desires to beget and generate. When he finds a fair and noble and well-nurtured soul...he is full of speech about virtue and the nature and pursuits of a good man... And they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children, for the children who are their common offspring are fairer and more immortal.  

The limits of language’s instrumental ‘possible’ are challenged in the reflexive production of representation. To achieve critical consciousness is to desire to perpetuate it. Reflexivity breeds reflexivity, moral action breeds moral action. Through his work, man overcomes the peculiarities of history and man’s vulnerability to time so as to mirror the suprahistorical nature of truth, as conceptualized metaphysically. In true Platonic vein, Cassirer notes that “what really survives man are the symbols that he has created.... It is only in this ideal and symbolic way that mankind and human culture possess an immortal life - an everlasting being instead of a merely temporary being” (2005, 293). The intermediary space of language between mind and reality is where the symbolic production of reality takes place. For Plato, this is a conceptual interval situated between being and becoming, between truth and expression. To even speak of this space is to demonstrate, to literally make apparent, the philosophical, suprahistorical reflexivity that is no longer vulnerable to crisis and to death but capitalizes on cultural expression to create instances of symbolic permanence.

Plato draws upon the semiotic possibilities opened by the phonetic alphabet, positing an abstract symbol as singular representation of a content that carries universal values, to demonstrate how the reality of the Forms gains its symbolic expression in the just man and

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society. On the one hand, the abstract symbol allows the semiotic conceptualization of difference between meaning and its visual representation, between a stable, suprasensible reality of Forms, and a changeable world of becoming, of history, and of expression. On the other hand, the conceptual identity between sound and letter suggests a stabilizing, intrinsic relation between the two realities. Barry B. Powell observes the expressive ideality of the Greek alphabet, standing closer to speech than all previous writing systems, in its ability to isolate the phoneme as “universal in human speech independent of any one language, a sound that makes a difference in meaning.”

The orders of the words demand mastery of each symbol and recognition of its combinatory possibilities and laws, as Plato shows in the *Republic* at 402a-b: “… just as we were competent at reading only when the few letters there are didn’t escape us in any of the combinations in which they turn up … if images of writings should appear somewhere, in water or in mirrors, we wouldn’t recognize them before we knew the things in themselves.” By extension, bringing together words to define a new reality involves a purposeful movement between meaning and its discursive expression. Reality emerges from this continuous, dialectical and transformative displacement between whole and part, truth and expression. This process is no longer a destabilizing event but a moment filled with ethical possibilities. The act of ‘making known’ through words becomes of utmost importance for the philosophical pedagogical project because it translates permanence.

I suggested earlier that the conceptual space where reality is shaped to reflect truth is one of choice, which must be performed reflexively. In constructing his discourse, the philosopher stands between truth and expression, between being and becoming. He accesses this productive,

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intermediary space that echoes, in the coexistence of possibilities awaiting actualization, the chora of the *Timaeus*: an “ever-existing place … which admits not of destruction, and provides room for all things that have birth” (52a). In the *Republic*, the intermediateness of the chora is represented by Piraeus, a place where all religions and cultures are shown to coexist but also where one encounters the opportunity to overcome the fearful stagnation associated with myth, represented by Cephalus, for the rational transcendence facilitated by the philosopher. Piraeus evokes the ‘choreion’ symbolized by the river Lethe in the myth of Er that closes the *Republic*, separating two consecutive lives. The ability to perform good choices in this space means, quite simply, drinking in moderation from the river whose water erases memories of one’s previous existence. Moderation prevents complete forgetfulness of what has been learned through philosophical discourse and enables continuous access to the values gained in one’s previous life. From here, man is thrown back into existence, where he must return with an understanding that choice enables one eventually to transcend death.

Moreover, this intermediary space speaks of the possibility of the happy life and of the better city through the contingency of moderation and of *chora* with the concept of *eudaimonia*, happiness or the good life. Philosophy, the true learning, takes one towards an understanding of how life should be lived rather than keeping one trapped in the fear of death, as Cephalus is shown to be early in the work. This understanding will further enable good choices: “And thus, Glaucon, a tale was saved and not lost; and it could save us, if we were persuaded by it, and we shall make a good crossing of the river of Lethe and not defile our soul. ... And so here and in the thousand year journey that we have described we shall fare well” (*Republic* 621c-d).
At the same time, Plato’s position indicates an engagement with the politics of self-representation in the emerging textual culture. From his perspective, the student’s intellectual ascent is always inferior to the philosopher’s relation to truth. In constructing the symbolic reality proposed as the best possible, the philosopher works from truth towards the word, whereas his students depend on words to be carried upwards towards the awareness of permanence, and need to have this awareness reinforced, rhetorically, by the mythical description. The written discourse, foregrounding the word’s - and implicitly the philosopher’s - mediating presence, reinforces this spiritual hierarchy. This discourse awakens the reader to the necessity of a virtuous life, but it cannot provide the imprint of the Form on the soul, hence the ideal city will always need a Philosopher King.

5. Reading with the Angels: Thomas More’s *Utopia* as Exercise in Humility

Thomas More’s *Utopia* opens with a poem. Through the voice of the fictional poet Anemolius, it proclaims this society to be superior to Plato’s vision of a better state in the *Republic*: “… now with Plato’s state I can compare/ perhaps outdo her (for what he only drew/ In empty words I have made live anew/ In men and wealth, as well as splendid laws):/ ‘The Good Place’ they should call me, with good cause.”39 The opposition described by the poem is misleading because in Book II Hythloday suggests a genealogical continuity between Plato’s republic and the enlightened community of Utopia: “I have a feeling they [the Utopians] picked up Greek more easily because it was somewhat related to their own tongue. Though their language resembles Persian in most respects, I suspect their race descends from the Greeks

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because, in the names of the cities and in official titles, they retain some vestiges of the Greek tongue” (*Utopia* 181). Echoing Plato’s concept of *anamnesis*, the Utopians’ acquisition of Greek is a re-learning.

As a direct relationship between Plato’s vision and Utopia becomes apparent, one may see that the Utopians’ social practices stem directly from a philosophical approach to life. Hythloday’s description of the Utopians’ practical spirituality evokes Plato’s *Republic*, but from a Christian perspective:

> They [the Utopians] think that when, with the help of philosophy, they explore the secrets of nature, they are gratifying not only themselves but the author and maker of nature. They suppose that like other artists he created this beautiful mechanism of the world to be admired - and by whom, if not by man, who is alone in being able to appreciate so great a thing? Therefore he is bound to prefer a careful observer and sensitive admirer of his work before one who, like a brute beast, looks on such a grand and wonderful spectacle with a stupid and inert mind. (*Utopia* 183)

More’s views on learning appear in the Utopians’ subjection of intellectual activity to the worship of the creator. In his ability to understand the complexity of the divine order, man becomes closer to God than to the rest of his creation. Although the fictional author of *Utopia* stops short of suggesting that the humble Utopians are somehow semi-divine, the fictional narrator Raphael Hythloday, whose name recalls the Old Testament’s angel, constructs his discourse on the opposition between the superior spirituality of Utopia, making up the content of
Book II, and the earthly life, marred by pride, of More’s contemporary England, described in Book I. Moving freely between the truth of God and the life of man, between the contrasting worlds of a higher and a lower humanity, Raphael emerges as a figure of intermediateness. Moreover, *Utopia*, conveying his critique of the prideful life from the vantage point of a superior existence, is instrumental in revealing the intrinsic relationship, central to the humanist educational project, between learning, represented by the book itself, and the possibility of a better life.

The notion of intermediateness in *Utopia* reflects the humanist view that learning may take man to previously unreached spiritual and intellectual heights. In the preface to the 1516 *Novum Instrumentum*, Erasmus shows how much he favours the angelic metaphor: “Another ... even a non-Christian, may discuss more subtly how the angels understand, but to persuade us to lead here an angelic life, free from every stain, this indeed is the duty of the Christian theologian.” Through the voice of Hythloday, More shows that the Utopians regard philosophy to be fruitful only when informed by the religious perspective of eternal happiness. The Utopians believe that death will reward one’s conduct on earth. For them, life is an opportunity to work in favour of the immortal soul. The religious principles do not misdirect reason but emerge from its intuition of a superior reality:

... they never discuss happiness without joining to the rational arguments of philosophy certain principles drawn from religion. Without these religious principles, they think that reason by itself is weak and defective in its efforts to investigate true happiness. The

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religious principles they invoke are of this nature: that the soul is immortal, and by God’s beneficence born for happiness; and that after this life, rewards are appointed for our virtues and good deeds, punishments for our sins. Though these are indeed religious principles, they think that reason leads us to believe and accept them. (*Utopia* 161)

More’s view that learning, like life itself, must be pursued as struggle against man’s natural inclination for pleasure transpires in the parerga to *Utopia*. In the “Letter to Giles” he argues that people tend to use learning as opportunity for self-gratification and self-aggrandizement rather than purification:

... to tell the truth, I’m still of two minds as to whether I should publish the book at all. For men’s tastes are so various, the tempers of some are so severe, their minds so ungrateful, their judgments so foolish, that there seems no point in publishing a book that others will receive only with contempt and ingratitude. Better simply to follow one’s own natural inclinations, lead a merry life, and avoid the harrowing task of publishing something either useful or pleasant. Most people know nothing of learning; many despise it. The clod rejects as too difficult whatever isn’t cloddish. The pedant dismisses as mere trifling anything that isn’t stuffed with obsolete words. Some readers approve only of ancient authors; many men like only their own writing. Here’s a man so solemn he won’t allow a shadow of levity, and there’s one so insipid of taste that he can’t endure the salt of a little wit. Some are so flat-nosed that they dread satire as a man bitten by a rabid dog dreads water; some are so
changeable that they like one thing when they’re seated and another when they’re standing.

(Utopia 37)

These comments echo the concern, shared by early modern authors and printers, that textual interpretation encourages vanity in the uncritical reader who may also misrepresent the author’s intentions:

It was ... feared that print could be almost preternatural in its effects on the supposedly uncritical “people” ... William Gilbert ... complained that so many books encouraged the mob to “profess themselves philosophers, physicians, mathematicians, and astrologers ... .” ... How the mob might interpret a work could therefore come to be of greater concern than any supposedly objective reading - and even than the author’s own intention.41

More’s views on the intellectual and spiritual challenges of textual learning reflect the complexities of the historical interval he inhabits. The printing press accelerates the “development of critical and historical approaches to texts” - challenging existing exegetical traditions - that had begun in early fifteenth-century Italy,42 and the rediscovery and dissemination of the works of antiquity. As new translations made possible the widespread study of Scriptures in the vernaculars, theological debates naturally focused on man’s role - both author


and reader - in deciphering the biblical meaning. The dispute between Erasmus and Luther, for example, is underlain by the difference between the Word of God and the language of man. Luther, while emphasizing the importance of direct access to Scripture, argues that salvation comes through grace because language, appealing to the senses, is nothing more than a mediator between man and the divine meaning (Bono 70).

Erasmus takes a more optimistic approach, suggesting the possibility to capture a trans-historical meaning (Bono 68) and to employ learning to change one’s way of life towards a redemptive perspective. Daniel Ménager observes, for example, how in a letter to Paul Volz, included in the preface to the second edition (1518) to the Handbook of the Christian Soldier, Erasmus depicts a Christian order in which priests are closest to Christ, facilitating salvation for those who appeal to them: “Their salvation depends on finding in their lives priests and bishops who will provide them with a proper explanation of the Gospel.”

While a detailed examination of this topic is beyond the objectives of my analysis, it is important to observe with Cassirer (1953, 117 cited above) how the humanist optimism concerning language’s epistemological power, reflecting the advancements in learning in this interval, is paralleled by the vision of a man empowered in relation to spiritual salvation.

More’s integration of learning and evangelical worship throughout his writings mirrors Erasmus’s synthesis. However, I wish to suggest that he sees himself as ethical, rather than scholarly, figure. On the one hand, he adopts a more critical attitude towards the problem of textual interpretation. On the other hand, I argue that he suggests practical ways of changing for the better through learning. In a manner that recalls Augustine, More foregrounds in Utopia the

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representational nature of language. Simultaneously, he proposes that man does advance towards salvation, leading, as it were, the good life, as he uses representation in order to reveal pride. Language cannot be trusted to enable knowledge, to bring true spiritual progress, unless it is fully integrated with Scripture’s warnings of pride and promise of redemption.

As I argue in Chapter 3, Utopia offers an example of how language may be employed to observe the many facets of pride from a suprahistorical, angelic vantage point. For More, to pursue transformative learning is to practise the angels’ humility. It is not by chance that he chooses Raphael: in the two scriptural episodes in which the archangel appears - the Book of Tobit, in the Old Testament, and the miracle at the pool of Bethesda of the New Testament - he unveils the limits of his own curative powers in a gesture of humility, prefigurative of, but also foregrounding, Christ’s ultimate healing.

Fighting pride is a most difficult task in this new context particularly because learning, while enlightening the mind, bears the potential to feed this mortal sin. Gerard Wegemer observes that, for More, a discussion of pride immediately evokes Lucifer and the relation, represented by the fallen angel, between self-consciousness and man’s impulse to delight in the soul’s imaginative power and creations of the mind: “Just as Lucifer and Adam and Eve wilfully interpreted God’s commands according to their own desires rather than diligently attending to their reason, so every person has the freedom of will to do the same.”44 Through learning, man becomes comparable to angels. Whether he will become enlightened and eventually acquire humility or, on the contrary, become proud like Lucifer depends on whether he will subject this transformation to the ultimate Christian purpose, which is to cleanse the soul from sin.

But how to explain the urgency felt in More’s emphasis on the relationship between learning and pride? Why does Hythloday, *Utopia*’s main figure of intermediateness, direct his critique towards pride, and the fictional More, standing between the angel Raphael and reader, humbly and repetitively present himself as simple scribe rather than author? I suggest that More’s perspective is that learning, inviting illusions of absolute knowledge, may pose challenges to the biblical worldview, thus threatening to dissolve the Christian community, and to the individual salvation. Brian Stock observes the relationship between literacy and heresy in the High Middle Ages:

… the heretics were said to deny the sacral, miraculous, and historical elements in Christianity, along with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which in their opinion was their logical outgrowth. What was similar in the reports was not the doctrine or practice being invalidated but the principle by which it was done. This consisted of a highly developed if somewhat personal style of “rationality” which depended on the individual interpretation of theological texts. As a result of his hermeneutic and often mystical endeavours, the interpreter was “illumined.” … The heresy, like the lay piety which grew up with it, was inseparable from the gradual formation of literate and semi-literate communities after the millennium.  

While admiring Pico della Mirandola’s synthesis of knowledge, for example, More sees a critical symptom of the shift towards the glorification of man reflected in the symbolism advanced in the

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1486 Oratio de Hominis Dignitate. In this work, Pico argues, among other dogmatically sensitive statements, that Christ did not truly descend into hell and that the interpretations generated by the Church Fathers are mere opinions. Pico’s suggestion that meaning may be grasped directly from the text by any reader without any interpretative mediation reflects the crisis in theological thought in the Florence of the 1470s and 1490s, when “humanists and their pupils disseminated their own concepts of religion among ordinary people,” the Church Fathers’ views are hardly mentioned, and the scriptural text is shown to offer the keys to all interpretation.⁴⁶ Ernst Cassirer offers an excellent overview of Pico’s highly theoretical thought, defining a tension between the ‘real’ and symbolic aspects of the sacrament:

[Pico] was never willing to give up speculative thinking; nor did he ever believe that such a sacrifice could lead to a genuine and veridical knowledge of God. The true amor Dei is for Pico amor Dei intellectualis: for only to the intellect is there disclosed the truly Universal, which forms a necessary moment and the real mark of the Divine.... Herein lies the great significance he has won for modern religious history. Through the way in which Pico’s position sought a pure “spiritualizing” of the doctrines of faith, through the way in which he distinguished the “sacramental” from the “symbolic,” he had a marked effect on the transformation and development of doctrine.⁴⁷

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More is aware that Pico faced accusations of heresy by the Church for some of his theses. While supporting secular learning, More believes that man may only have a direct relation with God through participation in the church, whose historical work is enabled by the Holy Spirit. In *Utopia*, this idea is reflected by a view of communication as divine revelation, observed by Travis DeCook.48 This mediated unmediatedness is the reality one should strive for rather than the pursuit of philosophical learning. In contrast, Pico describes philosophy in the *Oratio* not simply as man’s most important and noble activity (Wegemer 43 – 44) but as the way to become more worthy of glory and closer to God than the angels themselves.

*Utopia* emphasizes the view that the better reality accessible to man while on earth is not contemplative, nor stems from having achieved a celestial status. The good life is being shaped as man continuously engages with pride. It is this fight for humility that takes man upwards, as the Utopians’ example shows, to the point where the world’s false symbols are dismissed:

They [Utopians] pick up pearls by the seashore, and also diamonds and garnets from certain cliffs, but never go out of set purpose to look for them. If they happen to find some, they polish them and give them as decorations to the children, who feel proud and pleased with such ornaments during the early years of childhood. But when they have grown a bit older and notice that only small children like this kind of toy, they lay them aside. Their parents don’t have to say anything; they simply put these trifles away out of shame, just as our children, when they grow up, put away their marbles, baubles and dolls. (*Utopia* 151)

More’s orthodox relation between symbol and truth speaks of his effort to create, in *Utopia*, a synthesis between a religious worldview based on the scriptural promise of a happy afterlife, on the one hand, and the new opportunities for self-exploration offered by the fictions of language, on the other hand. *Utopia’s* title establishes the self-reflexive mood that permeates the entire work. ‘Outopos,’ ‘eutopos’: the ‘no-place’ is the ‘good place’ created at each point through the struggle against pride. Human creations, More suggests, depend on language and language is representation. Hythloday describes Utopia whereas the text, as a copy of his speech, is further removed from the better reality. All human creations are to a certain extent fictions because language, giving expression to mind, tends to construct imaginative realities that gratify the soul’s desiring nature. To employ language as a spiritual instrument is to turn it - like Raphael and like the fictional More - against its own representational nature. This strategy creates an intellectual and spiritual continuity between the medieval and the modern worldviews. Echoing the Cassirean synthesis of spirit and form, More proposes in *Utopia* that human creation becomes an expression of permanence - and image of the ideal - only when it enables one to see sin.

The processual nature of More’s notion of intermediateness is apparent as early as 1510 when, in the *Life of John Picus, Earl of Mirandola*, Pico’s fictionalized ascension after death is, in true medieval vein, delayed by a temporary stay in Purgatory:

… the most benign Judge hath dealt mercifully with him: and for his plenteous alms given out with a free and liberal hand unto poor people; and for the devout prayers which he most instantly offered unto God, this favour he hath: though his soul be not yet in the bosom of our Lord in the heavenly joy, yet is it not on that other side deputed unto perpetual pain;
but he is adjudged for a while to the fire of purgatory, there to suffer pain for a season, which I am the gladder to show you in this behalf, to the intent that they which knew him, and such in especially as for his manifold benefices are singularly beholden unto him, should now with their prayers, alms, and other suffrages, help him.\textsuperscript{49}

More’s perspective that learning must be carried out as a process of spiritual purification, conveyed in the \textit{Life} and in \textit{Utopia}, finds further expression in his description of reading as \textit{scala perfectionis} in \textit{The Conputation of Tyndale’s Answer} (1532 – 1533). The trajectory of spiritual transformation is the ‘good place’ on earth from which man becomes empowered to see the many facets of pride in the soul and anticipate, while fighting against it, the happiness that is to come. In Chapter 3, I explore the relation between humanity as historical continuity, carrying on the spiritual battle - this time through learning - and the Christian symbolism of the body. I argue that the permanence of the good life, shaped through practices of humility, is informed by the symbolic reality of the body: sacramental, ecclesiastic, but also human, a discussion for which More draws inspiration from Galen’s dualistic perspective.

Not surprisingly, Guillaume Budé’s “Letter to Thomas Lupset,” in the parerga, places \textit{Utopia} between the divine and human realms:

… I have discovered, after investigating the matter, that Utopia lies outside the bounds of the known world. Perhaps it is one of the Fortunate Isles, near neighbour to the Elysian

Fields. As More himself says, Hythloday has not yet told exactly where it is to be found. Though it is divided into a number of different cities, they are all united or confederated in a single society named Hagnopolis [City of Saints, the translator’s note], a nation content with its own customs and possessions, blessedly innocent, leading a celestial life, as it were - lower than heaven, indeed, but far above the smoke and stir of this known world, which -among men’s constant squabbles, as violent and bitter as they are silly and futile - is being swept down a whirling cataract to the abyss. (Utopia 15–17)

Textual meaning must not remain a facet of an individually-integrated truth, as Pico proposes. Interpretation must be approached as opportunity to test the soul, a gesture symbolic of humanity at its highest, indeed, angelic point in the recognition of limit - of the mind, of one’s sinful nature.

6. Post-utopia: The Authorizing Limits of Language

In what follows I attempt to theorize post-utopia, a term through which I describe similar developments in the conceptualization of the ideal society. I see these developments to be engendered by Plato and More’s views on language and on the ideal community, and in particular by the implication that the discourse of the ideal enables an experience of permanence through a process of symbolic transcendence.

Augustine’s De Civitate Dei, François Rabelais’s Gargantua, and Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis are centered on the vision of two separate realms, divine and human, like those advanced by the Republic and Utopia. However, unlike Plato and More, who demonstrate the transcendental potential of language and of reason, these writers emphasize the ontological
hierarchization of being. In all three works, the limits of representation and of the mind are reinforced. The ideal is a post-linguistic experience of grace - illumination and redemption - that for this author as for his readers and fellow Christian may only come from God. I suggest that this strategy efficiently addresses issues of authority in the textual cultures of late antiquity and early modernity. Like Plato and More, the post-utopian writer is culture’s critical consciousness. He teaches that words, while unable to grasp a superior reality, take man towards the experience of the divine. His moral role in a culture centered on the dogma of redemption is reinforced as the earthly ideal he describes demonstrates the limits of representation and the need for grace.

Throughout the Essay on Man, Cassirer emphasizes that the symbolic potential of ideas is unveiled gradually: “The history of philosophy shows us very clearly that the full determination of a concept is very rarely the work of that thinker who first introduced that concept. For a philosophical concept is, generally speaking, rather a problem than the solution of a problem …” (1996, 195). Augustine’s De Civitate Dei revisits the concept of the ideal community advanced by Plato in the Republic. The vision of two cities, an earthly one of struggle and sin and a celestial one of peace and love, appears at first sight as a marked departure from Plato’s optimistic view that man may use language hermeneutically to construct a philosophical way of life. Cassirer posits that the contrast between them would stem from the radical differences between the gradual displacement facilitated by dialectical reasoning in Plato and the theory of illumination, making knowledge an act of divine grace, in Augustine.\textsuperscript{50} He says that there is absolutely no logical explanation for Augustine’s notion of illumination (84).

\textsuperscript{50} Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of the State (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946) 84.
Nevertheless, the break between Plato and Augustine is not as dramatic as it first appears. In fact, Augustine’s view of a polysemous bible that reverberates in a familiar way in the mind of each interpreter (as opposed to imposing meaning on him) (Irvine 270) echoes remotely Plato’s argument that philosophical discourse is natural because it recuperates a truth written in the soul. Brian Stock has demonstrated the intrinsic relation between reading and illumination in Augustine’s writings. The text functions as object on which the mind focuses as it begins its inward journey to achieve moments of illumination that anticipate, in the temporary grasp of meaning that results from the use of senses but no longer depends on them, the blessedness of the afterlife: “…he argued that if the contemplative frame of mind is our only experience of the blessed life while we are alive, the person most likely to achieve temporary happiness is the reader…” (15). Even the vision at Ostia in Book IX of the Confessions is achieved in the contemplative mode that informs Augustine’s illuminative hermeneutics, despite the fact that it is not enabled by reading and it is shared simultaneously by Augustine and his mother Monica. Like the visions at Milan and Cassiciacum, it relies on a temporary transcendence of the body in the silence that follows the evocation of heaven that they had just performed. It depends on sight for its glimpse into the trans-temporality of the Word, and it is immediately followed by a return to the temporality of the body and of language.

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52 The scholarship on Augustine’s mysticism in the vision at Ostia may focus on the synthesis of Plotinian and scriptural readings in mediating this experience of transcendence (Paul Henry 1938, trans. 1981). It may also emphasize Plotinus over the Christian aspect (Pierre Courcelle 1963). A third direction presents the vision simply as universally human experience of transcendence (Gerald Bonner 1994). I concur with John Kennedy (2005, 85) that the differences between the visions at Milan, Cassiciacum, and finally Ostia are less marked than those between the fugitive vision that are out of the body experiences and salvation itself, which is not an illumination of the same kind but includes the body and is no longer followed by a return to the temporality of life and words.
Augustine’s two cities meet in the fleeting moment of illumination enabled by the reading of Scripture. The true difference between them may be said to lie in the contrast between the struggle of hermeneutics and the peace of contemplation and of the afterlife, but even then they complement each other much in the way representation is, for Plato, a step on the epistemological ladder. Stock observes that Augustine’s notion of illumination, when man experiences God’s grace, resolves Plato’s concerns with representation and the ultimate refusal of truth to the non-philosopher for whom the chora remains the highest accessible point. The awareness that a superior reality lies beyond the material appearance of the written word suggests affinities between the Platonic and Augustinian modes of spiritual elevation:

…through reading and meditation it is possible for us to populate our hearts and minds temporarily with a community of thoughts, which live within us as something other than our selves. They are harbingers of things to come and reminders that we pass our lives in what Plato aptly terms “a zone of unlikeness,” a locality in which we have only a transient awareness of the nontransience of higher things. We can overcome this sense of alienation in moments of inspiration, when we directly experience God’s power. (15)

Augustine’s separation of the earthly and divine cities reflects his experience with scripture, more specifically the effort to transcend the limiting materiality of the letter in order to grasp its meaning. Martin Irvine observes the early interpreters’ struggle with textual semiosis and with the apparent inexhaustibility of meaning: “For the early medieval exegetes, the biblical text is a vast field of signs so constituted by its rhetoric to be forever indicating its own
insufficiency as the univocal statement of the Logos. The biblical text is polysemous and therefore necessitates multiple interpretations in many supplementary texts; the unity of truth and of the Logos is dispersed into polysemy” (27). The effort to establish scriptural authority results in the insight, expressed in Book VI of the Confessions, that “Christianity was based not on carnal fictions but on realities not apparent to the senses” (Stock 1996, 63). What results is a symbolic worldview permeated by the understanding that “God could be on high and yet very near; he could be wholly everywhere, and yet located in no specific place … He could be in the world and inside man” (63). The principal condition to find God is to desire him, to look for him through the letter, through the physical expression of creation that evokes the divine presence in the world.

But how can the author, divine and human, help the reader to understand this and to experience the brief moments of illumination that offer proof of salvation? Augustine identifies the reader’s sensibility as the mediator between the divine and the human spirit (63). Through sensibility he may go beyond the literal sense of the text and hear the spirit of God speak directly to him. This sensibility, differentiating individuals and simultaneously connecting them to a superior mode of spirituality, conciliates self-representation with a polysemous scriptural text. Stock notes that this moment anticipates by “a short step” Augustine’s theory of narrative (63), positing in works such as the Confessions that improvement may be achieved, that one’s life may be re-written for the better when one’s textual self, which is only a representation of the historical, and therefore past, self, is examined from a Christian perspective. Augustine’s symbolic thought addresses his concerns with textual authority through narrative self-representation, implying a community of readers who, however, may only perceive his spiritual
intentions through the veils of the words but especially through the veil of their own sensibilities. This view is most clearly conveyed in Book IX of the *Confessions*, where Augustine asks God to help his readers take into consideration, in their interpretations of this particular fragment, the author’s pain at seeing his mother dead. In doing so, he invites these readers to change, to manifest charity - indeed, to raise their spirits so as to allow God to work through them - by weeping in prayer for another’s sins. The interpretative community is achieved when the author’s pretentions of textual authority have been replaced by the willingness to offer his own self for examination as a way of enabling others’ own hermeneutic journey:

If language, from which reading and writing derive, is definable through a community of speakers, then selves, souls, or minds, which depend on language for their human expression have to have their communities too. Their lives consist of what Charles Taylor calls a “web of interlocutions.” It is this intersubjective quality that makes Augustine’s *Confessions* unique in the ancient literature of the soul rather than the doctrine that the inner self is veiled, mysterious, or inaccessible. His story hovers between thought and the world before it enters the world in words that are intended to be interpreted by others. … He distinguishes between the events of his life that he personally recalls and the discourse in which those events are presented, which is inevitably a literary genre. He knows that the life is not a revision of events: it is a revision of his interpretation of them. (16)

The interpreter’s relation to the literary text mirrors Augustine’s own relation to Scripture. Leo Braudy observes how the “Augustinian sense of the individual as a voyager in the world”
and “the Christian in search of a home in heaven” is “imaged in the writer’s relation to his work, whose goal is ... to discover the soul, the true self.” Consequently, argues Mark Vessey, “the reader is invited to discover a true self (in God) by entering the processual theology of Augustine’s texts.” Augustine’s temporal model of self-examination in the Confessions does not override the issue of scriptural interpretation but defines a parallel space of creative action for man. He writes representations of mnemonic representations and then meditates on them as a way of becoming able to see God’s grace in his changed self. The literary work gives expression to his yearning for God. As a dialogue of such representations, culture itself becomes an existential mirror of a historical effort to observe the limits and destiny of the self unfolding in the only space truly accessible to man while on earth.

The historical conditions under which François Rabelais establishes the coordinates of his authorship are defined by a comparable concern with semiosis and textual authority. Robert Weimann observes that this is a critical time when authors “had to cope, within the text as well as outside it, with the order of particularity deemed appropriate for the task of the «historian».” The appropriation of signs, reflecting the conditions of cultural production and wider circulation of texts in early modern print culture, defines a tension between “authorial signification and the readers’ unpredictable interpretation of meaning” (150).

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54 Mark Vessey, “‘Figures of Writing in Western Late Antiquity,” in European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance edited by Patrick Cheney and Frederick A. De Armas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002 ) 52.

*Gargantua* is an exceptional reflection of this cultural tableau. The Abbey of Thélème, Rabelais’s version of the ideal community, no longer conveys anxiety over its fictional nature, as *Utopia* does, but posits representation as the basis of its ideality. It thematizes its signifying practices (151) as a way of establishing the author’s privileged position in relation to the meaning of his own textual creation, but also of unveiling his own human limits:

The reader’s wish for meaningful identification is titillated, but his or her satisfaction is deferred; the desire for interpretation is roused, but the grounds for exegesis are made to appear unsafe. And yet such semiotic instability in the text does not lead readers into a void when what is at issue is the exciting, teasing “power of signification” itself. Its major source and sustenance are inseparable from what “productivity” the text, as appropriated in the world, invests in its own assimilation of forms and meanings. (153)

The construction of Thélème demonstrates that language constructs fictions and makes apparent the need for a post-linguistic experience of enjoyable communion. “Drink!”, the imperative that closes *Gargantua*, requires the reader to generate his own interpretation of the enigma while forcing upon him the realization that in its highest situation language may only invite in the reader the desire to meet the author’s will for grace (159).

An examination of Rabelais’s concerns with authorship must take into consideration several particular aspects that I believe inform the self-representational dimension of his ideal: the continuous struggle with accusations of obscenity by the Sorbonne, who censured the 1532 *Pantagruel*, the atmosphere of persecutions for heresy that culminated in the 1534 Affair of the
Placards (the year *Gargantua* was published), and his efforts to establish his intellectual and spiritual affinities with Erasmus. Paul J. Smith observes, for example, that the immediate purpose of Rabelais’s 1532 letter to Erasmus is to reveal the identity of J.C. Scaliger, described as “atheist and physician of ‘bad reputation’.” Through this gesture, Rabelais connects himself with Erasmus against the Ciceronians’ purism and implicitly adopts the view, anticipating Montaigne and Francis Bacon, that creativity must be informed by spirituality.

*Gargantua* reinforces the scepticism toward textual interpretation advanced by *Pantagruel*. The analogies between the charity that underlies the notion of Pantagruelism, describing in *Gargantua* an interpretative community that Rabelais reclaims for his real authorial self in the text’s ‘Prologue,’ and the will for grace that permeates the Thelemites’ way of life, offer an even clearer image of the ever stronger scriptural undertone in Rabelais’s writings. William H. Huseman observes that Rabelais associates catastrophic consequences with free will alone: “Isn’t it simply a recognition of our one and only source of everything worth having? Isn’t it simply to declare that we all of us depend on His kindness, that without Him there is nothing, nothing is worth anything, nothing can happen, if His holy grace isn’t instilled in us?” The Enigme symbolically found in the abbey’s foundations expresses the anagogical significance of Rabelais’s vision of the ideal. It describes the biblical Day of Judgment in order to project a prophetic author whose literary visions evoke a final peace:

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Thomas More’s work is undoubtedly known to Rabelais, who makes Gargantua a King of Utopia. As an exercise in interpretative humility, the episode of Thélème echoes the constant unveiling of the pride in the soul in *Utopia*. However, the anxiety of the struggle to achieve a higher nature has been replaced, in *Gargantua*, by the acceptance of an uncrossable threshold that secures for Rabelais a position as a spiritual figure who unveils the reality of life to the existent (and otherwise more easily achievable) community of readers: his Pantagruelists.

Ernst Cassirer contrasts Augustine with Francis Bacon who, he argues, is more concerned with creating scientific, universal analogies than with foregrounding man’s exceptional contribution to the discovery of nature (1944, 228). Cassirer is certainly right with regard to Bacon’s dedication to the advancement of scientific learning. However, while carefully trying to stay away from any deterministic possibility he misses Bacon’s engagement with the politics of

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textual authorization, an aspect that links the fictional ideal in the *New Atlantis* to his philosophical and scientific work. The discussion that follows is not a departure from Cassirer but rather an effort to better understand how Bacon’s vision of the ideal positions the author in relation to God.

Adrian Johns has made the case that in early modern culture the authorization of knowledge in print is inextricably linked to the construction of an authorial persona. Bacon struggles to secure a political position and suggests that natural philosophy should be subjected to the authority of the state. Martin Elsky observes that despite his view that writing has primacy over speech, Bacon sees words as images of a divinely created reality, completely separated from it. Elsky contrasts this position to the hieroglyphic tradition represented by Du Bartas, Top, and George Herbert, for example, all positing that words may convey “higher levels of spiritual meaning” (169). To further complicate matters, throughout the *New Atlantis* Bacon emphasizes the primacy of experience over the written word: the island is founded by King Solamona upon hearing about the six day creation in Genesis, and the Christianization of its inhabitants occurs through an act of revelation that makes apparent the trans-historical nature of Scripture, as DeCook has shown (209).

These views are reconciled once we understand the relationship between aphorism - epitomizing in the *New Atlantis* a synthesis of philosophical and scientific knowledge that points beyond itself - and the experiential end of the trajectory of progress that leads to the recuperation of man’s original contemplative work and power over creation. Elsky observes that Bacon blames the representational function of language on the user’s imperfect knowledge of the reality

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to which words refer (171). More difficulties in language usage are generated by the mind’s tendency to create false analogies so as to create a falsely empowering image of a unified world of correspondences (171). Elsky advances the view, which I adopt, that for Bacon the language that communicates reality takes the form of a mental discourse “in the minds of those who properly understand the nature of things” and may be partially expressed in writing (174). This perspective may indicate Bacon’s intellectual debt to William of Ockham, who posits that intuition enables an abstractive cognition that eventually helps certain individuals to recuperate, through a form of intellectual memory, an experience or reality that is no longer available through the senses. In Chapter 4 I show how Bacon defines the author as an exceptional individual whose imagination, reinforced by good spiritual habits, functions as a sort of mnemonic device to intuit the order of creation and to establish the project meant to recuperate man’s original privileged position within that order. Bacon’s derogatory allusion to Thomas More’s ‘feigned commonwealth’ where men and women see each other naked before entering marriage testifies to his sense of spiritual mission.

Bacon does not simply appropriate Ockham’s nominalism but makes it his own by integrating it with the idea that imaginative intuitions must be strengthened through spiritual interpretations. This perspective responds to a particularity of the politics of authorship in this interval: asserting originality without being considered singular (Johns 52). The House of Salomon symbolizes man’s struggle to recuperate his original position within creation. Bacon, it becomes apparent, does not simply subject his work to Christian dogma but insists for a

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60 William of Ockham, Rep.3., Opera Theologica edited by Juvenalis Lalor and others (St. Bonaventure: St. At the very heart of my argument is the perspective that utopia, stemming from a crisis of history and of representation, reflects a concern with death and an effort to enable a transcendental mode of thought that manifests a perennial humanity. Bonaventure University), discussed in Ockham On Concepts by Claude Panaccio (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) 7.
trajectory of self-exploration that acknowledges man’s yearning for the original experience of grace.

The *New Atlantis* is perhaps the last text to echo so powerfully the processual nature of the transformation for the better advanced by Plato and Thomas More’s utopias. The authorial figure is crucial for this process. The interpretative work of the House of Salomon relies on Solamona’s mnemonic-imaginative foundational gesture in a move that recalls Augustine’s links between memory, textuality, and the interpretative community. The interpreters pray for a final divine illumination to help them understand how to turn their labours into ‘holy,’ good uses - acknowledging, as it were, that man’s reliance on language to recuperate an ultimate ideal is limited by an inability to grasp final causes. Where utopia conveys optimism with man’s power to achieve transcendence through the means of reason and of language, post-utopia emphasizes the author’s spiritual intention and his key role in preserving a teleological view of history. The discourses on the ideal in *De Civitate Dei*, *Gargantua*, and *New Atlantis* are comparably informed by a vision of textual interpretation as trajectory towards the recognition of the mind’s limit and of its desire - fuelled by visions of divine grace - to experience the Christian ideal of immortality.
Chapter 2

Representation and Symbolic Knowledge in Plato’s Republic

My objective in this chapter is to identify the textual strategies of the Republic and to discuss the importance of these strategies for Plato’s educational project. In Chapter 1, I suggested that Plato devises his written philosophical discourse in order to enable critical reflection and empower the reader in relation to death. By bringing together myth and dialectics, the text creates the conditions for an evaluative mode of krisis. It invites the reflexive disposition characteristic to the conceptual space between mind and language, which the philosopher opens for the reader. The discussion that follows is divided into two parts: the first part introduces the concept of ‘krisis’ as evaluative stance that mirrors the objective distantiation of thought from reality. I draw on the work of Eric Havelock, William Harris (1991), and Martin Irvine (2006) to show that Plato’s exploration of representation in the Republic involves a critique of existing spiritual practices and an effort to subject the interpretative experience to achieving philosophical wisdom. The second subchapter focuses on the textual strategies of the Republic. I draw on Harvey Yunis (2003) and Gerard Naddaf (1999) to argue that the role of these strategies is to enable interpretative reflexivity. The text, making apparent the non-historical temporality of dialectics, reveals the recuperative dimension of symbolic knowledge. It invites the reader to re-think the notions of ‘presence’ and ‘absence.’ The reader is challenged to re-present man, himself, as it were, through a community that reflects the higher reality imprinted onto the soul. Finally, I build on Peter T. Struck’s discussion on Plato’s concept of symbolic language to emphasize the importance attributed by the philosopher to reflexive interpretation. Myth and
dialectics, Image and Word, are reconciled in a discourse that promises to reconnect man with himself and with humanity as a whole.

My discussion of utopian thought in relation to literacy complements the scholarly position of Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, who argues that Plato’s work carries only the demonstrative aspects of a philosophy of reason. Wunenburger acknowledges that changes are taking place in Plato’s lifetime but credits the “surgissement d’un nouveau langage d’images, qui se met à l’aube de la pensée européenne” (Wunenburger 1979, 52) and “une imperceptible désacralisation des cosmologies moyen-orientales” (57) to argue that, in Plato, “jamais l’imagination ne peut se substituer à une démonstration, jamais le spectacle de la fiction est créateur d’une norme” (45). Wunenburger’s decision to ignore the issue of literacy undermines an effective understanding of how the ancient vision of the ideal engages with the cultural developments of the day. My discussion aims to demonstrate that the transcendental core of Plato’s philosophical thought is mirrored by the literary strategies of the Republic. I argue that its philosophical fiction defines a transformative trajectory for the reader, who emerges from it as empowered interpreter and shaper of reality.
1. **Plato on Writing: Evaluating Culture**

At the end of the *Phaedrus*, Plato, through the voice of Socrates, criticizes writing which is described as a “potion for jogging the memory” (275a). Writing is a mere image of living speech (*Phaedrus* 276a), two times removed from truth (a representation of speech, which in itself is a representation of the Idea it evokes). The fictional Socrates goes on to compare writing with painting:

> … there’s something odd about writing, Phaedrus, which makes it exactly like painting. The offspring of painting stand there as if alive, but if you ask them a question they maintain an aloof silence. It’s the same with written words: you might think they were speaking as if they had some intelligence, but if you want an explanation of any of the things they’re saying and you ask them about it, they just go on and on for ever giving the same single piece of information. (*Phaedrus* 275d)

Phaedrus agrees: “We’d be right to describe the written word as a mere image of this” (of the “living, ensouled speech of a man of knowledge”) (*Phaedrus* 276a). Plato’s critique of writing is fully displayed in his *Second Letter*, written to Dionysus of Syracuse:

> The greatest safeguard is to avoid writing and to learn by heart; for it is not possible that what is written down should not get divulged. For this reason I myself have never yet written anything on these subjects, and no treatise by Plato exists or will exist, but those
which now bear his name belong to a Socrates become fair and young. Fare thee well, and give me credence; and now, to begin with, read this letter over repeatedly and then burn it up.\textsuperscript{61}

However, this rejection should not be taken at face value. Derrida has shown that Plato’s term \textit{pharmakon} (\textit{Phaedrus} 274e), meaning both ‘remedy’ and ‘poison,’ to describe writing reflects ambivalence towards the medium.\textsuperscript{62} In the \textit{Thirteenth Letter}, Plato mentions sending some treatises by Pythagoras and his own \textit{Divisions} to Dionysius to help with the latter’s philosophical education and as a way of strengthening their relationship (360b-c and e). Written texts can, therefore, be trusted as vehicles of knowledge. Moreover, writing comes from Theuth, the same ancient Egyptian deity who invented geometry, a discipline Plato holds dear.

Plato’s ambivalence reflects the intellectual mode of reflection during this transition towards a culture based on writing.\textsuperscript{63} The fact that he writes his dialogues indicates that he

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item The adoption of the phonetic alphabet by the ancient Greeks remains a point of contention among media historians. In two articles, published in 1933 and 1938, Rhys Carpenter asserts that it was not until the last quarter of the eighth century that the Greek alphabet was shaped from the one adopted from the Phoenicians, “The Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet,” \textit{American Journal of Archaeology} 37 (1933): 8 - 29, “The Greek Alphabet Again,” \textit{American Journal of Archaeology}, 42 (1938) 58 - 69. Joseph Naveh pushes the date as far back as the 1100 BC, based on similarities between Old Phoenician inscriptions and Greek scripts, “Some Semitic Epigraphical Considerations in the Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet,” \textit{American Journal of Archaeology} 77 (1973): 1 - 8. Assuming a cautious position in the middle of the interval defined by the interpretations of Rhys Carpenter and Joseph Naveh, Florian Coulmas argues that “to set the time of adoption of the Phoenician alphabet by the Greeks at the tenth century at the latest does not seem too daring a supposition,” \textit{The Writing Systems of the World} (Oxford, UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1989) 159. If Walter Ong’s argument of a ‘primary orality’ and his nostalgia of a pre-writing and pre-print “pristine human consciousness” are contested by Derrida, for example, who points to a tendency to attribute to writing changes that have been previously attributed to language, his conclusion that it was not until the fifth and fourth century that alphabetic literacy became a reality in Athens has not been contested, perhaps because it is
\end{enumerate}
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favours the new medium, whose potential for change is fully integrated with the philosophical project. Eric Havelock argues, for example, that Plato’s rejection of poetry in the *Republic* expresses his critique of the educational apparatus of Athens, still adhering to methods of oral instruction, and indicates that Plato roots his own educational vision in literacy. His philosophy depends on a condemnation of the oral ‘state of mind’ and of mimesis, which cannot coexist with a rational perspective on life: “The psyche which slowly asserts itself in independence of the poetic performance and the poetised tradition had to be the reflective, thoughtful, critical psyche, or it could be nothing. Along with the discovery of the soul, Greece in Plato’s day and just before Plato had to discover something else - the activity of sheer thinking” (200). Plato does condemn certain “uses of writing,” especially for personal gain as was the case with the Sophists, for example. William Harris points out that Plato has a lucid awareness of the medium’s power to influence the world negatively as much as positively.

Kathryn A. Morgan argues that Plato combines myth and philosophy, story and writing, for his educational project which is described as a form of writing “in the soul of the listener” (227, supported by Eric Havelock’s argument on the late introduction of the alphabet. Finally, the idea of a gradual displacement from orality to literacy responds effectively to the issues raised by all assessment criteria.

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64 Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963). Havelock builds on Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord’s research. Parry’s argument that Homer composed his epics without the aid of writing generated a field of inquiry called ‘oral literature.’ See *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, edited and translated by Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 1 - 239. Albert B. Lord continued Parry’s research and further emphasized the idea of oral composition which would be visible in the formulaic style of works belonging to non-literate authors, in *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). In his chapter “Poetry as Opinion,” Havelock argues that the Greek educational system functioned in close interdependence with the poetic experience, involving a psychological identification of the reciter with the poem. Before writing, oral communication was vital to the transmission of ‘ethos,’ “a linguistic statement of the public and private law (including history and technology) common to the group and expressive of its coherence as a culture.” The Greek educational system was “placed wholly at the service of this task of oral preservation” (234). The oral state of mind resulting from these practices would reflect the emotional identification with the subject of study due to the performative dimension of reciting, absence of objectivity and analysis, reliance on verbal formulas and rhythm for memorization, formulaic writing, reducing experience to story (1963, 41).

referencing the *Phaedrus* 276e). Myth appeals to emotion and raises existential concerns and thus prepares one for the dialectical discussion, which in its turn invites ‘serious thought’ on how one should live life: “The myth is ... philosophical rhetoric and plays an important part in turning Phaidros (and the reader) from a life of superficiality, based on thoughtless acceptance of rhetorical and social convention, to a life of philosophy that analyses the relationship of these conventions with the truth” (229). The role of myth in awakening one to the most profound of all concerns - namely death - is made apparent early in the *Republic*:

The tales told about what is in Hades - that the one who has done unjust deeds here must pay the penalty there - at which he laughed up to then, now make his soul twist and turn because he fears they might be true. Whether it is due to the debility of old age, or whether he discerns something more of the things in that place because he is already nearer to them, as it were – he is, at any rate, now full of suspicion and terror. (*Republic* 330d-e)

The fluid movement between myth and philosophy, between narrative and dialectics, necessitates critical reflexivity, which is manifested by the exceptional individual who grasps truth and understands the workings of the human mind. This individual is the philosopher-educator of the *Republic*, who feels compelled to descend back to the cave to enlighten others:

But you we have begotten for yourselves and for the rest of the city like leaders and kings in hives; you have been better and more perfectly educated and are more able to participate in both lives. So you must go down, each in his turn, into the common dwelling of the
others and get habituated along with them to seeing the dark things. And, in getting
habituated to it, you will see ten thousand times better than the men there, and you’ll know
what each of the phantoms is, and of what it is a phantom, because you have seen the truth
about fair, just, and good things. And thus, the city will be governed by us and by you in a
state of waking, not in a dream as the many cities nowadays are governed by men who
fight over shadows with one another. (*Republic* 520b-c)

The philosopher re-shapes man’s thought through a continuous movement between Form and
expression, a process described symbolically as a re-writing of the soul:

Then it’s the philosopher, keeping company with the divine and the orderly who becomes
orderly and divine, to the extent that is possible for a human being. (*Republic* 500c-d)

…

They would take the city and the dispositions of human beings, as though they were a
tablet ... which, in the first place, they would wipe clean.

…

After that, I suppose that in filling out their work they would look away frequently in both
directions, toward the just, fair, and moderate by nature and everything of the sort, and,
again, toward what is in human beings; and thus, mixing and blending the practices as
ingredients, they would produce the image of man, taking hints from exactly that
phenomenon in human beings which Homer too called god-like and the image of god. ...
And I suppose they would rub out one thing and draw in another again, until they made human dispositions as dear to the gods as they admit of being. (*Republic* 501a-c)

The last passage indicates that the purpose of the philosophical transformation is the achievement of a higher spirituality. Human disposition and action are ‘wiped clean’ and re-written according to the values of justice. I will later show how Plato’s teleology speaks, in fact, of the construction, through learning, of a basis of good choices that allows man to act moderately in life as well as in the afterlife.

2. **Interpreting Text, Life: Writing, Difference, Reflexivity**

Philosophy carries the potential to enable man’s reorientation towards a rational life. But how is one to distinguish between poetic or sophistic writing, proposing a representation as truth, and the true learning, leading to self-knowledge, offered by philosophy? Martin Irvine observes Plato’s concern with the difficulties posed to the reader by emerging interpretative practices:

> A text cannot be interrogated; it can only be interpreted. But how? According to which authority? In Socrates’s parable, King Thamus objects to reading without accompanying teaching (*aneu didaches*) (275a), in short, without the codes of interpretation and discourse authorized by the king. Nothing is clear and certain when left to writing (*en grammasi*). (Irvine 28)

At issue is the text’s inherent polysemy (28). Irvine observes that, for Plato, interpretative difficulties echo in ‘real’ life because in his time the concept of articulate speech was described
through an analogy between writing and letters (*grammata*): *phone engrammatos*, “speech resolvable into units of script” (28). Writing is “inscribed within articulate speech” and is permeated by the logic of speech: “the letters of the alphabet were thought to represent all the possible sounds of spoken *logos*, and articulate speech was understood to be only what can be represented and resolved into minimal scriptible units” (28). Plato’s engagement with writing is, then, an engagement with language itself because “Speech and writing were … convertible terms” (28). Through language, man’s mind and worldview may be acted upon.

I suggested earlier that the specific, abstract visuality of the phonetic alphabet enables the conceptualization of a difference between meaning and expression while proposing that a subtle but intrinsic connection between them does exist. Irvine notes that, through the concept of logos, writing is seen to carry truth value:

… connected, meaningful utterances, “the stream of speech which flows out and serves intelligence” (*Timaeus* 75e), the exteriorization or representation (*mimema*) of a prelinguistic mental experience (*en te psyche pathema*) (*Republic* 2.382b-c). Thought (*to dianoeisthai*) is the logos the soul has with itself prior to exteriorization in speech sound (*phone*). … as a construct of metalanguage, *logos* shifted from an unconscious, internal ground of statements to an externalized object of analysis and interpretation. In a grammatical context, *logos* ordinarily means statement, explanation, discourse, or declarative sentence. In Plato’s works, a *logos* is assumed to have reference to real things (*ta onta*) and their nature (*ousia*) and therefore has a truth value. (25)
Plato promises to empower the literate man in relation to all aspects of life. To the individual who cultivates reason, sensory experiences work to strengthen the epistemological impulse and the effort to control representation: “... notice that, when desires force someone contrary to the calculating part, he reproaches himself and his spirit is roused against that in him which is doing the forcing; and, just as though there were two parties at faction, such a man’s spirit becomes the ally of speech?” (Republic 440a-b). For such an empowered man, narrative no longer stands for representation but supports the process of self-knowledge by connecting him to his own spirit and to humanity in general. This is why Plato makes it an important part of education:

I once heard something that I trust. Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus under the outside of the North Wall when he noticed corpses lying by the public executioner. He desired to look, but at the same time he was disgusted and made himself turn away; and for a while he struggled and covered his face. But finally, overpowered by the desire, he opened his eyes wide, ran toward the corpses and said: ‘Look, you damned wretches, take your fill of the fair sight.’ (Republic 439e - 440a)

To the man who has received philosophical education, the difference between expression - phonetic symbol, story - and truth is no longer disorienting.

The concept of difference is fundamental to Plato’s effort to advance the instrument through which the philosopher communicates truth: dialectics. To understand dialectics is to have access to reason’s modus operandi, to become aware that the mind operates through

66 Through the concept of différence, Jacques Derrida creates an analogy between mind and writing, basing their objectivity on a continuous, difference-based deferral of presence. Without engaging with Derrida, it is my perspective in this work that Plato foregrounds the transcendental potential of symbolic, written discourse.
representations and to approach all texts, and life, from a philosophical perspective as if being
guided by a master at all times. Dialectics is central to the new education because it does not
 teach something in particular but invites critical reflection.

Because dialectics is a discursive practice, relying on words, it cannot provide ontological
knowledge of ‘being,’ of the totality of ‘what is.’ Its epistemological value is defined in the
functional terms of its own logic, which means that to think dialectically, to know, is to remain
constantly aware of the value of limit. To advance dialectically is to unveil gradually the qualities
of ‘being.’ This expressive, processual particularity of dialectics gives it its extraordinary
potential as mental practice, not confined to any particular discipline. Dialectics is the
philosopher’s intellectual practice of choice. Because it is a practice, it may be taught through the
written word and will continue to inform action after reading has ceased.

3. Creating Krisis: Death, Learning, and the Moral Choice

Creating the reflective disposition that will be part of intellectual skill is fundamental to
reconnecting mental image and language. Cassirer argues that realizing language’s
representational nature was for Plato a moment of moral and intellectual crisis, as this realization
threatens to throw man into an existential despair and awareness of solitude (1944, 110-111). But
through what strategy ought the Word to be made to act upon a mind that does not understand its
epistemological limitations? I suggest that Plato’s critique of writing proposes written philosophy
as a unique evaluative praxis that unites rhetoric and dialectics, as a way of bridging between
man’s social and intellectual life. Writing does represent a new memory. As rhetoric, it invites a
distantiation from the path of learning that leads to self-realization. To remedy this situation, the
written word must be made to speak of life, as it is but mostly as it should be lived. Accordingly,
the dialogue begins from a situation with which the interlocutors can identify, from a point where they meet regardless of their religious or political views.

In the *Republic*, this point is the most powerful of all realities: death. To write about it is to give palpability to a universal experience. Early in the work we witness how Cephalus’s daily activities revolve around rituals meant to appease the gods and ensure a rewarding afterlife. The conversation with Cephalus instantly creates a sense of solidarity among the participants in the dialogue, whose different attitudes towards life converge in the recognition of humanity’s most vulnerable moment. To write about death is also to foreground the trans-temporal dimension of this concern, which is of all generations that have ever lived and ever will. Insofar as it informs the plea for a moral, philosophical way of life, Plato’s written rhetoric draws on one of life’s most fundamental truths. The foreknowledge of death is one that writing will never shake off. More importantly, when a written text speaks of death it becomes itself a genuine memory of humanity as a whole.

Moreover, as Morgan observes, Plato’s rhetorical employment of myth suggests that every individual may be able to achieve his intellectual potential through learning. In the myth of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* all souls are immortal and carry different degrees of knowledge, ranging from the philosopher to the tyrant who stands on the ninth and lowest step of the spiritual ladder. Good rhetoric turns man inwards by forcing him to acknowledge the most critical of all human concerns. In Chapter 1, I argued that the myth of Er in the *Republic* has the purpose of reinforcing the truth of death and the importance of a moral life in transcending the mythical cycle of fear and repentance. I suggest that the description of the afterlife also enables the transition between text and life. It does so by ‘proving’ through the story that the potential
associated with dialectics may be fructified in the new life that begins once the written dialogue
has ended. The story of Er, ending the discourse on the ideal society, stands on the threshold
between textual interpretation and life, separating but also uniting them, demonstrating how
through choice - of words and then of actions - they flow into each other. This final myth,
centered around the image of an intermediary space of reflection and choice, functions as a
counterpoint to Cephalus’s opening description of a ‘threshold of old age’ (Republic 328e) when,
liberated of the bad masters of desire, one can clearly see the importance of good temper to a
balanced life (Republic 329d).

Philosophical learning helps man overcome fear and desire. This is the reason why, for the
character of Socrates in the Republic, decisions have less to do with one’s nature and more with
overcoming ignorance and understanding the benefits of the just life:

Before finding out what we were considering at first - what the just is - I let go of that and
pursued the consideration of whether it is vice and lack of learning, or wisdom and virtue.
And later, when in its turn an argument that injustice is more profitable than justice fell in
my way, I could not restrain myself from leaving the other one and going after this one, so
that now as a result of the discussion I know nothing. So long as I do not know what the
just is, I shall hardly know whether it is a virtue or not and whether the one who has it is
unhappy or happy. (Republic 354b-c)

The philosopher draws his power over language from the consciousness of his own ignorance.
His impulse to help others transcend particulars is genuine. To advance philosophy as ethics,
Socrates begins the discussion of truth and justice by positioning himself against Simonides of Ceos, whose concept of justice is shown to reflect self-interest: “Justice, then, seems, according to you [Polemarchus] and Homer and Simonides, to be a certain art of stealing, for the benefit, to be sure, of friends and the harm of enemies” (Republic 334b). Socrates endeavours to discover what justice really is, ultimately demonstrating that words may be used to understand it, not ontologically but through its benefits to man’s spiritual life. An inner truth, mental, imagistic, and pertaining to the individual, is projected into language, into the action specific to the social realm. After building the argument through dialectics, Socrates reinforces it through a description of the goods that are to reward one in the eternal life: the earthly gifts “are nothing in multitude or magnitude compared to those that await each when dead. And these things should be heard so that in hearing them each one of these men will have gotten back the full measure of what the argument owed him” (Republic 614a). Having been presented with an image of the afterlife, and having understood how desire prevents him from reaching his potential of self-knowledge, the reader is in a better position to navigate through the contrasting possibilities of justice and injustice in order to make informed decisions.

I suggest that the educational challenge of the Republic and the philosopher’s task is to create in the reader’s mind the mode of krisis to which Glaucon alludes at 360e, where it is pointed out that correct judgement may be obtained if the extremes of justice and injustice are set in opposition. Plato’s concept of judgment, by contrast, reflects the jurisprudential use of the term in his time. It carries the connotation of ‘remediation’ of a situation: Wendy Brown points out that, in Ancient Greece, ‘krisis’ indicates “the art of making distinctions ... considered
essential to judging and rectifying an alleged disorder in or of the democracy.” Krisis implies recognizing the existence of a dis-order that must be addressed (5). Brown argues that its use in the Republic conveys a critique of the “adjudicated truth” (a solution that the judges have agreed upon, therefore conventional) implied by the Athenian krisis, in order to suggest its replacement by the search for philosophical truth (5), which takes place removed from politics itself (6). This argument may explain why the dialogue on justice and the ideal is carried out outside of Athens.

The Word’s magical function, central to the mythical worldview, has been replaced in Plato by a semantic and symbolic function: “The Logos becomes the principle of the universe and the first principle of human knowledge” (Cassirer 1944, 111). Inasmuch as the phonetic symbol enables understanding of language’s representational nature, as I suggested earlier, it also allows the conceptualization of a superior reality of ‘being’ and the possibility that this reality may be conveyed. Plato, argues Cassirer, is the first philosopher to have become conscious of the immanent principle. By defining this reality as ‘idea,’ he initiates an unprecedented inquiry into the concept of being and reveals the inextricable relation between thought and reality:

… the pre-Socratics identified being with a particular existing thing and took it as a fixed point of departure, while he for the first time recognized it as a problem. … Only when being has the sharply defined meaning of a problem, does thought attain to the sharply defined meaning and value of a principle. It no longer runs parallel to being, a mere reflection “about” being, but by its own inner form, it now determines the inner form of being. (Cassirer 1953, 74)

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Plato’s extraordinary position in Western thought is defined by the ability to respond to this transitional moment with a mode of thought characterized by systematic, teleological reflection (74 and 95). The written discourse of the *Republic* takes the reader from the remembrance of death to understanding the benefits of justice. It does so by lifting, through dialectics, the veils of forgetfulness so that man may see the benefits of moderation and then strive to achieve morality both in life and after.

4. **Writing and Objectivity: Envisioning the Ideal**

Plato addresses the issue of a mediated reality also in the *Cratylus*, which is the first known extensive discussion of the nature of language in the West, designed as a critique of convention. I have argued that the phonetic sign enables the understanding that language is representation: the letter is a representation of speech, which is a representation of truth. In the following three sections I attempt to explore the philosophical basis of the new epistemology enabled by writing.

Philosophy proposes that symbolic knowledge is natural and resolves the tension between reality and its linguistic, social expression. I first suggest that Plato’s educational project relies on the observation that writing facilitates an objective, rational mindset. I then attempt to show that his nuanced concept of mimesis allows the possibility that the transformative practice of symbolic representation, employed throughout the *Republic*, may inform mental practices after the dialogue (and textual interpretation) has ceased. Finally, I discuss how Plato’s symbolic language

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empowers the reader in relation to the intermediary space between mind and word where reality is continuously produced.

In the *Republic*, rhetoric makes use of story and emotion to awaken the mind to existential problems while dialectics initiates and advances the transcendental process to allow one to overcome the fear of death. For Plato, myth and rhetoric also stand for the many unlearned who cannot employ reason appropriately and who need to be convinced of the necessity to pursue one path or another. Also, myth defines a worldview based on interaction and community identification. The text allows distantiation from both myth and philosophy, a suprahistorical disengagement from each mode of existence. Once written, rhetoric and philosophy no longer present different worldviews but work to draw a map of the mind unfolded for the reader to see and discuss. Sybille Krämer observes that writing forces objectivity and the need for discourse:

The relation between the discursive and the pictorial as materialized in phonetic writing produces spoken language as an isolated medium of communication. This act of “producing” is based in the interplay of embodiment and “dis-embodiment.” On the one hand, phonetic writing erases the mimetic, gestural, and tonal traces of the human body from language-use; on the other hand, it gives language pure discursive materiality and corporeality. Through this process, the epistemological essence of language achieves a scriptural existence anchored in time and space. Language acquires the status of a thing and/or an object only through this process. The notational iconicity of writing makes the
discursiveness of language visible and thus allows it to be schematized. In this regard, writing … becomes the prerequisite for the possibility of language as a scientific object.\textsuperscript{69}

The transcription of speech in alphabetic writing allows the dissection, analysis and interpretation (527) of language. On the one hand, the emphasis on discursivity over performativity resulting from the interpretative mediation describes the disengagement of language from the mental image it attempts to convey. On the other hand, it makes apparent the cognitive potential of objectivity, projecting realization into the future. Plato’s vision of the new community makes it clear that a philosophical way of life is built gradually, as bad habits are identified through language and overcome:

... this is the very charge I’m bringing; not one city today is in a condition worthy of the philosophic nature. And this is why it is twisted and changed; just as a foreign seed sown in alien ground is likely to be overcome and fade away into the native stock, so too this class does not at present maintain its own power but falls away into an alien disposition. But if it ever takes hold in the best regime, just as it is itself best, then it will make plain that it really is divine as we agreed it is and that the rest are human, both in terms of their natures and their practices. (\textit{Republic} 497b-c)

The ‘good city’ functions as an organic whole once its members become connected to the same moral reality:

\textsuperscript{69} Sybille Krämer and Anita McChesney, “Writing, Notational Iconicity, Calculus: On Writing as a Cultural Technique,” \textit{MLN} 118.3 (2003) 528.
- Then is that city best governed which is most like a single human being? For example, when one of us wounds a finger, presumably the entire community - that community tying the body together with the soul in a single arrangement under the ruler within it - is aware of the fact, and all of it is in pain as a whole along with the afflicted part; and it is in this sense we say that this human being has a pain in his finger. …

- ‘Yes, it does,’ he said. And, as to what you ask, the city with the best regime is most like such a human being. (Republic 462c-d)

Plato’s rejection of representation is in fact an engagement with the politics of discourse, enabling the “fundamental beliefs” that “make civil society possible.” He proposes that once leaders and citizens have become enlightened through learning, conventional belief may be replaced with a truthful discourse that bridges self-knowledge and the social production of reality. The fact that Plato writes his dialogues is in itself a statement, and an optimistic one, about the possibility that moral action may spring from the objective disposition associated with a rational and literate mind.

5. Teaching Prudence: Imitating the Transformative Discourse

The potential of the written word to enable, through a discursive blueprint, a new intellectual practice informed by philosophy makes a re-examination of Plato’s concept of

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70 Doxa, for Plato, as opposed to knowledge, or epistēme.

mimesis highly relevant to this discussion. Günter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf observe that Plato’s concept of mimesis is heterogeneous and carries numerous meanings that range from representation, imitation, expression, emulation, transformation to “creation of similarity, the production of appearances, and illusion.” Most importantly, mimesis is fundamental to the transformation entailed by education: “That is why Plato insists on the supervision of poetry and the models contained in it. Since literary representations stimulate mimetic capacities, they initiate transformations and changes.” Gebauer and Wulf argue that Plato’s critique reflects the transition from a primarily oral society to a literate one. Plato is engaged in an “effort to replace an image-based discourse, with its major tie to orality, with a conceptual one” (26). The ambivalence towards the new medium speaks of the displacement from an oral mode of

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72 Plato’s dismissal of visual mimesis in the Republic is traditionally evoked in discussions that argue that the critique of representation informs his theory of the Forms. His scepticism towards painting and poetry has been consistently attached to the effort to present philosophy as the art of reason and of truth. More recently, Stephen Halliwell (2002) has observed that, despite a habit of employing numerous references to visual arts, little knowledge of Greek painting can be drawn from Plato’s work because most of these references “appropriate and enlist aspects of visual mimesis for his own philosophical ends.” He points out that nothing in Plato indicates “the same kind or degree of attention to pictorial technique” as is shown by Aristotle in De Sensu, for example. Eva C. Keuls (1978) argues similarly that, despite the fact that painting had a profound impact on Greek culture, more so than sculpture or other figurative arts, and in spite of being discussed throughout Plato’s works, the philosopher’s “interest in knowledge of it” is “neither deep nor wide.” Keuls contends that Plato was only interested in painting because of its “metaphorical potential,” and that it is only for wordplay and symbolism that he uses pictorial techniques and styles. Furthermore, since no major technical developments in painting are taking place now, “... the view of the philosopher as a crusader against illusionistic techniques invented during his life cannot stand the scrutiny of the historical background.” Nancy H. Demand (1975) summarizes the critical literature on the relation between Plato’s philosophical ideas and developments in Greek painting and offers an overview of the philosopher’s changing views to conclude that his negative opinions might have to do with the “illusionist extremes of the Sicyonians.” However, Plato demanded of art to be a ‘true’ copy, an epistemological rather than aesthetic demand. Demand concludes that his positive views on image “were determined primarily by his own epistemological and metaphysical position, rather than by current artistic tendencies.” In this context, it is also important to acknowledge that Plato’s negative statements on images may not accurately reflect his views. R.G. Tanner (1970) points out that, in the Republic, Plato uses the image “as a step to the apprehension of a Form under discussion, whether that image be in fact a diagram or a model, or simply a verbal picture, such as his imaginative account of Justice …” Images are not just shadows such as paintings, for example, but also mental representations, bearing positive connotations because they stand in the proximity of the Form and participate in its recollection. The scholar observes that, in the process of understanding of the Good, the mental image is the content of a theoretical stage that precedes understanding (epistême).

philosophy, demanding the physical presence of a teacher, to the possibility of a new consciousness, based on an ethics of prudence at the core of philosophy. Plato’s written dialogue cannot be an original Socratic dialogue. However, it bears a fundamentally transformative function, as it is suggested by the image of the philosopher as the writer of souls in the *Phaedrus* 275-276.

I believe that this new critical consciousness implies, first and foremost, an awareness of the educational importance of semiosis, epitomized by text. From the references to the multiple religions coexisting in Piraeus, to the conflicting aesthetic preferences of the interlocutors, to the various opinions on the nature of justice, the *Republic* speaks of the innumerable perspectival possibilities that we encounter as we try to find truth. The realization of semiosis empowers the reader in relation to his own learning by inviting him to find the source of his own worldview. As the text foregrounds its own nature and the instability of opinion, the nature of justice emerges as symbolic expression enabled by dialectical choice. The discourse of the ideal demonstrates that thought and language are tools for unveiling the naturalness of a philosophical way of life. To perpetuate such a mode of thinking, then, is not to imitate a representation but to capitalize on its instrumentality in order to manifest what already exists within the soul. This recuperative aspect of mimesis informs Plato’s construction of the ideal in the *Republic* and endows the written philosophy with its particular representational symbolism.

Plato’s premise is that philosophy shows how to ‘guard’ oneself (*Republic* 413e) against excess. But how does one negotiate the feeling of power associated with textual interpretation? Gebauer and Wulf observe this difficulty on the part of the educator:
Oral codification systems tend to transcend individual differences on the basis of the mutual interaction of the singer and public and the identification effects that thereby arise. A written text, in contrast, can be continually examined from many different perspectives and according to various aspects. ... With written culture begins the play of social versus individual control and the search for differentiated modes of expression. (51)

The solution lies in the mimetic potential of the intellectual behaviour associated with the emerging textual practices: on the one hand, reading is recognition, bringing together sound and image in logos (51 – 52). On the other hand, reading aloud creates identification between author and reader, who integrates the former’s work and becomes instrumental to its dissemination (52).

The first step is to make apparent to the reader the absence of an ontological connection between word and referent (46). To show how different philosophical learning is from other rhetorical practices, Plato defines it as re-birth during which one’s true nature is valorized. Book III introduces the idea of a ‘noble lie’ that must be told to each and every citizen of the better state. It shows that this time of education is suprahistorical and refers to the period when knowledge is not received, but its presence in the soul is made apparent to each individual:

… the rearing and education we gave them were like dreams; they only thought they were undergoing all that was happening to them, while, in truth, at that time they were under the earth within, being fashioned and reared themselves, and their arms and other tools being crafted. When the job had been completely finished, then the earth, which is their mother, sent them up. And now, as though the land they are in were a mother and nurse, they must
plan for and defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth. (*Republic* 414d-e)

The references to ‘mother’ and ‘nurse’ in this passage echo the concept of the chora in the *Timaeus*, and describe the intermediary space of productive significations between mind and word, between temporary non-being and being. The transformative aspect of mimesis is clarified by the understanding that philosophical learning enables emulation and not mimetic identification (like poetry, for example). The literate education is not an end in itself but corresponds to a formative interval.

Philosophy promises to empower man in relation to this interval of semiosis. The very existence of a discourse of the ideal speaks of the existence of a natural pattern: “It was, therefore, for the sake of a pattern … that we were seeking both for what justice by itself is like, and for the perfectly just man, if he should come into being, and what he would be like once come into being” (*Republic* 472c). To re-enact this discourse is to extract it from the semiotic excess, to give it expression through interpretative action. To do this, the student must adopt the philosopher’s perspective, which responds to humanity’s concern with immortality: “... if we are persuaded by me, holding that soul is immortal and capable of bearing all evils and all goods, we shall always keep to the upper road and practice justice with prudence in every way so that we shall be friends to ourselves and the gods, both while we remain here and when we reap the rewards for it like the victors who go about gathering in the prizes” (*Republic* 621c-d). The imitation of prudence is no imitation at all if carried out in awareness of the permanence of the
soul. The philosophical text does not teach something in particular, but enables the critical consciousness that the choices we make shape the expression of this permanence.
Interpreting the Republic: The Symbolic Ideal and Critical Thought

1. Inviting Critical Thinking: The Absent Author of the Republic

Harvey Yunis observes Plato’s concern with readers’ interpretative abilities in the larger context of a cultural change characterized by the increased use of written texts. He argues that part of Plato’s strategy for placing the focus on discourse as a way of facilitating critical thinking is to withdraw, as authorial figure, from his own works. Once the author is no longer the generator of the story or the rhetor whose views are to be pursued, the reader may engage directly with the text. Yunis argues that the Platonic dialogues have a formative role:

The critical project of understanding the argument is identical with reading the text. … In order to experience the tension of a Platonic dialogue, the reader must follow the dialectic as it develops in the text, whereby the reader is compelled to think critically while reading. It is, in a manner of speaking, impossible to read a Platonic dialogue without reading critically.  

In the Republic, the character of Socrates never references Plato directly: “I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son of Ariston, to pray to the goddess …” (Republic 327a). Glaucon is, of course, Plato’s brother, as is Adeimantus, who is described as “Glaucon’s brother.” Plato remains an anonymous member of the audience for which Socrates re-tells the dialogue. The anonymity is appropriate, considering that he is only seventeen or eighteen years

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of age when the events described in the *Republic* are said to have taken place.\(^7\) Plato is not even named as Socrates’s disciple. He is simply a scribe, a third party - a mediator between Socrates and readers - neither actor in the narrative, nor participant in the exchange entailed by the event of Socrates’s recounting. Plato becomes the absent figure who, through the text, enables contact between the master philosopher and his future students, transforming philosophy from a circumstantial event into a perennial discipline untouched by the peculiarities of time and space.

Nevertheless, the authorial figure lives in the effect of reality created by the adverb ‘yesterday,’ for example. The *Republic* is, in fact, written some fifty years later. The adverb is employed to support the suggestion that the text was written during or shortly after the story was told. It validates the truthfulness of its details and the intricacies of the argument in favour of the just action. It also indicates Plato’s views on the relationship between learning and writing: the text is shown to carry a philosophical dialogue over fifty years, making it available to readers when its creator is no longer there. Plato thus signals his distanition from Socrates’s negative perspective on the written word. The text, transgressing time and space, responds more appropriately than oral dialogue to the new cultural conditions. Plato is dedicated to making Socratic dialectics available to others, but he also appears to have a sophisticated understanding of how writing can participate in transforming one’s thought. As Yunis suggested, his withdrawal from the *Republic* is to encourage the reader to think freely, unobstructed by the consciousness of a master mind.

He may have aimed to do even more: by inviting the reader to acknowledge that meaning is generated by an apparently absent figure, Plato invites a critical re-evaluation of the relation

\(^7\) Allan Bloom points out that the action takes place around 411 BC. Plato’s birth is dated at 427 or 428 BC. Note 3 to the “Interpretative Essay” 440.
between appearance and truth. This literary strategy reinforces the core teaching of the *Republic*, which is the tension between representation and Form, gaining its clearest expression in the allegory of the cave in Book VII. The reader is forced, from the beginning, to ask who speaks in this text that describes a ‘yesterday’: is it Socrates who is already dead, or his student who has become a master himself? This is a lesson on the importance of critical thinking for textual interpretation. It prepares the reader for the dialectical dialogue that follows, marked by constant displacement between truth and appearance, between justice and injustice, and between the ethical education and politics and rhetoric.

2. Crisis and Ethics: Intermediateness and the Transformative Interpretation

Inasmuch as it forces the reader into the reflexive mode demanded by productive interpretation, the absent authorial figure also introduces this reader to the morality of philosophical teaching. The philosopher acts from a sense of duty made acute by awareness that manipulation, on the one hand, and enlightening transformation, on the other hand, are equally possible actions that result from the theoretical conceptualization of representation. Truth may be made apparent to the mind or forever hidden by him who knows that reality is produced through language.

Early in the *Republic* the character of Socrates awakens the reader to critical cultural circumstances by pointing out that the dialogue of the ideal marks a crossroad. It is a fight for life, no less, and it reflects the philosopher’s commitment to the truth he knows and to his students:
“… I’m afraid it might be impious to be here when justice is being spoken badly of and
give up and not bring help while I am still breathing and able to make a sound. So the best
thing is to succour her as I am able.” Glaucon and the others begged me in every way to
help out and not to give up the argument, but rather to seek out what each is and the truth
about the benefit of both. (Republic 368b-c)

The philosopher is the ideal pedagogue because he never imposes anything onto the student, but
promptly responds if his help is sought. The medium of writing is subtly referenced to build a
contrast between rhetoric, which forces the intellect against its natural inclinations, and
philosophy. Much like the teacher and truth itself, the text is sought by the student who prefers a
productive dialogue to non-dialogical rhetoric (“Could you really persuade … if we don’t
listen?”, Republic 327c). Socrates’s argument responds to the limits of rhetoric and to an oral
mode of teaching that draws its power from pathos rather than from an affinity to reason:

… something quite divine must certainly have happened to you [Glaucon and Adeimantus],
if you are remaining unpersuaded that injustice is better than justice when you are able to
speak that way on its behalf … On the one hand, I can’t help out … when I thought I
showed in what I said to Thrasymachus that justice is better than injustice, you didn’t
accept it from me. (Republic 368a-b)
A different kind of teaching is required, one that aims to make truth visible. This is the ‘good rhetoric’ of philosophy. The metaphoric potential of the written letter inspires the vision of a symbolic representation designed to lead man to knowledge:

It looks to me as though the investigation we are undertaking is no ordinary thing, but one for a man who sees sharply. Since we’re not clever men ... in my opinion we should make this kind of investigation of it: if someone had, for example, ordered men who don’t see very sharply to read little letters from afar and then someone had the thought that the same letters are somewhere else also, but bigger and in a bigger place, I suppose it would look like a godsend to be able to consider the littler ones after having read these first, if, of course, they do happen to be the same ... So then, perhaps there would be more justice in the bigger [city] and it would be easier to observe closely. If you want, first we’ll investigate what justice is like in the cities. Then, we’ll also go on to consider it in individuals, considering the likeness of the bigger in the idea of the littler? (Republic 368c – 369a)

The processual nature of the conceptual space where symbolic knowledge comes into being is discussed in at least two other Platonic texts: the Timaeus, where it is conceptualized as chora, a semiotic interval of coexisting possibilities, and the Symposium 203, where it is embodied in the figure of Love, the interpreter who is neither human nor godly but “spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together ... For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and converse of God with man, whether awake or asleep, is
carried on.” The figure of intermediateness is fundamental in achieving an existence informed by spirituality rather than by aesthetic experiences: “The wisdom which understands this is spiritual; all other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is mean and vulgar.”

I suggest that it is possible to extrapolate and argue that Plato’s notion of intermediateness enables the conceptualization of a transformative interpretation that forces “the reluctant and unsociable nature of the other into the same” (Timaeus 595 – 596). The spatial, visual nature of this space is appropriate for the myth of Er that closes the Republic, where it reinforces the importance of the good choice in the interval between two of the soul’s earthly lives. But if the reader is to become empowered in this productive space, if he is to carry out a transcendental interpretation as a transformative act of love, he must rise above the particularities of spatial and temporal context. This step is fundamental to gaining awareness of the fundamental difference between philosophical reasoning and all other spiritual pathways that may be pursued.

In the Republic, the conceptual interval of coexisting possibilities is epitomized by the eclectic and cosmopolitan Piraeus, port of Athens, locus of commercial exchange but also scene where the aesthetic dimension of religious rituals becomes apparent: “Now, in my opinion [says Socrates], the procession of the native inhabitants was fine; but the one the Thracians conducted was no less fitting a show” (Republic 327a). The productivity of this space is also mirrored in its affinity with instability: Allan Bloom observes that Piraeus functioned as center of democratic resistance against the rule of the ‘Thirty Tyrants’ (Bloom 440 – 441) and against the politics represented by Athens, where deficient leadership had already led, at the time of the writing of the Republic, to the death of Socrates.
The dialogue of the ideal city occurs away from Athens but does not convey a critique of the city, much in the way the dialectical exploration of justice through injustice, for example, does not imply a critique of the latter but teaches of the nature of both. Athens is, after all, Socrates’s beloved polis and the place chosen by Plato for his academy. At the time when the dialogue is suggested to have taken place, Socrates was still some ten years away from the trial that resulted in his death. In my view, the distance from the city indicates a displacement from the political order into the conceptual space where the philosopher may be seen as he truly is, an ethical figure whose impulse to enlighten his students is independent of social and political motivations.

This strategy is fundamental to showing the philosopher as master of intermediateness, acting from duty, not interest, in the space where language is produced. His version of change does not, therefore, involve an overturning of an existing political order. He proposes a more radical, if socially safe, solution: a new language of politics that mirrors a new way of looking at the world. He takes the youth into the suprahistorical space where language is produced at each moment to show them how a better order may be shaped as the critical interpretation of reality enables one to convey truth through symbolic expression. Through the symbol of the ideal city, man can see himself as he truly is, in his everyday thought and action. This language, helping man draw the truth from his own soul rather than from an external, artificial source, indicates that Platonic philosophy is natural. The ‘enlarged letters’ of the city provide a template for the natural interpretation of reality that is philosophical, transformative practice.
3. Unveiling Presence: Understanding and Permanence

I argued that writing provides the conceptual model for the new mode of symbolic knowledge informing Plato’s philosophy. I suggest that it also informs the transformative role envisioned for the text of the Republic by forcing the reader to rethink the notion of presence in temporal rather than spatial terms. The symbolic interpretation opens to the reader the space where language, used in awareness of the good and of the benefits of moderation, generates a better reality. To perform this mediating function, philosophical language must demonstrate its ability to make apparent the permanence of truth and of a trans-historical humanity defined by the engagement with this truth. Just as textual interpretation challenges the notions of proximity and circumstantiality associated with oral methods of teaching, for example, the narrative of the Republic actualizes the reality of death and man’s desire for immortality by showing how they permeate, in fact, man’s daily existence. Dialectics then addresses man’s most profound concern by enabling him to recognize the universality of justice.

To truly empower man to make just choices, the benefits of the philosophical life must be taught early so that in old age man is no longer marred by fear, but lives in the joy given by the awareness of a just life. The transformative function envisioned for the interpretation of the Republic entails, firstly, the reconnection of the reader to himself and to the whole of humanity through the reminder of death, which is provided by the story. This strategy gives to the interpretative perspective its spiritual dimension, helping the interpreter to shift the focus inwards, to the permanence that permeates his inner world.

The Republic’s figure of old age, Cephalus, represents the powerlessness in face of death associated with a mythical worldview, a situation that philosophy promises to remedy. He
complains that Socrates does not provide him with enough opportunities to talk about spiritual
issues: “Socrates, you don’t come down to us in the Piraeus very often, yet you ought to. ... I
want you to know that as the other pleasures, those connected with the body, wither away in me,
the desires and pleasures that have to do with speeches grow the more” (*Republic* 328d). But
proximity does not necessarily entail a true dialogue, as Cephalus himself admits:

Some of us who are about the same age often meet together and keep up the old proverb.
Now then, when they meet, most of the members of our group lament, longing for the
pleasures of youth and reminiscing about sex, about drinking bouts and feasts and all that
goes with things of that sort … Some also bewail the abuse that old age receives from
relatives, and in this key they sing a refrain about all the evils old age has caused them.
But, Socrates, in my opinion these men do not put their fingers on the cause. For, if this
were the cause, I too would have suffered the same things insofar as they depend on old
age … But as it is, I have encountered others for whom it was not so. … (*Republic* 329a-b)

As the importance of physical presence for a meaningful dialogue is questioned, true
communication is redefined as spiritually productive encounter. But almost immediately,
Cephalus quits the conversation to perform the daily sacrifices meant to appease the gods. His
brusque departure raises questions over the genuineness of his complaint towards Socrates. It
may be seen to indicate an inability to transcend the fear of death and the powerlessness to
overcome this fear through means other than those offered by religion. The reiterative nature of
the sacrifices indicates their inefficiency, feeding the cyclicity of myth and perpetuating a lack of change:

... when a man comes face to face with the realization that he will be making an end, fear and care enter him for things to which he gave no thought before. ... Whether it is due to the debility of old age, or whether he discerns something more of the things in that place because he is already nearer to them, as it were – he is, at any rate, full of suspicion and terror; and he reckons up his accounts and considers whether he has done anything unjust to anyone. (*Republic* 330d-e)

This allows Socrates to remain the dialogue’s central wisdom figure and enables him to proceed with the argument meant to educate the youth concerning the benefits of justice. The discussion begins, appropriately, with a demonstration of individuals’ inability to reach consensus when their interaction occurs within the rhetorical parameters of social conviviality:

Now Thrasymachus had many times started out to take over the argument in the midst of our discussion, but he had been restrained by the men sitting near him, who wanted to hear the argument out. But when we paused ... he could no longer keep quiet; hunched up like a wild beast, he flung himself at us as if to tear us to pieces. Then both Polemarchus and I got all in a flutter from fright. And he shouted out into our midst and said, “What is this nonsense that has possessed you for so long, Socrates? And why do you act like fools making way for one another? If you truly want to know what the just is, don’t only ask and
gratify your love of honor by refuting whatever someone answers ... but answer yourself and say what you assert the just to be. And see to it you don’t tell me that it is the needful, or the helpful, or the profitable, or the gainful, or the advantageous, but tell me clearly and precisely what you mean, for I won’t accept it if you say such inanities. (Republic 336b-d)

In contrast, the allegory of the cave, in Book VII, reinforces the temporal dimension of understanding, refused by Thrasymachus:

- Then I suppose he’d have to get accustomed, if he were going to see what’s up above. At first he’d most easily make out the shadows; and after that the phantoms of the human beings and the other things in water; and, later, the things themselves. And from there he could turn to beholding the things in heaven and heaven itself, more easily at night - looking at the light of the stars and the moon - than by day - looking at the sun and sunlight.
- Of course.
- Then finally I suppose he would be able to make out the sun - not its appearances in water or some alien place, but the sun itself by itself in its own region - and see what it’s like.

(Republic 516a-b)

To walk the path of philosophy, one must go from the recognition of representation to the sun of truth. The narrative beginning of the Republic stands for the sensorial that constitutes the starting point for symbolic knowledge.
In the suggestion that knowledge is remembrance, the allegory of the cave echoes the metaphor of philosophical discourse as written speech in the *Phaedrus*. Philosophy is the living word that, like the good seed, generates more words of wisdom. Like the written letter, it is not a convention, a construct, but has an affinity with the image of truth already written in the soul of the learner. Because it is recuperative, it transforms reality by making apparent the truth that informs its logic. The following citation reinforces the idea that Plato’s critique is directed not towards writing, but towards the ‘dead discourse’ that does not generate growth:

Socrates - But now tell me, is there another sort of discourse, that is brother to the written speech, but of unquestioned legitimacy? …

Phaedrus - What sort of discourse have you now in mind, and what is its origin?

- The sort that goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner: that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing.

- You mean no dead discourse, but the living speech, the original of which the written discourse may fairly be called a kind of image. …

- … He will sow his seed in literary gardens, I take it, and write when he does by way of pastime … and he will take pleasure in watching the tender plants grow up. And when other men resort to other pastimes … he will doubtless prefer to indulge in the recreation I refer to.

- And what an excellent one it is, Socrates! How far superior to the other sort is the recreation that a man finds in words, when he discourses about justice and the other topics you speak of.
- … But far more excellent, I think, is the serious treatment of them, which employs the art of dialectic. The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge, words which can defend both themselves and him who planted them, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up in new characters; whereby the seed is vouchsafed immortality, and its possessor the fullest measure of blessedness that man can attain unto. *(Phaedrus 276 – 277)*

As one recognizes the universality and uniqueness of each letter after understanding how it functions in the different, particular words, to reference Plato’s metaphor, in order to learn dialectics one must already carry a spiritual and intellectual disposition, defined by the soul’s initial grasp of truth (described in the myth of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*). In this rich field, the words taught by the dialectician grow more words of the same kind. Dialectics’ self-perpetuating nature, evoking immortality, emphasizes the importance of time to developing a reality-improving practice.

Dialectics, unveiling truth through revealing its opposite - the representation generated by personal interest - as incompatible with the good life, exists in contrast to the cyclicity of mythical time, represented by Cephalus’s rituals, and to the linearity of Socrates’s story. The narrative that begins with Socrates’s trip to Piraeus is left unfinished; its diachrony is never fully realized. The end of the *Republic* offers, in exchange, the conclusion that philosophy empowers man in relation to death. The end of the narrative becomes irrelevant as unveiling of the benefits of justice leads to the completion of the learning process, to the understanding that the better society is, indeed, possible because it has been revealed through dialectics. The dialogue is a
recollection of the heavenly ‘pattern’ of the ideal city, “… laid up for the man who wants to see and found a city within himself on the basis of what he sees” (Republic 592b).

The strategy emphasizes the instrumentality of language: *how* we speak is more important than *what* we try to convey through stories, which remain a representation. A better reality may only be produced when language is employed to evaluate an existing state of affairs as a way of transforming it. The better society of the *Republic* is, then, the discursive, temporal expression that recuperates what has been written in the soul. Man’s transformation into a better citizen - fundamentally a fulfillment of his potential - requires time, which is why learning must begin early.

By refusing an end to Socrates’s story, Plato makes an authorial gesture of self-disclosure. At the same time, he poses a final challenge to the reader’s expectations: the ‘incompleteness’ of the narrative forces the reader to examine his own response to the unfinished story as a way of grasping its relevance to the understanding of the concept of justice. By opening and closing the *Republic* on the subject of death and on the importance of justice to the immortal soul, Plato subjects societal improvement to man’s impulse towards self-knowledge.

4. The Empowered Interpreter: Symbolic Practice and the Ideal Society

Ernst Cassirer observes that Plato rejects the Socratic focus on the individual life in favour of an examination of man’s social and political behaviour. The city is a symbolic representation of man’s true nature. The metaphor of the body mentioned earlier shows that a good society is one composed of individuals who have found their particular potential. To examine man
generically does not generate the same knowledge as examining his actions. This is due to the fact that, as such, language cannot express truth:

Language and word strive for the expression of pure being; but they never attain to it, because in them the designation of something other, of an accidental “attribute” of the object, is mixed with the designation of this pure being. Accordingly, what constitutes the characteristic power of language is also its characteristic weakness, that makes it incapable of representing the supreme, truly philosophical content of cognition. (Cassirer 1953, 126)

As I have already suggested, this is one of the first and most important lessons that Plato teaches his readers: what is said does not reflect the truth, but how one uses language may make apparent the nature of that truth.

Nevertheless, a connection of some kind between word and its referent does exist, or signification would be postponed ad infinitum. Plato resorts to the metaphoric potential of writing to address this issue in the Cratylus 434a-b:

… if the name is like the thing, the letters of which the primary names are to be formed must be by their very nature like the things, … names can never be like anything unless those elements of which the names are composed exist in the first place and possess some kind of likeness to the things which the names imitate; and the elements of which they are composed are the letters.76

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Gerard Naddaf observes that Plato privileges writing for its conceptual and epistemological instrumentality not just in the *Cratylus* but in many other works.\(^77\) Naddaf references the *Statesman* 277e – 288e to argue that Plato “employs letters to help explain how paradigms work in his dialectical method. He believes that the study of letters can help us become better dialecticians” (xxii). Moreover, in the *Theatetus* 206b knowledge of letters “reveals clearer knowledge than that of the complex elements” (xxii) whereas in the *Sophist* 263b the study of letters discloses “how some forms blend together and others not” in “the texture of philosophical discourse” (xxii). Naddaf also points out that, in the *Philebus* 17a – 18b, Plato employs his views on phonetic writing as basis and model for the “philosophical investigation into the problem of the one and the many” (xxiii).

Plato’s views on language are informed, then, by the double understanding that, on the one hand, language attempts to reflect some primary relation to truth, and that, on the other hand, the expression of that truth is inevitably a representation. The realization of mediation need not be considered pessimistic: man’s action makes apparent his nature, much as in the way the sound’s universality is manifested by the graphic symbol that represents it. Accordingly, words make philosophical discourse stand for the philosopher’s unique, individual experience of truth.

Peter T. Struck observes that the emphasis on the word’s instrumentality, in Plato’s philosophy of language, clarifies the ambiguity of ‘pharmakon.’ The word conveys an experienced reality by translating it into a symbolic expression:

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Plato’s theory grows out of an anxiety provoked by an appreciation of the power of language to invoke a world - an appreciation not far removed from the idea of language as a magic spell. [He] treats language as a filter, sometimes distorting, that stands *between* us and the phenomenal world. Since we make use of this filter, we run the risk of distorting the world of appearances, and so bring ourselves even further away from the true realities that underlie the phenomena.\textsuperscript{78}

The solution between pure naturalism and pure conventionalism, neither appealing to Plato, is the idea that language can bring into view through dialectical dialogue - much like a shuttle producing fabric - the order of Being (56). Words carve out of uniformness the orderly pattern that underlies reality. Language must also establish its direct relation to Being: “Unless the word and the meaning both accept match up with some independently existing reality, we are simply saying words: we are just communicating the same phantom back and forth” (59). This nuance powerfully echoes in the modern ontological view of the symbol. Struck observes the metaphor, in *Phaedrus* 265d-e and *Cratylus* 388b, of the dialectician as butcher, cutting reality along its ‘natural seams’ in order to make Form apparent (57). Because “words *systematically* run the risk of separating reality at the wrong spots” (58, referencing *Cratylus* 436b-d), non-philosophers such as Sophists or poets create “phantoms,” which is why Plato banishes them in Book X of the *Republic*.

The philosopher, offering dialectics as the key to the connection between word and the immutable Form, emerges as an exceptional figure who reveals to each student the potential underlying his own nature:

...each of us must, to the neglect of other studies, above all see to it that he [the human being] is a seeker and student of that study by which he might be able to learn and find out who will give him the capacity and the knowledge to distinguish the good and the bad life, and so everywhere and always to choose the better from among those that are possible. He will take into account all the things we have just mentioned and how in combination and separately they affect the virtue of a life. Thus he may know the effects, bad and good, of beauty mixed with poverty or wealth and accompanied by this or that habit of soul... From all this he will be able to draw a conclusion and choose - in looking off toward the nature of the soul - between the worse and the better life... For we have seen that this is the most important choice for him in life and death. He must go to Hades adamantly holding to this opinion so that he won’t be daunted by wealth and such evils there ... but rather he will know how always to choose the life between such extremes and flee the excesses in either direction in this life, so far as is possible, and in all of the next life. For in this way a human being becomes happiest. *(Republic 618b – 619b)*

The written dialogue, defining the pattern of the best city, is the symbolic representation of this potential. To different degrees, each man carries the memory of ideality within himself. To read the philosophical text is to become aware of this ideality and to begin to ‘read’ or recover its
reflection in productive action. Although Plato never discusses the role of the written word in this process, the following passage from the Republic recalls Krämer ’s discussion of the ways in which the phonetic letter allows the re-conceptualization of embodiment in order to invite constant reflection upon language’s representational nature and its relation to Being:

...soul... must be seen such as it is in truth, not maimed by community with body and other evils, as we now see it. ... Now we were telling the truth about it as it looks at present. ...

But, Glaucon, one must look elsewhere ... To its love of wisdom, and recognize what it lays hold of and with what sort of things it longs to keep company on the grounds that it is akin to the divine and immortal and what is always, and what it would become like if it were to give entirely to this longing and were brought by this impulse out of the deep ocean in which it now is ... And then one would see its true nature - whether it is many-formed or single-formed, or in what way it is and how. (Republic 611b – 612a)

The remembrance of immortality through story defines the existential dimension of the interpretative perspective. It employs emotion to take the reader into a suprahistorical space where he is reconnected to humanity’s most fundamental concern. The dialectical nature of the symbolic interpretation then enables the examination of the soul. Through myth, the text demonstrates that the most fruitful life is the one carried out with an awareness of death and the rewards of immortality. Through dialectics, it offers a blueprint for the particular kind of thought that makes possible the just choice.
The evaluative mode associated with *krisis*, demanded by the creation of symbolic reality in language, informs the intellectual practices that produce a better life. The end of Book IX emphasizes the tension between the lower, fixed order of politics and the superior space where critical awareness of the importance of good choice make possible self-improvement and the transcendence of death. The educational nature of the discourse is reaffirmed: the city that has just been built in speech is the foundation of a new reality, defined by continuous transformation in awareness of the Good:

... as for the man who doesn’t get away with it [with injustice] ... doesn’t his whole soul – brought to its best nature, acquiring moderation and justice accompanied by prudence – gain a habit more worthy of honor than the one a body gains with strength and beauty accompanied by health, in proportion as soul is more honourable than body?

... Then won’t the man who has intelligence strain all of his powers to that end as long as he lives; in the first place, honouring the studies that will make his soul such, while despising the rest?

... Rather, he looks fixedly at the regime within him ... and guards against upsetting anything in it by the possession of too much or too little substance. In this way, insofar as possible, he governs his additions to, and expenditure of, his substance ... 

... ... if it’s that he cares about, he won’t be willing to mind the political things.
Yes, ... , he will in his own city, very much so. However, perhaps he won’t in his fatherland unless some divine chance coincidentally comes to pass.

I understand ... he will in the city whose foundation we have now gone through, the one that has its place in speeches, since I don’t suppose it exists anywhere on earth. (*Republic* 591b - 592b)

Plato subjects history to man’s search for self-knowledge in the context of the transition to literacy in ancient Greece. The phonetic letter makes apparent the tension between concept and expression. It enables the conceptualization of a higher space of interpretation between mind and language. This is the ‘no-place’ from where the prudent choice that produces a symbolic and philosophical reality is projected onto the existential plane as a form of moral action. The student of philosophy is empowered in relation to life, to politics, and to history when he becomes aware that reality is representation. The dialogue of the ideal life and society reconnects the reader to the continuity of humanity through the recognition that death is the most powerful reality of life, one that man continuously attempts to transcend. This transcendence becomes possible only by changing how one chooses to live. The symbolic production of reality overrides the problem of representation through awareness that linguistic expression, like death, must not be seen as an end, but as a foundation and as an impetus for change. Its role is to express the spirit’s engagement with life and with fate. The dialogue of the ideal gives a form to this transcendental effort and provides the basis for a life carved out from the higher space of reflexivity. Having become acquainted, through reading, with the necessity to differentiate between what appears to
be and what truly is, the reader is empowered to build a new life and social reality through symbolic practices.
Chapter 3

Humble Fictions: Fashioning the Ideal in Thomas More’s *Utopia*

In this chapter, I examine Thomas More’s critical engagement with a mode of symbolic thought perceived to threaten, in the learning culture of early modernity, the biblical worldview and man’s redemption. I argue that the literary strategies of *Utopia* convey these views and advance an interpretative perspective that reconciles fiction, standing for mind and for language, and church mediated scriptural interpretation. The emphasis on spiritual progress addresses the tendency towards self-glorification at a time when print facilitated unprecedented opportunities for knowledge creation and dissemination.

In the first part, I examine how *Utopia* problematizes the relationship between language and sin. I argue that the omnipresence of the themes of representation and pride are indicative of the reflective mode in which More operates. I suggest that his theoretical insights and existential concerns are projected upon the early modern reader. I draw on Ernst Cassirer, Lisa Jardine (1993), and Gerard Wegemer (1996) to show that More rejects the individualistic core of Pico della Mirandola’s symbolic thought which is perceived to be a highly subversive form of pride. He offers in exchange a symbolic synthesis which bridges medieval and early modern worldviews. Man, he asserts, must remain aware of the challenges posed by sin to the soul through the mind. Language and fiction are inextricably linked because of the mind’s inclination to construct false symbols. To generate true knowledge and enable spiritual progress, language must be turned against its nature and unveil pride.

In the second subchapter, I examine More’s discourse in *Utopia* as a pedagogical strategy. I argue that it advances a mode of symbolic thought that integrates fiction with the traditional
scriptural perspective. Fiction stands for text, for the mind, and for the mortal human body, whereas the biblical worldview places the sacramental and ecclesiological body at the centre of the teleology of salvation. To practise this mode of thought is to acquire knowledge of the soul’s status and its gradual healing from the illness of pride. I argue that the critical discourse in *Utopia*’s Book I is informed by Galen’s dualistic anatomical discourse, revived and celebrated in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. *Utopia* proposes an interpretative practice that creates the ‘good place’ of continuous self-exploration and spiritual progress.

More’s symbolism of the body in the construction of the ideal individual and society is explored here as a synthetic expression of an ethical stance meant to address the spiritual difficulties posed by the transition to a new textual reality. The discussion bridges scholarly positions such as those advanced by Marina Leslie (1998), who notes utopia’s engagement with history, Wegemer (1996), who foregrounds the role of pride in More’s theological and fictional works, and Brian Gogan (1982), who explores the doctrine of revelation in More’s controversial writings. I aim to unveil a continuity of thought, not yet resolved by the existing scholarship, between More’s fiction and his theological work of the 1520s and 1530s.
Protean Man, Perfidious Pride: Crisis

1. Interpretation: Building Fictions of Pride

In 1517, Thomas More receives from Desiderius Erasmus and Peter Giles their portraits painted on the same panel by Quentin Metsys. More’s thankful response to Giles contrasts the painting’s fictional self-description to his own ‘real’ reaction to the work: “The picture speaks: Castor and Pollux were great friends of old: / Erasmus such and Gillis you behold. / Far from them, More laments with love so dear / As scarce a man unto himself could bear. / Yet letters (making naught of envious space)/ Bring near the loved one’s mind, and I his face.”79 The associations between image and physical appearance, on the one hand, and between words and mind, on the other hand, are misleading. Words add sophistication to the strategies of self-representation: “Now I, More, speak myself: If you have seen these men before, / Their features will be soon detected. / If not, to make all safe and sure,/ One holds a note to him directed; / The other writes his name - which yet, / Though he say naught, you’ll soon discover, / For on the shelf behind are set / Books that are known the wide world over” (CWE 5 149).

Lisa Jardine observes that the books behind Giles, identified as Plutarch, Suetonius, Seneca, or Quintus Curtius subtly position him as student of Erasmus.80 Moreover, although More’s letter stems from a personal event, it is written with a public in mind. More asks Giles to evaluate it before passing it on to Erasmus, which indicates that the author of Utopia is aware of


his friend’s intentions to publish the correspondence. The text goes through several drafts before being printed in the 1518 *Auctarium selectarum aliquot epistolarum Erasmi Roterodami ad eruditos, et horum ad illum* (CWE 5 149). More’s optimism towards learning and printing (represented by Giles) is, it becomes apparent, paralleled by awareness of a new way of looking at the self.

In the same letter, More brings up the theme of pride, central to his work (Wegemer 88):

> You would hardly believe, my most lovable Erasmus … how forcibly I exult in the glory of being so highly valued by you. … to tell the truth, this is the one itch in the way of ambition which I find it impossible to shake off, and which tickles me in a most agreeable manner, when it comes into my head that distant posterity will remember me for my friendship with Erasmus, attested in letters and books and pictures and every other way. (CWE 5 147)

The subject of the communication is no longer the painting, but the reader’s own self. The passage indicates that meaning is constructed discursively in order to reflect and address the interpreter’s own desire: “… in this remarkable document you put it on record that there is no one else whose affection you rate so highly” (CWE 5 147).

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81 Erasmus believed that readers should have access to his letters which is why he kept a book where all his outgoing and incoming correspondence was copied. For the publication of the 1518 *Auctarium*, the 1519 *Farrago*, and the 1521 *Epistolae ad diversos*, for example, he asked friends for copies of letters sent by and to him. *CWE* 5 xiii – xiv.

82 Stephen J. Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) remains the most comprehensive discussion on the topic of self-fashioning. My own approach, emphasizing authorial engagement with cultural developments, departs from Greenblatt and, for that matter, Foucault’s views of the individual as product of culture.
The “Letter to Giles” in Utopia’s parerga reinforces the view of a direct relationship between textual interpretation and pride. In it, More speaks of a professor of theology who wants to become a bishop on his fictional island upon reading about it. More revisits the subject of learning and pride in a 1518 letter sent to William Gunell, his children’s tutor:

... the more I see the difficulty of getting rid of this pest of pride, the more do I see the necessity of setting to work at it from childhood. For I find no other reason why this evil clings so to our hearts, than because almost as soon as we are born, it is sown in the tender minds of children by their nurses, it is cultivated by their teachers, and brought to its full growth by their parents; no one teaching even what is good without, at the same time, awakening the expectation of praise, as of the proper reward of virtue. Thus we grow accustomed to make so much of praise, that while we study how to please the greater number (who will always be the worst), we grow ashamed of being good (with the few). That this plague of vainglory may be banished far from my children, I do desire that you, my dear Gunnell, and their mother and all their friends, would sing this song to them, and repeat it, and beat it into their heads, that vainglory is a thing despicable, and to be spit upon.  

Finally, these views are restated in the 1534 Godly Meditation, where it is shown that man builds and chooses to live in a fantasy that reflects his own desires and expectations that stand in tension to God’s actual creation: “... ridde my mynd of all the bysynes therof/ Not to long to here of eny

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worldely thyngis/ But that the heryng of worldely fantesyes may be to me displesaunt/.../ To abstayn from vayne confabulations...”

The painting by Metsys is, then, not just a representation of Erasmus and Giles reminding More of his friends but the public expression of friendship between two scholars, on the one hand, and the imagined projection of Erasmus’s appreciation towards More. More’s letters in response to Erasmus’s gift show that meaning is a construct, a fiction of a mind constantly challenged by sin.

2. The Man that Mirrored God: Crisis

As his first poems reveal, More’s concerns with pride go back to the formative interval of the late 1490s and early 1500s. The focus on the relationship between learning and pride received a vigorous literary expression as early as 1510, when he translated *The Life of John Picus Earl of Mirandola*. R.W. Chambers observes that More regarded Pico as the model of scholar and pious layman and began to translate his life, written by Pico’s nephew Giovanni Francesco, some ten years after the scholar’s death in 1494. But Pico’s views were informed by the Cabbala, a tradition of Jewish mysticism that gained importance among the Italian Christian intellectuals of the fifteenth century. David B. Ruderman argues that printing, facilitating the dissemination of Hebrew texts, “enhanced and magnified” the Christian intellectuals’ interest in Judaism. Pico’s argument, in the *Oratio*, that the key to scriptural interpretation lies with the Cabbala, which has been given to Moses on the mountain along with Scripture, and his view that the patristic

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interpretations are mere opinions epitomize the intellectual effervescence of the times. Informed by the Neoplatonic view of creation as emanation, the syncretism of Pico’s theory of knowledge made interpretation a truly creative act. It endowed it with a profound symbolism validating all opinions as images of the divine truth (Cassirer 1992). The Christian notion of revelation is challenged by the view that all knowledge is divine expression derived through interpretation:

Pico is no longer trying to exhibit the Many as the effect of the One, or to deduce them as such from their cause, with the aid of rational concepts. He sees the Many rather as expressions, as images, as symbols of the One. … Metaphysics as well as dialectic or physics can yield no other and no higher truth. They are only different symbols and different interpretations of one and the same meaning, which is the foundation of them all, but which is not capable of being grasped by us as it is in itself, without any symbolic intermediary. (Cassirer 1992, 26)

I see More’s preoccupation with the challenges posed by learning and interpretation to the reader, unambiguously doctrinal in the writings of the 1520s and 1530s but already clearly defined in the 1515 Letter to Dorp and in Utopia, to originate in reflections on the intellectual model represented by Pico. Pico’s example reveals how the infatuation with knowledge invited vainglory. His critical attitude towards the patristic tradition and rejection of all interpretative authority in the 1486 900 Theses and in the later Apologia, where he defends his statements as intellectual difficulties (of which he also accuses Aquinas) rather than symptoms of an error in

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faith, may have been highly problematic to a devout Catholic such as More. The *Life* is not simply a translation but a partial fictionalization of the original text. It describes Pico’s first move away from patristic theology as discontent brought on by the lack of excitement in the study of the Canon: “In the fourteenth year of his age, by the commandment of his mother (which longed very sore to have him priest) he departed to Bononie to study in the laws of the Church, which when he had two years tasted, perceiving that the faculty leaned to nothing but only mere traditions and ordinances, his mind fell from it” (*CWM* I 56).

Daniel Wakelin observes that the preoccupation with the effects of interpretative practices upon the reader is a particularity of the humanists’ pedagogic project. He argues that the practical benefits offered by printing, in particular greater speed and facility of reproduction, are observed as early as the fifteenth century: “When, in their liminary verses or insinuating prologues, they imagine reproducing their ‘textual community,’ they often imagine one very real community: the classroom of pupils.” This resulted in attempts to establish a direct relationship with the reader. Wakelin cites the example of Giovanni Gigli, who acted as a papal representative in England between 1476 and 1490, who at the beginning of Cicero’s *Tusculanae disputationes* wrote by hand verses instructing the ‘lector’ to read the text “for its moral wisdom” (129). From Bokenham and Traversagni to Erasmus, Lupset, and Elyot, reading practices are at the center of the humanists’ insistence that only selected texts be suggested to less sophisticated readers, for example, as a way of ensuring that they derive ‘safe’ and helpful interpretations (201 – 202).

The view that reading must be guided is apparent among humanists from the 1520s onwards, perhaps in light of the Reformation debate. Interpretation profoundly influences the

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The way one leads one’s life and, as Wakelin observes, may even have an impact upon one’s salvation. The degrees of pedagogical restrictivity differ among the humanists, reflecting their individual learning experiences, the level of scholarly knowledge projected upon their imagined readership, and their positioning during the early years of the Reformation:

Lupset stresses the exercise of judgement in wording which is ascetic and pietistic: we must judge what is weighty over what is ‘vayne,’ a word which evokes some contempt of the world. … In Erasmus’s thinking, human beings can influence their salvation to some degree, although God in his grace does still influence them and does have foreknowledge of their free will. Elyot seems to have shared this view: he briefly mentions ‘libertie of wille’ and the importance of knowing oneself in *The boke named the Gouernour*; some years later in *A Preservative Agaynste deth* he defends more fully the ability of humanity to save himself by ‘his owne counsaile, whiche is his free will’. It is this sense of spiritual self-determination which is felt in Lupset’s *Exhortation*, too. … Godly reading and the wise judgement of this reading are essential for the exercise of free will and lay piety sketched in Erasmus’s *Enchiridion*. However, although we should judge our books with our free will, we must not judge with entire independence. Even when Elyot, in *A Preservative Agaynste deth*, tells us to shore up our sense of free will by reading scripture, he would have us guided not by prejudice or presumption, but by old teachers and ‘the bokes of the moste aunciente and catholike doctours’ of the Church. And Lupset too recommends judgement not in a vacuum, but ‘with the best sort of writers’ in order to comprehend what is good for our souls (as quoted above). He tells his pupil to read the New Testament with the
‘expositions’ of the learned doctors and to ‘conforme’ his interpretation to the true doctrine. … The process of reading is not here informing oneself or forming oneself from within by one's own judgement, but conforming or confirming, etymologically forming with someone else's help. In this respect, Lupset and Elyot seem more restrictive than Erasmus on free will: he suggested that the doctrines of free will and grace were so knotty that it was better not to interpret scripture with firmness, but to concede ‘free choice over free choice.’ Lupset and Elyot more honestly express the wish to steer the freedom of the reader. This is because the reader whom they imagine is reading within the household, or in the city or the court. (203 – 204)

Like his fellow humanists, Thomas More is interested in the problems posed to a virtuous way of life by interpretation and by learning in general. Many studies have documented the argumentative expression taken by this concern in his writings of the 1520s and early 1530s against Luther and William Tyndale, which were contrasted to the ‘light-heartedness’ of Utopia. More’s dedication to the dissemination of the printed word, on the one hand, and his involvement in the Reformation debate, on the other hand, are seen to indicate a dual figure.89 Brian Gogan argues that More’s ecclesiocentric view of a common corps of Christendom gains its final expression in response to Tyndale’s view of the Church of Christ as the small group of the elect.90

Jennifer Summit argues that More’s representation of Pico’s library in the *Life* where he reduces the encyclopaedic collection to a corpus of doctrinal works indicates that he was an “exemplary early Tudor reader” who constantly observed how the “opposition between Erasmian humanist and Carthusian devotional literacy” shaped readership. A religious devout and family man, More may have seen Pico’s belief that philosophy can be pursued for its own sake to be related to his unstable emotional life and social inadequacy. However, the more serious consequence of this philosophy is the view that Scripture may be approached and understood as any philosophical text, through the mind.

3. Protean Pride: Deconstructing Illusions of Freedom

More felt challenged to engage with the principles of Pico’s interpretative symbolism: the view that man is free and that his glory is served by words and time. In foregrounding the mind’s vulnerability to pride in the *Life* and *Utopia*, More appears to reject Pico’s vision of a free man as Protean figure of divine origin able to choose his form and destiny within creation:

> We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage

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point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.\textsuperscript{92}

Ernst Cassirer observed the Pelagian core of this vision of man as superior being, carrying creative powers that make him equal to divinity (Cassirer 1992, 50). In rejecting the fall and its effects on human nature and emphasizing contemplative knowledge, Pico opposes himself to a medieval teleology of salvation:

> When we consider with what vehemence Pelagianism had been fought in the medieval church since the days of Augustine, and how unconditionally it had been rejected as heresy, we must be astonished at the frankness and boldness with which Pico reaffirms the basic Pelagian thesis. For him man’s sinfulness does not stand as an indelible stain upon his nature; for in it he sees nothing but the correlate and counterpart to something other and higher. (Cassirer 1992, 43)

In contrast, More’s perspective is that the study of literature enables the acquisition of prudence in human affairs, as the letter dated 29 March 1518, addressed to the members of the Masters’ Guild at the University of Oxford, clearly indicates:

Furthermore, not everyone who comes to Oxford comes just to learn theology; some must also learn law. They must also learn prudence in human affairs, something which is so far from being useless to a theologian that without it he may be able to sing well enough for his own pleasure, but his singing will certainly be ill suited for the people. And I doubt that any study contributes as richly to this practical skill as the study of poets, orators, and histories.93

To have a positive effect on one’s conduct in the world, lay learning must be employed to challenge one’s prejudices (Wegemer 83). Subjecting learning to the acquisition of prudence is a particularly difficult task because pride forces man away from God and towards idolizing the things that give him a sense of fulfillment. This perspective is communicated in the Life: “That thing a man taketh for his god that he taketh for his chief good; and that thing taketh he for his chief good, which only had, though all other things lack, he thinketh himself happy, and which only lacking, though he have all other things, he thinketh himself unhappy” (CWM 196). Self-knowledge and self-mastery are challenged by pride through the notion of honour, which follows virtue the way the shadow follows the body:

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But Picus, of whom we speak, was himself so honourable, for the great plenteous abundance of all such virtues the possession whereof very honour followeth (as a shadow followeth a body) that he was to all them that aspire to honour a very spectacle, in whose conditions, as in a clear polished mirror, they might behold in what points very honour standeth: whose marvellous cunning and excellent virtue though my rude learning be far unable sufficiently to express ... (CWM I 53)

_Utopia_ begins with this idea of a link between knowledge and prestige, treated in a similarly ironic tone. More’s fictional alter-ego lists all the persons with whom he meets upon being sent to Flanders to resolve a commercial issue on behalf of Henry VIII. The “noted … citizen and undersheriff of the famous city of Britain, London” is validated by his associations with the “incomparable man Cuthbert Tunstall,” with the “most distinguished” Mayor of Bruges, with the “eloquent,” “learned,” and “skilful in diplomatic affairs” Georges de Themsecke, and with Peter Giles, “a man of high reputation … cultured, virtuous, and courteous to all” (_Utopia_ 41 – 43).

Because the fictional and the real More share a political biography that includes the Flanders episode, the effect of fiction on reality is clear: one would expect nothing less than excellence from More himself without doubting the king’s ability to have the very best represent him. Busleyden’s letter to More in the parerga reinforces the relationship between learning and honour:
… the world has never seen a model more perfect than yours, more soundly established or fully executed or more desirable. It surpasses and leaves far behind the many celebrated commonwealths of which so much has been said, those of Sparta, Athens and Rome. … Feeling pity for the pitiable fate of these commonwealths, you feared lest others, which now hold supreme power, should undergo the same fate; so you drew the portrait of a perfect commonwealth, one which devoted its energies less to setting up laws than to forming the very best men to administer them. (*Utopia* 123)

The elaborate introduction of More’s diplomatic persona exists in marked contrast to Raphael Hythloday’s in the Church of Notre Dame. Hythloday is only noticed because he is speaking with Peter Giles. He looks “of quite advanced years, with a sunburned face, a long beard, and a cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders,” an appearance that would have prevented a natural encounter between the two unless the man had approached More on Giles’s behalf (*Utopia* 43). Not mistakenly, More takes Raphael to be a ship’s captain. As a learned man and publisher, Giles adds a mythological and philosophical dimension to Hythloday’s persona and travels by comparing him with Ulysses and Plato. Upon finding that Raphael is learned in Greek and Latin and has taken part in Amerigo Vespucci’s extraordinary travels, More opens his house and mind to the intriguing man whose voice he then assumes in the description of foreign territories.

The opening scene in *Utopia*, giving veridicality to a fictional event, demonstrates the constructed nature of biography. Reality and fantasy are intricately woven into each other to reveal that man’s histories are fictions engendered by a desire to be considered learned. These
enlightened humanists validate each other and the events that otherwise would have been
ignored, or discarded by posterity, if reported by common people. A meeting and story that
would have vanished like other innumerable meetings between intellectuals and adventurers is
made into history by its introduction in a context that is marked by the presence of illustrious
figures. Furthermore, the diplomatic event itself gains historical importance when the fictional
More claims to put it into writing and Giles gives it a public life through printing.

4. Textual Fictions of Power: Shaping Pico’s Library, Life

As early as 1510, when he translated the Life, More drew attention to the subtle ways in
which pride informs the construction of textual meaning:

Now had he been seven years conversant in these studies when, full of pride and desirous
of glory and man’s praise (for yet was he not kindled in the love of God) he went to Rome,
and there (coveting to make a show of his cunning and little considering how great envy he
should raise against himself) nine hundred questions he proposed of divers and sundry
matters, as well in logic and philosophy as divinity, with great study picked and sought out
as well of the Latin authors as the Greek, and partly fetched out of the secret mysteries of
the Hebrews, Chaldees and Arabians, and many things drawn out of the old obscure
philosophy of Pythagoras, Trismegistus, and Orpheus, and many other things strange and
to all folk (except right few special excellent men) before that day not unknown only but
also unheard of. ... Lo, this end had Picus of his high mind and proud purpose, that where
he thought to have gotten perpetual praise, there had he much work to keep himself
upright, that he ran not in perpetual infamy and slander. ... he judged that this came thus to
pass by the especial provision and singular goodness of almighty God, that by this false crime untruly put upon him by his evil willers, he should correct his very errors, and that this should be to him (wandering in darkness) as a shining light in which he might behold and consider how far he had gone out of the way of truth. ... he drew back his mind, flowing in riot, and turned it to Christ. Women’s blandishments he changed into the desire of heavenly joys, and despising the blast of vainglory which he before desired, now with all his mind he began to seek the glory and profit of Christ’s Church, and so began he to order his conditions that from thenceforth he might have been approved, as though his enemy were his judge. (CWM I 57 – 60)

One way in which More indicates Pico’s shift to spirituality is in the description of his library. More’s literary intervention on Pico’s library in the Life, where he reduces the incredibly large and eclectic collection of books to a corpus of doctrinal works, is in accord with the spiritual shift described in this passage. Summit has shown that, in his translation, More omits a large part of the library set forth in the nephew’s biography. More eliminates all references to Pico’s knowledge of philosophy, mathematics, natural science, Hebrew or Arab authors. In short, he discards everything that “fueled Pico’s larger project of establishing the essential unity of all knowledge” (65). This literary strategy of elimination responds to Pico’s prideful attitude in the Oratio and in his later Apologia, stemming from his vision of an epistemological synthesis (Wegemer 40 – 41). More indicates the subtle ways in which a perspective of learning as end in itself, inviting a glorified image of humanity, may challenge a teleology of salvation history.
Despite taking the path of spirituality, More’s fictional Pico ends up in Purgatory. Wegemer concludes that, in light of the epigrammatic “Twelve Rules of Spiritual Battle” in the *Life*, sending Pico to the Purgatory is a rather dramatic statement that reflects More’s belief that to love God is to carry a spiritual battle that strengthens the soul (49). Pride is the most perverse of all sins because it “arises from the soul’s intrinsic power to imagine what it wants and then to will freely to delight in that image regardless of its truth or goodness. With this spiritual freedom, rational creatures can will to devise «worldly fantasies» of their own creation that are actually opposed to what it exists” (31). The Twelfth Rule in the *Life* shows that man can conquer the pride in the soul only by imitating Christ’s suffering:

Though thou be tempted, despair thee nothing:

Remember the glorious apostle Saint Paul

When he had seen God in His perfect being,

Lest such revelation should his heart extol,

His flesh was suffered rebel against his soul:

This did almighty God of His goodness provide

To preserve His servant from the danger of pride.

And here take heed that he whom God did love,

And for His most especial vessel chose,

Ravished into the third heaven above,

Yet stood in peril lest pride might him depose:

Well ought we then our hearts fence and close
Against vainglory, the mother of reprieve,
The very crop and root of all mischief.
Against this pomp and wretched world’s gloss
Consider how Christ the Lord, sovereign power,
Humbled Himself for us unto the cross:
And peradventure death within one hour
Shall us bereave wealth, riches and honour:
And bring us down full low both small and great
To vile carrion and wretched worm’s meat. (CWM I 109)

More appears to suggest that man’s history must remain a continuous effort to achieve a higher spirituality. The secular books in Pico’s library represent his view of a suprahistorical man whose work reflects that of God. By removing them, More affirms that the Christian dogmatic tradition should be considered as the only source of continuity and immortality. History makes sense only from the perspective of redemption. Awareness of this critical truth enables acceptance that knowledge may only be partial. In contrast, Pico suggests that the absolute makes itself fully known in the microcosms of individual, intellectual expressions. The suggestion, in the Life, is that Pico remains in Purgatory ‘for a season.’ This idea appears to reconcile Pico with a tradition he challenged and to define More’s critique of Pico’s heretical views.

At the same time, the suggestion reinforces, for the reader, the fact that language and fiction are bound together. This understanding is fundamental to More’s symbolic thought and, I shall argue, to his educational strategies in Utopia. The construction of Pico’s afterlife in fiction
is an illusion of power: as author-translator, he cannot do much about the issue just as he could not (and most probably would not) do anything to the real library. Textuality creates a false sense of authority. This perspective is reinforced by Peter Giles’s “Letter to Jerome de Busleyden” in Utopia’s parerga, where he proposes that more truth can be assigned to More’s written representation than to Hythloday’s own words:

As often as I read it, I seem to see even more than when I heard the actual words of Raphael Hythloday - for I was present at his discourse quite as much as More himself. As a matter of fact, Hythloday himself showed no mean gifts of expression in setting forth his topic … And yet when I contemplate the same matters as sketched by More’s pen, I am so affected by them that I sometimes seem to be living in Utopia itself. I can scarcely believe, by heaven, Raphael saw as much in the five years he lived on the island as can be seen in More’s description. That description contains, in every part of it, so many wonders that I don’t know what to marvel at first or most. (Utopia 25-26)

Ultimately, More and Pico share an anthropology that exalts man’s ability to produce and employ learning in order to challenge his fallen condition. They both envision the possibility of a displacement towards a superior intellectual space from where the reality of God may be contemplated. But whether in the active mode of the Oratio where he is free to choose his own nature, or in the passive mode of the Heptaplus, where he is one with God, Pico’s man is elevated by knowledge to a semi-divine status. Where Pico envisions greatness - ‘this is how much man can be’ - More foregrounds the humility of the process: ‘I can be, or do, only this
much.’ Pico’s angelic man points towards himself as a mirror of the absolute, whereas More’s angelic man moves upwards as he acknowledges that the only true power to create the reality of immortality lies with God.

5. A Time of Glory: Scriptural Interpretation and the Ideal Man

Through the depiction of a better man and life More affirms his alignment with the humanist view of a self-transforming man. His difficulties lie, I suggested, with Pico’s glorification of humanity. In this section I show that, in *Utopia*, More engages with one of the core aspects of the symbolism engendered by the new learning culture, which is the desire for time. For Pico, learning demanded a never-ending interval of intellectual and spiritual renewal. In *Utopia*, More draws attention, just as he had in the *Life*, to the illusions of power associated with textual scholarship. In the *Oratio*, words reflect man’s greatness just as they mirror God’s truth. This perspective is particularly problematic for scriptural interpretation, where the reader’s ability to universalize, enabled by learning, must draw him towards the text’s message of humility rather than towards self-glorification. Ernst Cassirer observed that as Pico’s learned man enters the limelight as a symbol of power, the value of his temporal existence, fundamental to the transformative process, is emphasized over the scriptural promise of eternity:

... the distinctive privilege of man is the almost unlimited power of self-transformation at his disposal. Man is that being to whom no particular form has been prescribed and assigned. ... What is novel in this idea lies not in its content, but rather in the value Pico places in this content. ...That man is confined to temporality, that even in his highest achievements he cannot overstep time, this now no longer appears merely a proof of his
Fall ... The fact that he is temporally conditioned and temporally mutable is the basis of the distinctive power of man.... man is not merely subject to a passive becoming; he rather determines his own goal and realizes it in free activity. It is this activity toward which Pico’s admiration is directed, and his oration is but the philosophical hymn in which he gives expression to this admiration. (Cassirer 1992, 45 - 46)

In Pico’s views, sin is a pre-condition of moral action so the fall must be re-enacted constantly if man is to prove his superior nature (43). Man’s glory depends on the refusal, rather than postponement, of a redemptive end to history. In the Oratio, man’s self-transformative impulse is a “holy ambition” that reflects the mind’s unquenchable need for knowledge: “Let a holy ambition pervade our soul, so that, not satisfied with mediocre things, we strive for the loftiest and apply ourselves with all our strength to pursue them (because we can achieve them, if we want).” Cassirer observes Pico’s refusal of moderation in matters of learning: “The mind of man can be satisfied with no moderation, indeed, with no possession of any sort that has fixed limits. His [man’s] ambition ... consists in striving on and on” (46).

In Utopia, More engages with this mode of thought. The Utopians appear to lack the ability to think theoretically and to conceptualize man symbolically: “They are so far from being able to speculate on ‘second intentions’ that not one of them was able to see ‘man-in-general,’ though we pointed straight at him with our fingers, and he is, as you well know, colossal and bigger than any giant” (Utopia 157). This apparent inability to universalize is reflected by their humble acceptance of the mind’s limitations. The Utopians have an excellent grasp of the laws of nature but acknowledge the difficulty in understanding the causes of creation:
From long experience in observation, they are able to forecast rains, winds and other changes in the weather. But as to the causes of the weather, of the tides in the sea and its saltiness, and finally, the origins and nature of the heavens and the earth, they have various opinions. ... So ... when they propose a new theory they differ from our ancient philosophers and yet reach no consensus at all among themselves. (*Utopia* 159)

Despite their perspective that the mind is “weak and defective,” the Utopians believe that “man was born for happiness” (*Utopia* 161). Their daily life reflects this belief in a destiny of immortality and of an afterlife when man’s just actions on earth will be divinely rewarded. The belief that God created man for happiness suggests that, despite their possible Greek origins and lack of familiarity with Scriptures prior to Hythloday’s visit, the Utopians’ worldview is not Platonic but informed by a conflation of the central messages of the Old Testament’s creation story and the New Testament’s doctrine of salvation. Hythloday’s words and scriptural learning do not change anything in the Utopian’s way of life, but reinforce the truth that man was created with a natural inclination to be happy.

More bypasses the difficulties of interpretation at the very moment he breaks the relationship, in *Utopia*, between textuality and a Christian-echoing felicity. The space between the redemptive message and the human soul is literally annulled and the mind - standing for the dangerous interpretative space where ‘worldely fantesyes’ and ‘vayne confabulations’ emerge - is put to work towards a good life and afterlife. In fact, the belief in immortality and monotheism are Utopia’s only laws and to go against them is to no longer be human: “Anyone who denies
this proposition they consider not even one of the human race, since he has degraded the sublimity of his own soul to the base level of a beast’s wretched body” (Utopia 225). The Utopians, it is revealed, can universalize but they envision man within a spiritual community.

More had advanced the view that the divine promise of happiness is already in man’s heart in the 1515 “Letter to Dorp,” where he states that the meaning of the Gospel “has been implanted in the hearts of the faithful throughout the universal Church ...”94 This perspective becomes more radical in his theological writings from the 1520s. He believes that faith can be achieved by one who has never read the Bible, simply through adhering to the word of God as it is preached in the church (Gogan 12). Accordingly, the Christianization of the Utopians is facilitated by divine inspiration and by the similarities between this religion and their spiritual practices:

But after they heard from us the name of Christ, and learned of his teaching, his life, his miracles and the no less marvellous constancy of the many martyrs whose blood, freely shed, has drawn so many nations far and near into their religion, you would not believe how eagerly they assented to it, either through the secret inspiration of God or because Christianity seemed very like the sect that most prevails among them. (Utopia 219 and 221)

The centrality of unmediateness in Utopia reflects More’s particular concern with scriptural interpretation. Interpretation, relying on the mediation of the mind, is constantly challenged by the mind’s desiring nature. For More, text and time must be recuperated by

humility, which defines man’s original spiritual status. The earthly existence is a time of struggle against the illusory power associated with the notions of social identity - intellectual, scholarly, religious - engendered by textuality. In contrast, the Utopian enjoys unmediated access to the divine truth, to the immediateness of an identity and life informed not by illusions of glory but by the belief that the soul is immortal.

6. The Toils of the Word: Writing the Self, Un-writing Friendship

I have shown that More’s perspective is that learning makes one susceptible to intellectual pride and vainglory. In this section, I explore the possibility that More directed his views towards Erasmus himself who, just like Pico, epitomizes exceptional learning. Publicly, More and Erasmus enjoyed a continuous friendship. Nevertheless, More’s suggestions in Utopia that the textual self is a fiction, that interpretation generates illusions of glory, and that the truth of God may be obtained without direct access to Scripture must have struck a negative chord with Erasmus, whose spiritual life and theological scholarship are inextricably bound to his textual self-fashioning as the foremost intellectual of his times.

Lisa Jardine notes the complex strategy through which Erasmus fused Jerome’s secular and sacred letters in the Life of Jerome (1516) in order to fashion an image for himself as Jerome (63). What results is a figure of “scholar-saint/saint-scholar” with which Erasmus fully identifies. Jerome, he suggests, is being reborn through the process of textual restoration and correction of his letters: “I have borne in this such a burden of toil that one could almost say I have killed myself in my efforts to give Jerome a new lease of life. One thing I could even swear without hesitation: it cost Jerome less to write his works than it has cost me to restore and explain
them.” Erasmus saw his efforts to “elide with those of his original; the two tasks become inseparable in their arduousness and difficulty, and materially indistinguishable” (CWE 3 108). Jardine draws an extraordinary portrait of the man as manipulator of the new medium of print, which he uses to create a reputation for himself and for Low Countries humanism. Erasmus is “shaping his own persisting trace in intellectual history, adjusting his public image, editing the evidence to be left for his biographers, managing the production of ‘influences’ and contemporary movements to enhance his own posthumous renown” (68).

More’s comparison between Erasmus and Jerome, in the Letter to Dorp, indicates that he is aware that the 1516 Novum Instrumentum is meant to mirror the Vulgate. While the letter lauds the enterprise, the comparison indicates that More is sensitive to Erasmus’s efforts to affiliate his work with a tradition of Christian thought which would continue through him. Jardine observes Erasmus’s efforts to “inhabit” the “familiar figure” of Jerome “with all the grandeur and intellectual gravitas that might thereby accrue to him,” the effort to show that where “Jerome stood for the dissemination of true scripture throughout the Western world ... Erasmus would stand for the dissemination of humane learning across Europe” (4). I suggest that the topic of intellectual pride which More links to prestige is a sensitive point in his relationship with Erasmus. Affiliation with an intellectual tradition is a particularly efficient way of advancing scholarship but, for More, a problematic strategy because it entails prestige. In what follows, I show how Erasmus responds to a scripture-less Utopia by weakening More’s association with the humanistic intellectual tradition.

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Richard Marius observes that Erasmus does not write a letter in support of the 1516 edition of *Utopia* and appears to want to distance himself from the work (240). Marius cites an October 1516 letter addressed to Busleyden where Erasmus asks Giles to send a preface for More’s fictional text and adds: “In everything else I will act as a friend should.”  

In a February 1516 letter to Guillaume Cop, Erasmus mentions *Utopia* laconically and with undertones of irony: “As for More’s *Utopia*, if you have not read it yet, be sure to ask for it when you want to be amused, or more truly, if you wish to see the very wellsprings of all troubles in the commonwealth” (*CWE* 4 255). Indeed, there are few references, and virtually no praise of *Utopia* anywhere in Erasmus’s correspondence between August 1516 and June 1517. This is intriguing at the least, considering the major importance given by Erasmus to private letters for the construction of a public image.  

In a letter to Johann Froben dated August 1517, Erasmus supports a second edition of *Utopia* on the grounds that More is already regarded as an extraordinary author by the intellectual elite of Europe. His praise of More is again nuanced by undertones of irony; its elaborate rhetoric deserves a lengthier citation:  

> Although everything by my friend More has always won my highest approval, yet before now I used to feel a certain distrust of my own judgment, as that of an intimate friend. But when I see the whole learned world with one voice endorsing my assessment and admiring his superhuman gifts even more emphatically than I do, not because they love him better 

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97 Jardine points out that Erasmus’s work on Jerome’s correspondence gave him a clear sense of the extraordinary power of the letters in projecting an intellectual figure (148).
but because they see more clearly, I approve my own opinion in good earnest, and shall have no misgivings in future in saying openly what I think. What might he had not achieved, with that astonishing natural gift of style, had his great talents been raised in Italy, had all his time been devoted to the Muses, had he been free to ripen to full bearing and his proper harvest-time! Besides his duties as a husband and father and the cares of a household, beside the claims of public office and the flood of litigation, he is distracted so often by important business of the realm that one might wonder how he found the time even to think of books. (CWE 582–83)

Erasmus indicates that he can no longer withhold praise due to More’s public recognition, but goes on to subtly question the latter’s scholarly background and to suggest that his dedication to learning is of secondary importance.

The concern with scriptural interpretation was heightened in this period due to piracy, careless printing, and inadequate translation, symptomatic of print culture’s market-driven nature. Adrian Johns points out that even “closely monitored texts” such as the Bible suffered due to piracy with the advent of print (31). Johns notes that Luther’s own translation of Scripture in German was “beaten into print by its first piracy, and in succeeding years the proportion of unauthorized to authorized texts was roughly ninety to one” (61). M.H. Black observes that the English authorized version of the Bible in particular suffered in the printing process up to the eighteenth century. A hand-corrected copy or a volume of errata, when the errata was not marred

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by errors, enabled a decent reading.\textsuperscript{99} The text would suffer degradation from printing to printing, as a less than perfect version would be considered exemplary by another printer, who would reproduce the already problematic text while contributing his own errors. In short, says Black, “the arrival of printing for a long time facilitated and speeded the process of corruption, as well as providing the instrument by which corruption might eventually be stayed” (414). Long before the Reformation, the printed Bible was “an article of ready commerce, available in convenient formats and with a considerable body of aids to study incorporated with the text” (414).

Paul Botley observes that Erasmus believed that he could control the printing process and prevent the decay of the scriptural text.\textsuperscript{100} More importantly, Erasmus argued that his work permanently resolves the problem of textual corruption: “This labour of mine not only removes blemishes from the Scriptures, but it also provides an obstacle to corruption in the future” (Epistle 860 cited in Botley 146). Thomas More communicates more sceptical views when he bypasses the problems of interpretation and textual inaccuracy entirely by placing liturgy at the center of Utopia’s spiritual life. A small number of priests “of extraordinary holiness” (\textit{Utopia} 231) are entrusted to instruct all utopians in the principles of morality and virtue. The priest is the most honoured official of this society, and his commitment to truth is so highly valued that, should he commit a crime, he is not subjected to punishment but left to his own conscience (\textit{Utopia} 233). Utopians unite in Churches where, “like travellers going to a single destination by different roads,” they worship the “divine nature” (\textit{Utopia} 235). It is the priest who explains the


meanings of the symbols inscribed on their clothes, which carry messages that “serve to remind them of God’s benefits towards them, and of the piety they own in turn to God, as well as of their duty to one another” (*Utopia* 239).

Finally, prayers are read in unison during liturgy. Despite their fixed form, they convey values that make them perfect guides for a moral life. This strategy reflects More’s views that a perfect scriptural translation does not exist:

First of all, I do not think there is a single individual - and to be somewhat bold, not even Jerome Himself - who has had the brashness to claim he was so sure of himself that nothing could possibly escape him in making a translation. This is so true that a point will sometimes be noticed by men of average ability who happen along in the wake of superior men, and even in a task in which superior men are properly engaged. (‘Letter to Dorp’ 44)

The secondary role assigned to Scripture in the ideal society of Utopia may have been perceived by Erasmus as a downplaying of his own translation project. More agreed on the importance of Scripture, as the 1515 *Letter to Dorp* indicates, but showed that faith can be achieved by one who has never read the Bible. If anything, More did not want to alter his relationship with Erasmus. He depended on his friend for the printing of *Utopia* and their correspondence shows that More did everything he could to enlist the scholar’s help. Nor is there any written evidence other than his laconic words that Erasmus was annoyed by *Utopia*. However, in the context defined by reciprocal written support for the advancement of humanist
ideas, the lack of praise on the part of Erasmus may only have reinforced More’s views on the relationship between learning and pride.

7. The Body as ‘Real’ Fiction of the Soul

More observes the necessity to address the corruption of Scripture but does not agree that addressing this corruption makes the text more accessible. Scripture is the ultimate challenge to the human mind and no single person may claim authority over its truths:

Augustine thought it was unfathomable. Not a single one of the ancients had the boldness to say he understood it. They think that the comprehension of this work had been heavily blockaded by some mysterious providence of God, or for the very purpose of challenging inquisitive minds and arousing dormant talents, whose powers had been buried and needed to be called forth by hard work. ... I definitely think that the literal interpretation carries with it so much difficulty that I do not see how anyone at all can grasp it. (“Letter to Dorp” 33 - 34)

This view is reflected by the Utopians’ attitude towards law and text in general. If the truth that humility brings immortality is not obvious one should not try to look for it because all that results is excess of meaning: “If laws are not clear, they are useless; for simple-minded men (and most men are of this sort, and must be told where their duty lies), there might as well be no laws at all as laws which can be interpreted only by devious minds after endless disputes” (Utopia 197). In Book I, this excess is represented by private property, which becomes the symbol of an imbalanced society as described by More through a medical metaphor:
… so long as private property remains, there is no hope at all of effecting a cure and restoring society to good health. While you try to cure one part, you aggravate the wound in other parts. Suppressing the disease in one place causes it to break out in another, since you cannot give something to one person without taking it away from someone else.

(Utopia 38)

The end of the Life of Picus offers a first instance of More’s thought relying on the symbolism of the body. L. E. Semler observes that the phrase “without his fleshly wife” included in the translation of Pico’s final prayer does not appear in the original Latin text. Semler argues that More aims to emphasize an intrinsic connection between soul and body which ends only when the bond between them, like that of a marriage, is dissolved through death. This relationship must be regarded as an opportunity for purification. To remain aware of death, symbolized by the body itself, is to carry on the transformative battle that ensures spiritual progress. By placing the church at the centre of Utopia’s life More reinforces the symbolic identity between the living spiritual community and the ideal society. In true mediaeval tradition, the Utopian ecclesiastical body stands for God’s truth recognized, or mirrored, by each individual. Rather than weakening the role of Scripture, the analogy between the written letter

101 The final version reads: “That when the journey of this deadly life / My silly ghost hath finished, and thence / Departen must without his fleshly wife,/ Alone into his Lord’s high presence, / He may Thee find, O well of indulgence, / In Thy lordship not as a lord, but rather / As a very tender loving father. Amen” (CWM I 123).


and body strengthens it: truth is inherent to the text just as the immortal soul is inherent to the living body and the spirit of God is inherent in the Church.

But More’s symbolic synthesis, creating cultural continuity in response to a vision of spiritual crisis, is even more intricate. I suggest that the medical paradigm employed by More to create an analogy between social and spiritual health throughout *Utopia* is informed by Galen’s anatomical model, which is integrated with the humanist focus on the fictions of language and with the concern with scriptural interpretation. More was introduced to Galen by Thomas Linacre, his mentor at Oxford.104 For Galen, the health of the body reflects the state of the soul. Appropriately, for More, the scholarly reader who cannot understand the meaning of a passage after comparing the gospels and different contexts is blind and should resort to other translations “as from physicians” (“Letter to Dorp” 46 – 47). Being unable to recognize truth is an illness. Refusing to admit to this illness reflects an unwillingness to be healed. In this context, punishment remains the only remedy against further deterioration and eventual damnation. The analogy between word and body lies at the core of More’s thought. Once grasped, it enlightens the relation between pride and excess in *Utopia*: “Pride measures her prosperity not by what she has but by what others lack” (*Utopia* 247). The Utopians, having suppressed private property, are healthy individuals making up a healthy social body.

More suggests that awareness of a text’s purposefulness overrides the need for superior interpretative skills: “As they [the Utopians] see things, all laws are promulgated for the single

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purpose of advising every man of his duty. Subtle interpretations admonish very few, since hardly anybody can understand them ...” (Utopia 197). The emphasis on purposefulness echoes Galen’s De Usu Partium (On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body), where the physician agrees with Aristotle on the vital importance of knowledge of causes. The notion of purposefulness clarifies the derogatory comments on Plato in the introductory poem: Plato’s philosophical search for truth generates ‘empty words,’ whereas a teleological perspective on life enables access to meaning. Understanding the role occupied by the Galenic anatomic-physiological model in the construction of the ideal in Utopia also reveals that More realizes, in a way, Pico’s synthesis of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies. The ideal society, like the Galenic body, integrates Aristotelian purposefulness with Plato’s arguments for an external Creator and for the immortality of the soul. Moreover, Man is a mirror of God but only insofar as he is an integral, purposeful part of creation.

Galen is referenced twice in Utopia: first, in Guillaume Budé’s letter to Thomas Lupset in the parerga, where Budé mentions Linacre’s translation project and subtly suggests that More’s discourse of the ideal somehow complements Galen’s On Protecting One’s Health:

… you left me enormously in your debt by presenting me with the Utopia of Thomas More, and thereby introducing me to an extremely amusing and profitable book. In fact, you had recently asked me to do what on my own account I was more than ready to do - that is, to read over the six books of Galen, On Protecting One’s Health ... For this reason I already thought myself sufficiently in your debt; and now, as an appendix or supplement to your former gift, you send me the Utopia of More, a man of the keenest wit, the most
agreeable temper and the most profound experience in judging human affairs. (*Utopia* 7 - 8)

The second instance is in Book II, where Hythloday notes that one of the medical books given to the Utopians is *Microtechne*.

The teleological perspective in *De Usu Partium* was attractive to More. Galen begins his work with a description of the hand, not because he considers it the most important part of the body but because it is representative for the notion of purposefulness:

In every case the body is adapted to the characters and faculties of the soul…. [Man] is an intelligent animal … hence he did not need horns as a natural endowment since, whenever he desired, he could grasp in his hand a weapon better than a horn … With his skilful hands man tamed the horse … But, being also a peaceful and social animal, with his hands he writes laws for himself, raises altars and statues to the gods, builds ships, makes flutes, lyres, knives, fire-tongs, and all the other instruments of the arts, and in his writings set down by the hand, it is yet possible for you to hold converse with Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and the other Ancients.105

Andrew Cunningham observed the hermeneutic nature of the ‘Catholic anatomy’ in the early sixteenth century:

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To watch an anatomical dissection was to have paraded in front of one’s eyes the handiwork, goodness and providence of God. The future physician … would be able to see the hidden inward parts with which his practice would later deal, their relations to each other and their connections. … the body demonstrated as instrument of the soul. (45)

In the second part of this chapter I discuss More’s vision, in *Utopia*, of a symbolic social body as ‘real’ fiction of a community’s spiritual state. I argue that he sees the teleological interpretation as the only possible fructuous engagement with spiritual death. The discourse on the ideal society, bringing spiritual change, is informed by the anatomical description: it provides, through an observation of a body’s health, a diagnosis of the soul’s state. The ‘real’ fiction and the good interpretation carry a diagnostic role. Language’s representational function is subverted in several ways: it no longer mediates, but describes an existing situation as it takes place. It shows illness (pride) as a way of enabling the remembrance of death (associated with the fall), and it invites the humility inherent to the anatomical description, focusing only on one body part at the time, always partial and processual. This language is no longer vulnerable to pride but becomes an angelic gesture of humility and adoration. As the soul finds its purposefulness, it finds self-healing, angelic capacities and enters into a direct relation with Christ’s body, representing continuity and finality. Pride may be rooted from the soul only gradually. If this is still not possible, the ‘doctor’ shall act upon the oath of Hippocrates and do no harm:

If you cannot pluck up bad ideas by the root, or cure long-standing evils to your heart’s content, you must not therefore abandon the commonwealth. Don’t give up the ship in a
storm because you cannot hold back the winds. You must not deliver strange and out-of-the-way speeches to people with whom they will carry no weight because they are firmly persuaded the other way. Instead, by an indirect approach, you must strive and struggle as best you can to handle everything tactfully - and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make as little bad as possible. (Utopia 97)

In More’s view, the transformative interpretation, enabling spiritual progress, is carried out in awareness of Scripture’s message of sacrifice. The ‘good place’ is defined by the processual dimension of an interpretative practice that no longer gratifies the mind but enables humility. Language conveys truth only insofar as it reveals the pride in the soul. I show that Book I is a diagnosis of the ill body and prideful soul of More’s contemporary world. Book II describes the continuity of truth in a society that does not rely primarily on textual interpretation for its spiritual existence.

The complex exploration of the relation between interpretation and pride in Utopia links this text to More’s later doctrine of revelation. While it is less disputatious than the writings of the Reformation debate, Utopia conveys a sense of urgency concerning the spiritual dangers associated with learning. A synthesis between the word of man - standing for the mortal body and for the mind’s fictions - and the continuity represented by Scripture, Christ, and church appropriately addresses the peril of spiritual death.
Synthesis: Humble Practices, Angelic Man

1. Angelic Humility and the Limits of Representation

Elizabeth McCutcheon argues that More’s use of medical metaphors in *Utopia* establishes the archangelic identity of Hythloday. In the Old Testament’s story of Tobit, Raphael tells Tobias to remove the organs of a fish in order to make the medicine that will heal his father’s blindness. The angel heals by helping Tobias ‘see’ what the cure is. He functions as intermediary between man and God, symbolized by the fish. McCutcheon demonstrates that More’s theological background would have allowed him to be competent in such subtle biblical interpretations. She observes that, in *Utopia*, Raphael is “a surrogate for Jesus Christ, the heavenly physician of our salvation - a conception which fascinated More” (26). Raphael’s role, as in the Old Testament, is that of a “symbolic physician who cures souls as well as bodies and illuminates darkened minds” (23).

More would have found his affinity with Raphael through Pico. In the *Oratio*, Raphael is a particularly important angelic figure who heals through moral philosophy and dialectics. However, the Raphael of *Utopia* is anything but a skilled dialectician. His harsh description of England in Book I and praising depiction of Utopia in Book II force upon the reader the realization that a better life emerges only if man remains aware of the dichotomy between good and evil and committed to Christian principles. Moreover, Raphael appears confused over what being a philosopher truly is: “Whether it’s the business of a philosopher to tell lies, I don’t know, but it certainly isn’t mine” (*Utopia* 97 and 99).

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I suggested in Chapter 1 that, in Utopia, reason is mainly responsible for the awareness of immortality and of God’s plan to give man eternal happiness. Virtue stems from this critical consciousness that recuperates man’s original worshipping function within creation: “They define virtue as living according to nature; and God, they say, created us to that end. When an individual obeys the dictates of reason in choosing one thing and avoiding another, he is following nature. Now above all reason urges us to love and venerate the Divine Majesty to whom we owe our existence and our capacity for happiness” (Utopia 163). Utopia’s Raphael stands neither for a form of dialectics, nor for philosophical reasoning. In my view he is, more than anything else, a figure of reflexivity, of the critical engagement with sin that must inform the Christian existence. Budé’s letter to Lupset introduces the idea that good spiritual practices bring gradual individual and societal improvement:

The island of Utopia ... is said to have imbibed ... both in its public and its private life, truly Christian customs and authentic wisdom... It has done so by holding tenaciously to three divine institutions: equality of all good and evil things among the citizens ...; a fixed and unwavering dedication to peace and tranquility; and utter contempt for gold and silver. These three principles are the dragnets ... which sweep up all swindles, impostures, tricks, wiles and underhanded deceptions. Would that the gods, by their divine power, could cause these three pillars of Utopian policy to be fixed by the bolts of strong and settled conviction in the minds of all mortals. You would promptly witness the withering away of pride, greed, idiot competition and almost all the other deadly weapons of our hellish adversary. (Utopia 13 and 15)
Hythloday reveals that the Utopian way of life is defined by a constant fight against pride. In contrast, this sin is nurtured in England. I showed earlier that More describes pride’s workings in the mind through a metaphor of acquisition. The theme of excessive acquisition is central to Hythloday’s critique in Book I. Pride is the main culprit in spiritual and social decay: “Pride is a serpent from hell that twines itself around the hearts of men, acting like a suckfish to draw and hold them back from choosing a better way of life” (*Utopia* 247). To remain conscious of its blinding force is to carry small victories that define a trajectory of gradual healing. Book II, describing the Utopian state where everything is held in common, reinforces the curative undertones of Book I’s diagnosis by illustrating how understanding the nature of illness implies the possibility to recuperate and preserve an organism’s health.

Pride is too deeply fixed in human nature to be easily plucked out. So I am glad that the Utopians at least have been lucky enough to achieve this republic which I wish all mankind would imitate. Through the plan of living which they have adopted, they have laid the foundations of a commonwealth that is not only very happy but also, as far as human prescience can tell, likely to last forever. (*Utopia* 247)

The curative pedagogy underlying Hythloday’s speech is introduced early on in Book I: he “told us of many ill-considered usages in ... new found nations” and “described quite a few other customs from which our own cities, nations, races and kingdoms might take lessons in order to correct their errors” (*Utopia* 49). The fictional narrator indicates his intention to make known this
modus vivendi by relating "what he [Raphael] told us about the customs and institutions of the Utopians" but not before "recounting the conversation that drew him into speaking of that commonwealth" (Utopia 49 and 51). The invitation extended to the reader is to see himself, in the contrast between the two books, the profound difference, on the existential level, between the moral choice and self-interest. In depicting both worlds side by side, More invites the reader to examine life from Hythloday’s angelic vantage point. Man has now the privilege of seeing both sin and cure but in order to live like the Utopians he must also humbly accept that this work of self-improvement is only an instrument for God’s redemptive plan.

By giving man self-healing powers, More achieves what Pico could not: to endow man with suprahuman qualities. First, there is the critical awareness that defines the angel’s ability to look towards both God and man, made possible by his intermediary position. Secondly, there is the humility that is derived from the angel’s unmediated relation to God: this makes very clear the differences between their natures. Where Pico calls for Raphael as for a “heavenly physician” who heals a sick soul with dialectics “as with healing drugs,” More suggests that, by observing his own mortal limits in prideful behaviour, man engages in a diagnostic practice that actualizes God’s healing plan for man.

The archangel and the enlightened man envisioned by More are subtly different from those introduced by the Old Testament’s story of Tobit, discussed by McCutcheon. They mirror each other through the gesture of humility described by an acknowledged dependence on representation to convey the experience of a superior reality. This dependence speaks of the limits of their healing powers. Hythloday admits this shortcoming to his listeners:
I’m not surprised that you think of it this way ... since you have no image, or only a false one, of such a commonwealth. 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, and would never have left it, if it had not been to make that new world known to others. If you had seen them, you would frankly confess that you had never seen a well-governed people anywhere but there. (Utopia 105)

I suggest that the inspiration for Utopia’s reflexive and humble angelic figure and self-transforming man is drawn from another biblical episode, also centered on Raphael and which, to my knowledge, has not been yet explored by scholars in relation to More’s ideal society. This is the Probatica story in John 5: 1 – 15, which brings into view the New Testament’s redemptive message, less developed in the Book of Tobit. In this episode, Raphael, meaning ‘God heals,’ or ‘God is a healer,’ or ‘medicine of God’107 is the angel who stirs the water of the sheep pond near Bethesda.108 Traditional interpretations have identified him not through name but based on his role in this episode of miraculous healing. The gospel indicates that the ill - blind, lame, and withered - were waiting on the pool’s five porticos for the angel to move the waters when God’s healing grace descended. The first to step into the pond was cured. There, Jesus heals a paralytic who had been ill for thirty-eight years and had no hope of recovery because of the immobility

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that prevented him from ever leaving his bed.\textsuperscript{109} The New Testament’s archangel is more of a mercurial figure than the Old Testament’s Raphael, who explicitly designates the cure. In John 5, he performs his role through an act of communication that amounts to a description: the stirring of the waters at Probatica is a visual indicator that the ill must go into the pool. The imagistic nature of this communication defines the limits of both angelic healing and human mind: the extent to which the angel enables good health is the extent to which man may comprehend the divine message.

Accordingly (and echoing Pico and Erasmus),\textsuperscript{110} Hythloday is not a physician himself but indicates the path that must be taken to achieve healing. Interestingly, Christ’s healing of the lame in John 5: 8 is not through water, but also through word: “Arise, take up your bed, and walk.” In his Tractates on the Gospel of John, Augustine observes that the cure is conferred through the verb ‘arise,’ whereas the last two commands affirm the need for a Christian life, and define its particularities.\textsuperscript{111} Augustine’s observation allows a reading of this episode’s baptismal connotations not simply as a cleansing from sin but also as the foundational act for a life defined by effort to walk the ways of God: “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” says Jesus before the man departs. To sin in awareness of God’s will for a good life, manifested by Christ, results in eternal damnation, a point emphasized in John 5: 24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He

\footnotetext[109]{In an annotation on 5:4 in his Paraphrase on John, Erasmus himself chooses to preserve the active ‘moved the water’ as opposed to ‘the water was moved,’ in support of which he makes references to old Greek manuscripts and Chrysostom. Note 4 to pages 64 – 66, CWE 46 266.}

\footnotetext[110]{Aside from presiding over learning and communication, Mercury is also regarded as inventor of sacrifices as well as having the ability to increase the fertility of sheep. Loren L. Johns, The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 59 - 60. Erasmus’s Mercury is a patron of learning and eloquence. Erasmus, “Adage II V 1,” in CWE 34 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 189.}

that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

Reading *Utopia*’s Raphael through the New Testamental emphasis on the representational nature of the angel’s self-limiting gesture in John 5 allows for an unmediated relation between man and God. The divine will and grace are manifested directly in the angelic man’s ability to ‘see’ the face of sin. More evokes the Probatica episode in the *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (1534), where he emphasizes man’s potential to bear good provided he becomes transformed through penance:

> For seeing the man so sore set on his pleasure that they despair any amendment of him whatsoever they should shew him, and then seeing also beside that the man doth no great harm, but of a gentle nature doth some good men some good; they pray God themself to send him grace, and so they let him lie lame still in his fleshly lusts at *probaticam piscinam, expectantes aquae motum*, at the pool that the Gospel speaketh of beside the Temple, wherein they washed the sheep for the sacrifice, and they tarry to see the water stirred. And when his good angel coming from God shall once begin to stir the water of his heart, and move him to the lowly meekness of a simple sheep, then if he call them to him they will tell him another tale, and help to bear him and plunge him into the pool of penance over the hard ears.\(^{112}\)

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\(^{112}\) Thomas More, *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (London: Charles Dolman, 1847) 47.
The analogy between men and sheep in this fragment sheds light retrospectively on Hythloday’s critical metaphor of the ‘greedy sheep’ of England in Book I of *Utopia*. Hythloday’s prefigurative function is intuited by the character of Cardinal Morton, a figure dear to More, who ensures that his discourse ‘of truth,’ like the archangels’ trumpeting in New Testament’s *Revelation* 8:2, goes uninterrupted (*Utopia* 67).¹¹³

Christ’s demand to the lame at Probatica to ‘sin no more’ is echoed in a medical metaphor that describes the Utopians’ focus on maintaining their state of health: “When we eat, they [the Utopians] say, what happens is that health, which was starting to fade, takes food as its ally in the fight against hunger” (*Utopia* 175). This metaphor, reinforcing the theological and medical models of the discourse of the ideal, introduces the idea that man can feel the changes in his state of health. This view gains its full expression in More’s later view of revelation as continuous reality in the heart of the believer. Because Christ has restored man’s health through his sacrifice, man knows when his spiritual state changes for the worse: “The idea that health cannot be felt they consider very far from the truth. What man, when he’s awake, can fail to feel that he’s in good health - except one who isn’t?” (*Utopia* 175). The desirable spiritual practice preserves health: “As for eating, drinking, and other delights of that sort, they consider them desirable, but only for the sake of health” (*Utopia* 177). Man’s is a perpetual struggle to feed the soul the good spiritual food as a way of carrying on God’s work: “If our health feels delight in the struggle, will not rejoice when the victory has been won?” (*Utopia* 175). The transformative dimension of this practice of preservation emerges from its prefigurative symbolism: man does heal himself, one facet of sin at the time, as he employs representation not to delight in its distorting creations but to achieve humility and remain aware of the ultimate reward of immortality.

¹¹³ Raphael is not named but the text specifies that all seven archangels are present and provided with trumpets.
2. Fictions of Illness: Galenic Anatomy and the Purposeful Order

Hythloday makes known to the reader the fact that man has the resources to take steps towards the recuperation of his spiritual health. Like John’s Raphael, he provides exemplary communication as gesture of humility: like the angel’s troubling of the waters, he may only signal - and does so through description - the possibility of healing and the path towards it. At the same time, his relation to the representational aspect of language defines his role, which is to make people ‘see’ the two realities, divine and human, healing and prideful. In this section I focus on the notions of order and purposefulness, or rather on their absence and the consequences thereof in Book I’s England. I show that the teleology of its spiritual diagnosis is informed by Galen’s anatomical body. England is cut open for all to see and examined in detail as if in a surgery or dissection. The verbal expression of this examination is, of course, a fiction - the anatomy of a social body. It is also a fiction insofar as it provides a representation of this society’s spiritual state. The multilayered interpretation enables the reader to understand that pride functions by destabilizing the purposeful existence that leads to the better society and to salvation. It provides the model for a symbolic, superior diagnostic practice that helps man see, at all times, his state of health reflected in the moderate or excessive aspects of his actions.

Scholars are in agreement that More would have been very familiar with anatomical discourses. His intellectual formation took place in a period marked by Pope Sixtus’s decision, in late fifteenth century, to permit dissections for the purpose of learning anatomy,114 as well as by a renewed interest in Galen, with whom More became familiar through Thomas Linacre, as

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discussed above. Linacre’s translations of Galen’s work from Greek into Latin were published between 1517 and 1524. He also founded medical lectureships at Oxford and Cambridge and the study of Greek at Oxford for the purpose of improving medical education in England.\textsuperscript{115} More showed rather respectable medical knowledge that allowed him to heal his daughter Margaret from sweating sickness in 1528, when no fewer than 40,000 people are said to have been infected and thousands died (Marius 227). His adopted daughter Margaret Giggs was herself skilled in medicine due to her father’s support and guidance, while her husband John Clement, who also lived with More for some time as a tutor to his children, became a member and later president of the Royal College of Physicians.

Marie Boas Hall observes that Galen’s work reinforces the view of the human body as a living whole created through, and animated by, purpose.\textsuperscript{116} Dissection, unveiling its extraordinary organization, is a lesson in humility in that it reinforces the limits of rational knowledge:

These are the things, then, that our Creator wished to be made, and since they have been made, do not attempt or venture to find out how it was done. For how could you reasonably bring yourself to inquire how things were made, the existence of which you would not have discovered if you had not been taught by dissection? It is enough for you to have made as great a discovery as this, that every part has been constructed to be what its usefulness

\begin{footnotes}
\item[115] Elizabeth Lane Furdell, \textit{The Royal Doctors 1485-1714: Medical Personnel at the Tudor and Stuart Courts} (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001) 22.
\end{footnotes}
requires, and if you undertake to investigate how a part has been made such as it is, you will stand convicted of not realizing either your own weakness or the power of the Creator. 

(On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body II 658)

While the anatomized body demonstrates the complexity of divine creation, it reminds man of mortality in more than one way. The open body shows an order; however, when its inner workings become visible, when ill-like England - it evokes sin because in Galen’s anatomical perspective the state of the body mirrors the state of the soul.

Prideful excess is designated as the illness specific to ‘Englishmen,’ a term that, self-deprecatorily, includes More himself. Changes have occurred in the Christians’ sheep-like nature and they now “devour human beings themselves” (Utopia 63). As a strong emphasis on worldly values generates illusions of power, fierceness has replaced the meekness of Christian humanitas. Because its logic is rooted in a lack of satisfaction, excess continues to perpetuate disorder until the last patch of common humanity has been affected: “Living in idleness and luxury without doing society any good no longer satisfies them; they have to do positive harm. For they leave no land free for the plough; they enclose every acre for pasture; they destroy houses and abolish towns, keeping the churches - but only for sheep-barns” (Utopia 63). Hythloday continues with an extended description of how an apparently small occurrence echoes throughout the entire social body and imbalances it.

The anatomical description has the value of a diagnosis. English society is a body whose parts no longer serve the functions assigned to them by the creator. But from his angelic position Hythloday is not and cannot be pessimistic: this social malfunction may be repaired if the
spiritual core of the matter is addressed. Eliminating habits that perpetuate excess will gradually lead to healing, which is nothing less than a recuperation of the original purposefulness: “Banish these blights, make those who have ruined farmhouses and villages restore them or hand them over to someone who will restore and build ... Let fewer people be brought up in idleness. Let agriculture be restored, and the wool-manufacture revived as an honest trade, so there will be useful work for the idle throng ...” (*Utopia* 67).

The link between social body and the community’s spiritual state in *Utopia* echoes Galen’s dualism in *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, where the function of each organ serves the purposeful action of the soul: “The usefulness of all the organs is related to the soul. For the body is the instrument of the soul, and ... is adapted to the character and faculties of the soul” (67). It reflects the intertwining of religion and science specific to this period with a focus on the observation of the body as a means of gaining knowledge of the teleology of creation. The anatomic body demonstrates the limits of the mind, which can only know through images. It also suggests that these limits may only be transcended through a form of symbolism based on the inextricable unity between two very different realities. It demonstrates the existence of the soul and it offers proof of its state, much in the way as the historical Christ demonstrates God’s redemptive purposes and the historical church demonstrates the divine nature of the Christic message of immortality.

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117 Cunningham notes that in his *Commentarius de anima* (Vitebergae, 1540), Philipp Melanchthon argues that we cannot understand the soul without understanding how it operates, and we can do that through observing the body. Twelve years later, Melanchton’s views had been adjusted to incorporate the Vesalian views of anatomy: through the body we can have a glimpse at God himself, not simply his work, as if “through a thick darkness,” with the heart as domicile of God and brain as His temple. K.G. Bretschneider and E. Bindseil, Editors, *Corpus Reformatorum* volume 13 (Halae Saxonum, Brunswigae 1834–60) cols. 57 and 71, 46-47.
As a representation of the open body, the anatomic description of Book I is a fiction. It is, however, not a ‘vain confabulation’ but an example of language turned against its logic of excess. Its symbolic fictionality implies the restoration of the body’s state of health: if it were to be ‘read’ directly by the naked eye, this would be a dead organism. The interpretative paradigm provided by Galen’s anatomy enables direct correspondences between individual, society, and the Christian community. The body is a true sign of the soul; the laws of a society reflect its morals, while the church actualizes the continuity of God’s redemptive plans.

Because Christ’s sacrifice, anticipated by the miracle at Bethesda, redefined the beginning of history as state of health, man’s true power over death depends on the continuous engagement with the illness of sin as a way of ensuring salvation. Book I of Utopia is a true fiction in which the reader may observe his own soul as if in a mirror until, having improved gradually, he becomes able to recognize, in the natural laws that guide his life, the harmony of spiritual health.

3. Fictions of Health: Re-Imagining History

I suggested that Book I of Utopia is the anatomical description of an organism that lost the spiritual rejuvenation brought by the Christic sacrifice. In what follows, I explore Book II as alternative history of an ideal humanity which enjoys an unmediated relation to its nature. The Utopian is an original Adam who assumes the sin that brought the fall from Eden and lives in remembrance of death, according to God’s command in Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” The very foundation of Utopia occurred through an extraordinary act of physical work which resulted in the separation of the island from the mainland. More addresses his concerns with interpretation by demonstrating that the spiritual
community emerges naturally from the humble existence enabled by the consciousness of mortality. I have already shown that the Utopians never had Scripture nor do they require it to congregate and worship God. Moreover, their language reinforces the hate of sin and spiritual renewal. I demonstrate that the apparently oxymoronic toponyms are reminders of the island’s foundational act, enabling contemporary Utopians’ trans-historical relation to this society’s origin in physical work. Utopia’s alternative history demonstrates that a new life may be established if man would be willing to return to the moment of humility represented by the realization of sin and its embodiment in mortality. Book II illustrates a symbolic practice of employing the language of fiction to re-interpret life from the vantage point of Adam’s new status as fallen being. This is the true interpretation that allows man to start anew on the basis of his real nature.

The foundation of Utopia through physical work recalls the account of the fall in Genesis, when God decides that man’s earthly life will be one of labour. The shared experience creates a community united in the consciousness of a new destiny: “[Utopus] put not only the natives to work at this task [of separating the island from the land], but all his own soldiers too, so that the vanquished world would not think the labour a disgrace” (Utopia 111). Germain Marc’hadour observes that More frequently refers to Genesis 3:19 in support of the promulgation of the law of manual labour. The fall is interpreted as a “passage from Eden to a new dwelling”: “When he should be driven thence into the earth, he gave him a necessity to labour, making the earth to be such as without man’s labour, should not bring him forth his living.”118 Appropriately, the island

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is enclosed and its citizens isolated from the rest of the world since only those who have participated directly in its creation may be fully integrated in this new, fructuous way of life.

The toponyms reinforce the concern, reiterated by More in the introductory letters and expressed by Hythloday himself, that Utopia, representing man’s rational and thus natural history, appears strange and thus fictional to most people. The capital Amaurot, whose name means ‘dark,’ or ‘dim,’ is depicted in apparently contradictory terms as identical to all other cities yet “the most worthy of all” (Utopia 117). Hythloday explains that, according to historical accounts, Utopus himself designed it as the island’s administrative centre. I see its uniqueness deriving from the relationship to the river Anydrus (meaning ‘waterless’) which makes it the only city with direct access to the bay. Hythloday makes this point, if only briefly: “If you know one of their cities you know them all, for they’re exactly alike, except when geography itself makes a difference” (Utopia 115). Water naturally isolated the island from the mainland: “Utopus ... had a channel cut fifteen miles wide where the land joined the continent, and thus caused the sea to flow around the country” (Utopia 111). Through Anydrus, Amaurot is connected to the beginning of Utopia’s history, echoing multiple biblical episodes of renewal: the separation of water from earth in Genesis, the re-creation of a sinless world through the flood in the story of Noah, the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and the baptism of the New Testament. The capital ensures that the memory of the island’s origin in work is replicated in everyday experience: its inhabitants “raise vines, fruits, herbs and flowers, so well cared for and flourishing that I have never seen any gardens more productive and elegant than theirs. ... it appears that the city’s founder must have made such gardens a primary object of his consideration” (Utopia 119). Its meaning reinforces its role in ensuring the continuity of the

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119 I am indebted to Professor David Galbraith for this observation.
spiritual community: in Utopia, “The [churches’] interiors are rather dark, not from architectural ignorance but from deliberate policy; for the priests (they say) think that in bright light thoughts will go wandering, whereas a dim light concentrates the mind and aids devotion” (Utopia 235). Amaurot regulates the island’s exchange with the rest of the world to ensure that is never loses sight of its singular destiny. It is the spiritual eye of the soul that takes in only what it needs to advance its spirituality, in this case reminders of the world’s futile symbols of power - iron and precious metals: “In exchange they receive not only such goods as they lack at home (in fact, about the only important thing they lack is iron) but immense quantities of silver and gold” (Utopia 147).

A similar strategy transforms Anydrus, the river whose waters become salty from the tidal, unruly ocean, into a symbol for the mind, enabling the remembrance and learning that nourish the soul while remaining vulnerable to the external occurrences of life. Finally, Utopia’s governor is named ‘Ademus,’ meaning ‘without people.’ He is elected to this position for life after being recognized as the most learned of all the Utopians. At the same time, he is more of a consultant than an administrator: “The tranibors meet to consult with the governor every other day, more often if necessary ...” (Utopia 123). ‘Ademus’ has replaced ‘Barzanes,’ a name that has been traced by Utopia’s translators back to Lucian’s Menippus, where it means ‘son of Zeus’ (Utopia 131). The pride that may have been encouraged by the consciousness of a divine origin has been avoided through the humble ‘without people,’ which functions to remind the governor that he owes his position not to a privileged birth but to hard work and study.

The Utopians’ learning mirrors their unmediated access to the island’s foundational act which at the time of its occurrence appeared unnaturally miraculous to others: ”...the
neighbouring people, who at first had laughed at the folly of the undertaking, were struck with wonder and terror at its success” (*Utopia* 111). Learning comes to them naturally, almost effortlessly, and is integrated with their experiential spirituality, which is why they cannot understand a corrupted text:

> When they heard from us about the literature and learning of Greeks... it was wonderful to behold how eagerly they sought to learn Greek through our instruction. ...They picked up the forms of letters so easily, pronounced the language so aptly, memorised it so quickly, and began to recite so accurately, that it seemed like a miracle. ... Thus in less than three years they had perfect control of the language, and could read the best authors fluently, unless the text was corrupt. (*Utopia* 181)

The utopian alphabet,\(^{120}\) describing the transformation of a circle into a square from A to Y (Figure 1), reinforces the fictionality of a history defined as trajectory between two natural states.\(^{121}\) It demonstrates that man’s transformative impulse, originating in the moment when he grasps the fatal consequences of his disobedience, defines a trajectory between comparable expressions. The opening quatrain, which offers the only example of writing in the Utopian language, establishes that Utopia’s history of regulated exchange with the world is shaped by the consciousness of its particular nature: “The commander Utopus made me, who was once not an island, into an island. I alone of all nations, without philosophy, have portrayed for mortals the

\(^{120}\) In the prefatory letters Peter Giles claims to have added it. However, the possibility that More himself conceived it has not been ruled out by scholars. Currently, there is no definitive perspective on this topic.

philosophical city. Freely I impart my benefits; not unwillingly I accept whatever is better” (Utopia 23).

Utopia is an alternate history of humanity, the fiction of a social body whose continuity emerges from the consciousness of its new nature. It is easier, argues Hythloday, to preserve health than to restore an ill body: “If you allow young folk to be abominably brought up and their characters corrupted, little by little, from childhood; and if then you punish them as grown-ups for committing the crimes to which their training has consistently inclined them, what else is this, I ask, but first making them thieves and then punishing them for it?” (Utopia 67).
Figure 1: The Utopian Alphabet
At the same time, this is a truthful fiction in that it reinforces the experiential core of Scripture over its materiality. More’s contemporary man cannot examine his own history in such terms, which is why he perceives Raphael Hythloday as ‘speaker of nonsense.’ To this man, Christ’s teachings, learned through books, are “alien from the common customs of mankind” (*Utopia* 99). Nevertheless, *Utopia* proposes that history may begin anew if only man was willing to regain the consciousness of his fallen nature, which is also an opportunity to hear again God’s voice define his path, as in Genesis 3:19.

4. The Map of Utopia: Memento Mori

Utopia’s experiential spirituality is reinforced by the interpretative role attributed to the church, ensuring that the Utopians remain in touch with their dutiful nature: “certain symbolic mysteries are hidden in the patterning of the feathers on the robes, the meaning of which is carefully taught by the priests. These messages serve to remind them of God’s benefits toward them, and of the piety they owe in turn to God, as well as of their duty to one another” (*Utopia* 239). The text’s ecclesiocentric message, shaped by the emphasis on self-sacrifice throughout, is reinforced by the map that accompanies the 1518 Froben edition of *Utopia* (Figure 3). In this section I demonstrate that the map complements the text and makes its discourse familiar to the reader by framing its interpretation through the New Testament. The central symbol of the church, the cross, is the drawing’s only repeatable sign and addresses the modern viewer’s need for visual orientation. It is the recognizable element in an otherwise unnatural composition proposing identity between the reader and the ideal man of Utopia in the way of life defined by Christ’s sacrifice, and thus overriding the existential gap created by interpretation.
Marina Leslie argues that the detailed ‘tabula’ carries ‘documentary’ value as opposed to the 1516 cruder ‘figura’ and functions as “methodological rather than as a topographical illustration” (40). It is improbable that More met Ambrosius Holbein for purposes related to the illustration of his work, but Alfred Woltmann argues that the painter would have known enough Latin to become familiar with the text directly and not through Froben or Erasmus. The bird’s eye view of the island refuses the appropriation of the territory by the viewer. The differences from the original 1516 image (also authored by Ambrosius, Figure 2) and the inaccurate representation of the textual descriptions reinforce the difficulties of interpretation.

In the 1518 map, the churches are the most prominent buildings, recognizable as such because of the crosses that reference the Christian conversion of the Utopians following Raphael’s visit. By adorning the churches with crosses Holbein demonstrates that he captures the eschatological symbolism that permeates More’s discourse of the ideal. The legend of the cross, a Mediaeval construct that goes back to the fifth century, reached a comprehensive form in Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend* (1261 – 1266) that becomes part of *devotio moderna* in Northern Europe.

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Figure 2: The Map of Utopia by Ambrosius Holbein (1516)
Figure 3: The Map of Utopia by Ambrosius Holbein (1518)
Barbara Baert notes that the story had an enormous impact on Mediaeval art and literature. The legend explains that Seth, Adam’s third son, fetched a branch from the Paradisiacal tree of knowledge from the archangel Michael which he intended to use to restore his father’s health. By the time he returned with the branch, however, Adam was already dead, so Seth planted it on his father’s grave. Later, Solomon cut it down to build his temple, but the tree changed its size constantly, so eventually it was cast aside and used as bridge over a stream that ran by the city. The Queen of Sheba somehow perceived its value upon her entrance into Jerusalem, and venerated it. Eventually, the wood was left in the Piscina Probatica at Bethesda, from where it was taken and made into the cross on which Christ was condemned to die. Utopia’s Hythloday cannot signal to the reader the healing descent of the Holy Spirit over the waters of the soul, like the archangel does in John 5. Nevertheless, the 1518 map translates the episode’s healing message in Hythloday’s gesture towards the island, inefficiently showing Utopia to a fictional More who does not turn around to ‘see’ it, while more efficiently pointing towards the hidden reality of the Probatica waters, which is the cross. Only latent in John 5, the cross’s redemptive power is inextricably linked, following Christ’s sacrifice, with a way of life indicated in Luke 9:23 where the son of God invites his disciples to take up their crosses every day and follow him. The self-sacrificial connotations of this mode of symbolic existence elude Pico, who in the Oratio had argued that the cross should not be worshipped because in and of itself it is only a sign of the sacrifice.

The path to redemption entails sacrifice, humbling one by constantly reminding him of his own mortality. The map conveys the text’s *memento mori* message in two brilliantly subtle ways: first, the tiny cross outside one of Utopia’s towns indicates a cemetery or a single grave. The centrality of its location clarifies the focus of the interpretative perspective. Secondly, the map itself appears to depict an image of death. Malcolm Bishop demonstrates that the composition has the shape of a skull, the teeth visible on the body of the ship.\(^{125}\)

Despite its multiple visual planes, the map refuses perspective. The decorative banners that carry the names of cities and appear to link the island to the land reinforce the fictionality of the construct and undermine illusions of interpretative competence. More’s position, with his back towards the island or skull, indicates an inability to acknowledge a reality that literally hangs over his head. Hythloday’s apparently inefficient gesture speaks of language’s representational nature. Language cannot make death - or the ideal for that matter - known to the rational mind: Adam, the Bible shows, could only know evil when he experienced it. But at the very moment Hythloday unveils its limits, language triggers in the hearer and reader a mode of critical awareness from which he may begin to engage with this ultimate reality by challenging pride’s false promise of knowledge.

By foregrounding the limits of representation in *Utopia*, More invites his readers to acknowledge the experiential symbolism associated with the human condition to which the New Testament, through its sacramental ecclesiology, attributes transcendental connotations. Knowledge is not an end in itself, as Pico suggests, but a means to the recuperation of one’s sacrificial humanity. The spiritual crisis is overridden through the consciousness that man may

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indeed hear a suprahistorical God speak to him directly if only he can act on the redemptive impulse inherent to his fallen nature. Such a man is no longer a fiction but reads and writes history from the privileged space of the angels.
Chapter 4

Post-utopia: Authorizing Representation in Augustine, François Rabelais and Francis Bacon

This final chapter discusses Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei*, François Rabelais’s *Gargantua*, and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. I argue that these authors employ the concept of an ideal community in order to engage with issues of authority in the textual cultures of late antiquity and early modernity. In Chapter 1, I proposed that these texts are post-utopian in that they unfold and reinforce the ideologies central to the discourses of the ideal in the *Republic* and *Utopia*. In particular, I have suggested that they emphasize the limits of language as well as the authorial figure’s intermediary position between a divine truth and his readers. In what follows, I explore how this perspective comes to inform Augustine, Rabelais, and Bacon’s views of the author as symbol of a superior humanity striving for self-knowledge and carrying out God’s redemptive plan in doing so.


Each of the authors discussed here integrates his own work with a dogmatic understanding of the ideal. I attempt to present their texts as comparable efforts to draw on the authorizing power of scriptural textuality in order to project their works as symbols of a trajectory of self-
exploration from the perspective of limit. They reinforce the biblical image of a fallen man who relies on the divine love to transcend an inability to see his own destiny through means other than language. Whereas Plato and More advance the image of a powerful, rational man, and transcendental discourses seen to override history and language’s representational limits, the authors of *De Civitate Dei*, *Gargantua*, and the *New Atlantis* recognize that language, standing for the fall, may only evoke a divine ideal. In these texts, interpretation reinforces the limits of representation and of the mind, and knowledge is received through illumination, objective manifestation of grace.
Augustine’s Two Cities: The Author as Symbol of Change

1. The Heavenly City as Post-Textual Ideal

Plato’s transcendental ideas and the view that the written word holds transformative power re-emerge in Augustine, whose theology, theory of knowledge, and concerns with authorship inform each other in defining a post-reading ideal of illumination with strong redemptive undertones. Brian Stock observes the central role occupied by the written word in Augustine’s Christian theology:

In monotheism it is necessary to establish a direct link between the authority behind Scripture and the obligations of man. … The gymnastics of verbalism aside, the adepts all arrive at meaning through a reading of the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament. Those enlightened directly by God can receive his words in a variety of ways. But the rest of us, as Augustine observed, have to read the transcript. … For Christianity, it is implicit in the communicative strategy that privileges the spirit of the text as the essential bonding of God and man. … the reality of scriptural knowledge is established contextually by believers who arrive on the scene post textum. For them, faith may be in the word, but proof is in the text. 126

While relying on speech for reading and writing, Augustine is clearly committed to the written word, a position that places him in contrast to the ancient philosophers (Stock 1996, 9). He

“adapted the Platonic distinction between the sensible and the intelligible to the literal and nonliteral dimensions of interpretation” (10). From this perspective, his work may be seen to define the moment when “reading takes precedence over other ways of understanding the future course of events” (12).

James J. O’Donnell observes the inextricable relationship between Augustine’s pioneering efforts to advance the scriptural message and his perspective that interpretation - the interpretation of life which is read as one would read a text - enables self-knowledge and spiritual advancement. With little secondary literature on hand, Augustine generated an enormous body of theological work through which he “appeared to his community as a mediator of the written word contained in the large and handsome Gospel book … that inspired his own production in great abundance.” Augustine reminds his readers that the desire for knowledge defines the human condition (De Civitate Dei XI.27) and that learning cannot be pursued without the use of the senses. True knowledge, however, is enabled only by the “inner vision” - the intuition of being, of knowledge and of love in ourselves - a concept on which the very notion of faith relies. De Civitate advances such an ideal as experience of final freedom and peace from the worldly turmoil:

In that final peace … our nature will be healed by immortality and incorruption. Then, it will have no vices, and nothing at all, in ourselves or any other, will be in conflict with any one of us. Thus, there will be no need for reason to govern the vices, because there will be no vices. Rather, God will rule man, and the soul will rule the body; and the delight and

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effortlessness with which we obey in that final peace will be as great as our happiness in living and reigning. There, for each and every man, this condition will be eternal, and its eternity will be assured; and so the peace of this blessedness, or the blessedness of this peace, will be the Supreme Good.  

This vision, evoking the biblical image of a heavenly eternal happiness, is indicative of the central role that Augustine assigns to Scripture in shaping a Christian way of life and community.  
The ideal is the desirable end of a trajectory of spiritual transformation that addresses man’s longing for a state of blessedness:

The City of God of which we speak is that to which the Scriptures bear witness: the Scriptures which, excelling all the writings of all the nations in their divine authority, have brought under their sway every kind of human genius, not by a chance motion of the soul, but clearly by the supreme disposition of providence. … a city of God, whose citizens we long to be because of the love with which its Founder has inspired us. (De Civitate Dei XI.1)


129 Harry Y. Gamble observes the formative complexity of early Christian literacy, preventing any generalizations, but argues that “from the beginning Christianity was deeply engaged in the interpretation and appropriation of texts.” Christianity was a religion “constitutionally oriented to texts.” Religious texts were distributed to communities “strongly orientated toward the written word” as the text “had a constitutive and regulative importance for Christian thought and action.” Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) (27 and 141). Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams observe the importance of Origen and Eusebius’s textual practices to emerging Christian intellectual practices, in Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
Man longs for a continuous intellectual experience of God: “… the blessedness which an
intellectual being desires as its proper goal will result from a conjunction of two things: namely,
the enjoyment without interruption of the immutable Good which is God; and the certain
knowledge, free from all doubt and error, that it will remain in the same enjoyment for ever” (De
Civitate Dei XI.13). However, this experience may not be conceived through the limited means
of reason and is projected as a liberation. This idea of a visionary final experience is reiterated
throughout Chapter 29 of De Civitate’s concluding Book XXII. There, the concept of the ideal is
more clearly related to Augustine’s theory of knowledge:

… to tell the truth, I do not know what the nature of that occupation, or rather of that rest
and repose, will be. After all, I have never seen it with my bodily sight; and if I should say
that I had seen it with my mind - that is, with my intellect - how great, after all, is our
intellect, and how can it comprehend so excellent a condition? For then there will be, as the
apostle says, ‘the peace of God which passeth all understanding; and does not this mean
that it will pass all human, and perhaps all angelic, understanding, though not, of course,
the understanding of God?’ (De Civitate Dei XXII.29)

The intellectual experience of the divine evokes, almost prophetically, the scriptural promise of
salvation:

For then will be that time of perfection of which the apostle speaks, saying: ‘We know in
part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in
part shall be done away.’ … in the world to come, we shall see the bodily forms of the new heaven and the new earth in such a way as to perceive God with total clarity and distinctness, everywhere present and governing all things, both material and spiritual. In this life, we understand the invisible things of God by the things which are made, and we see Him darkly and in part, as in a glass, and by faith rather than by perceiving corporeal appearances with our bodily eyes. In the life to come, however, it may be that we shall see Him by means of the bodies which we shall then wear, and wherever we shall turn our eyes. … God will then be known to us and visible to us in such a way that we shall see Him by the spirit in ourselves, in one another, in Himself, in the new heavens and the new earth, and in every created thing which shall then exist. (*De Civitate Dei* XXII.29)

The letter stands for the perceptual, knowable world (Stock 1996, 258 and ff). It constitutes the first step, or invitation, in the reader’s search for a final truth while its materiality ultimately refuses access to the suprasensible reality towards which it points. Because man is a “homo signans,” his earthly existence is marked by a “state of temporality, lack, endless deferral of final meaning” (Irvine 257) as well as transformation. In contrast to Plato’s dialectical reasoning, understanding is facilitated by faith: “… it is rather a question of learning the sense of the word, that is, the meaning hidden in the sound, from a previous knowledge of the reality signified than it is of perceiving that reality from a sign of this kind” (*De Magistro* X.34). Reading enables transitory moments of illumination in anticipation of the blessed life (Stock 1996, 15) but remains a marker of man’s fall from grace: “Before the fall, there was no need of such cumbersome instruments of communication. God spoke to Adam and Eve directly, as he did to
the Hebrew prophets, or made his will known without the use of language” (Stock 1996, 16). *De Civitate* closes with an emphasis on language’s inability to provide access to truth, which is a reiteration of the views expressed in *De Magistro XI.36.*

… by the body we shall see Him in every body to which the keen vision of the eye of the spiritual body shall extend. The thoughts of each of us will then also be manifest to all; for then shall be fulfilled the words of the apostle, who said: ‘Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the thoughts of the heart, and then shall every one have praise of God.’ (*De Civitate Dei* XXII.29)

For Augustine, language regains its redemptive power only as a prayer or as incarnated Word, as Andrew Louth has observed. Louth cites *De Corréptione et Gratia* II.3 where St. Paul’s prayer is shown to be more important than his preaching: “… he [St. Paul] knew what all these things that he was doing openly in the way of planting and watering would be of no avail unless he who gives the increase in secret should give heed to his prayer on their behalf’” (158). The illuminative power of the Christic sacrifice is also observed by Austin Markus, one of the

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130 “… the most I can say for words is that they merely intimate that we should look for realities; they do not present them to us for our knowledge.” Brian Stock notes that this inadequacy is due to language’s usage (1996, 32-33).

first scholars to acknowledge the implications of Augustine’s own experiences as reader of Scripture for his theory of language as system of signs.\footnote{\textsuperscript{132}}

No conviction had for him a compelling force comparable to that of his vision of the truth known to him as being imparted to him by God, speaking through his Scriptures or his creatures from without, and through his own mind from within. … he is much more interested in his identity with the Word ‘whose participation is our illumination, the Word who is the life which is the light of men’ (\textit{De Trinitate} IV.2.4), than he is in the difference between the signs and words interpreted by the one and the ‘words’ begotten in the light of the other. (83)

Unlike Plato’s enlightened philosopher, Augustine the author is not a teacher so much as a reader himself. He struggles with the same perceptual challenges and longs for the realization of the self in Christ.\footnote{\textsuperscript{133}} But, he says, there is no other road to the ultimate felicity than through the written word, which he assumes and advances as an instrument that helps man and through the description of ideality envisions the possibility of a trajectory towards ultimate illumination.

2. A Model of Becoming: Grace and Interpretive Self-authoring

The vision of the ideal society in \textit{De Civitate} is informed by a model of reading that mirrors Augustine’s own experience with the written word. The earthly and heavenly cities,

\footnote{\textsuperscript{132} “… the Interior Teacher, which is Christ dwelling in the mind, can teach by at once displaying to the mind the reality to be known and providing the language for its understanding. He is the source of both the objects encountered and the light which illuminates them for our understanding. This is the teacher whose activity is presupposed by all learning.” Robert Austin Markus, “Augustine on Signs,” \textit{Phronesis} 2.1 (1957): 60 – 83.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{133} “Expand your soul beyond yourself,” writes Augustine in \textit{Joannis Evangelium Tractatus} XX.12 (406 – 421).}
standing for the struggles of life and for salvation, respectively, are the two ends of a trajectory of self-discovery and improvement in response to the awareness, brought by Scripture itself, that the predestined citizenship in the city of man can be followed by citizenship in the city of God because grace responds to he who searches for it. Stock observes the centrality of textuality and of Scripture to spiritual becoming, a view that Augustine had already fully developed in the *Confessions*: “The human soul normally rises with the aid of biblical texts. Contemplative bliss is achieved through arduous study: the steps of the ladder are the lines of the text. Readers are like infants; they lack the words to express their desires. Beginners can appreciate earthly beauties but not those of the heavens” (1996, 241). Augustine’s writings “provide Western reflection in reading, inwardness, and transcendence with their earliest synthetic statement” (2). His contribution to a culture that sees a refined understanding of the relations between textualities is no less than a “design for reading” (2) that posits the written text at the center of spiritual transformation.134

Perhaps even more important to Augustine’s model of spiritual self-fashioning through interpretation is the idea that reading does not simply lead to visions of grace but it is actually enabled by them. This understanding reveals the subtle ways in which Augustine’s own literary work, which itself reflects grace, is integrated with scriptural study. Stock suggests that it is only because of an ordering divine act that his experience with different textualities defines a

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134 Irvine points out that “For Augustine and early medieval culture in general, the Scriptures were not formally different from other texts or other written signs: the Scriptures were understood to be different only in degree, in the fullness or complexity of their meaning” (258).

135 Irvine concurs with Stock in noting the importance of the holy texts to spiritual becoming: “In Augustine’s ontology, signs and things, signifiers and signified content, have different modes of being, and while signs are linked to temporality and the physical properties of material things, signs also provide the main path to knowledge of spiritual truths” (258).
progressive and irreversible process: “… it was God who directed him to these books before he had an opportunity to think seriously about scripture … so that the manner in which he was affected by such treatises might be imprinted in his memory” (74). In the Confessions VII. 20 Augustine says that:

If my thoughts had been shaped by your sacred texts beforehand … and I had afterwards discovered these volumes, I might perhaps have been ripened from the foundation of my piety. On the other hand, had I remained in the state of mind created by what was imbibed to heal my soul, I might have believed that such ideas could be born in the mind of someone instructed by the [neoplatonist] books alone.

The intrinsic relationship between grace and transformative reading informs Augustine’s vision of the ideal. Reading enables a trajectory of self-transcendence that entails progressive stages represented by different textualities: literature describes man’s true nature, Platonic philosophy speaks of a higher reality that may not be reached through the senses, while scriptural reading offers an interpretative perspective by positing that true self-realization may only be reached in Christ. In his explanation for the crisis caused by the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, to which De Civitate responds in defense of Christianity, Augustine argues that literature is a picture of humanity’s conflict-ridden history. Reading it helps one see that at the core of man’s earthly existence lies turmoil:
Many histories have been composed of the wars waged both before Rome was founded and after her rise and accession to imperial power. Let our adversaries read these histories and produce any instance of a city captured by invaders where the enemies who seized it spared those whom they found taking refuge in the temples of their gods. … Did not Aeneas see Priam before the altars ‘drench with blood the fires that he himself had blessed’? Did not Diomedes and Ulysses ‘slay the guardians of the topmost citadel, seize the sacred image, and with bloody hands dare to touch the fillets of the virgin goddess’? (De Civitate Dei I.2)

War is intrinsic to life and may be seen as instrumental to a divine providence that “often corrects and destroys the corrupt ways of men … and tests the righteous and praiseworthy by such afflictions of this mortal life, either conveying them to a better world when they have been proved, or detaining them still on this earth for further service” (De Civitate Dei I.1).

Philosophy, on the other hand, particularly Plato’s, speaks of man’s longing for the meaningful and lasting peace of God, which must be seen as the purpose of life:

… Plato asserted that the highest good is to live according to virtue; that only he can do this who has knowledge of God and imitates Him; and that this is the only cause of happiness. … Plato says that the true and highest good is God, and he therefore wishes the philosopher to be a lover of God; for philosophy aims at the happy life, and he who loves God is happy in the enjoyment of God. (De Civitate Dei VIII.8)
Philosophy testifies to an intellectual intuition of divinity that, in an enlightened individual such as Plato, may have resulted from the contemplation of creation but is most probably the result of Plato’s acquaintance with post-scriptural Christian teachings:

Plato himself said that the most righteous reason for the creation of the world was that good works might be made by a good God. Perhaps he had read this verse, or had learned of these things from those who had read it; or he may, by the acuteness of his own intellect, have seen the invisible things of God, understanding them ‘by the things that are made’; or, again, he may have learned of these things from others who had seen them. (*De Civitate Dei* XI.21)

Finally, Scripture offers truths that are not to be found anywhere in pagan texts and the means necessary for spiritual transformation:

Scripture, indeed, places the mind itself under the governance and help of God, and the passions under the mind, so that they may be moderated and bridled and turned to righteous use. Within our discipline, then, we do not so much ask whether a pious soul is angry, as why he is angry; not whether he is sad, but whence comes his sadness; not whether he is afraid, but what he fears. (*De Civitate Dei* IX.5)

Pagan literature stands for a lower spiritual stage that is the City of Man. This inferior spirituality may be transcended through Scriptural study that culminates in salvation:
When those two cities began to run through their course of birth and death, the first to be born [Cain] was a citizen of this world, and the second [Abel] was a pilgrim in this world, belonging to the City of God. The latter was predestined by grace and chosen by grace; by grace he was a pilgrim below, and by grace he was a citizen above. So far as he himself is concerned, he arises from the same lump which was wholly condemned originally; but God, like a potter … made ‘out of the same lump, one vessel unto honour, and the other unto dishonour’. But the vessel into dishonour was made first, and afterwards came the vessel unto honour; for in every case, as I have said already, man is first reprobate. But though it is of necessity that we begin in this way, we do not of necessity remain thus; for later comes the noble state towards which we may advance, and in which we may abide when we have attained it. Hence, though not every bad man will become good, it is nonetheless true that no one will be good who was not originally bad. (De Civitate Dei XV.1)

Augustine’s conceptualization of the post-reading ideal differs from Plato’s through the view that the transformation starts with the realization that the very act of reading is an expression of grace. The temporal relation between pagan and scriptural textualities is fundamental to Augustine’s self-authorizing strategy: the author occupies a superior position because he has become transformed along this interpretive trajectory and therefore manifests a healed will, desiring to meet God’s redemptive plans. Nevertheless, in acknowledging his own dependence on words and
on grace for illumination the author admits fallibility and identifies with the community of
Christian readers.

3. History as Symbolic Image of Man: Inviting the Will for Grace

Jed Wyrick argues that Augustine’s main contribution to the Western concept of authorship
is the idea of a text produced by a writer endowed with intention and will.\textsuperscript{136} Will is critical to
transcending the vicissitudes of the City of Man. The extensive discussion on fate in Book V of
\textit{De Civitate} emphasizes a definition of will as the ability to choose from glory, the love of all that
is human, and the love of the divine: “... let the lust for glory be at any rate so surpassed by the
love of righteousness that, it at any point, ‘those things which are held in low esteem’ should be
neglected even if they are good and right, the love of human praise will blush and yield to the
love of truth” (\textit{De Civitate Dei} V.14) The City of God is made of those who resist worldly
desires, including the desire to gain praise for intellectual work. Martyrs are given as examples of
a strong will and contrasted to the Romans who are condemned by their choices:

\begin{quote}
But the heroes of Rome were members of an earthly city, and the goal of all the services
which they performed for was its security. They sought a kingdom not in heaven, but upon
earth: not in the realm of life eternal, but in that region where the dead pass away and are
succeeded by the dying. What else were they to love, then, but glory, by which they sought
to find even after death a kind of life in the mouths of those who praised them? (\textit{De
Civitate Dei} V.14)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{136} Jed Wyrick, \textit{The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and
Harry Gamble situates Augustine’s concern with authorship within the larger context of a fourth and fifth century preoccupation with readership. At this time, texts were held to be instrumental to Christian life. Moreover, Gamble argues that Christian writers participated actively in the dissemination of their own work (140). He cites a recently discovered letter of Augustine to Firmus regarding *De Civitate* itself, which throws light on the nature of the publication practices. In this letter, Augustine insists that the book’s argument exists in a close relationship to its form: “If … you prefer more than two volumes then you must have five volumes of which the first will contain the first five books … [and the second] the second group of five …” (134). His objective is to convey to his readers a picture of his own transformative path, an endeavour that may only be achieved by describing the trajectory of his experience with different textualities. This pedagogical impulse may also be observed in the *Confessions*, where Augustine proposes an interpretative model that encourages the examination of life through biblical teachings (Stock 1996, 215). James Wetzel notes that through this strategy Augustine integrates his views on authorship with Christian theology: “In his Platonic theism, the world is intelligible only when we represent it to ourselves as God’s creative act, and we represent it to ourselves as created only when we create (act) in imitation of God. Augustine weds his theory of truth to his doctrine of creation.”137

*De Civitate* opens by presenting the authorial effort to explore man’s nature as an expression of a spiritual intention supported by divine help: “In this work … I have undertaken to defend her [the city of God] against those who favour their own gods above her Founder. The

work is great and arduous; but God is our helper” (*De Civitate Dei* I.1). The perspective, introduced by the *Confessions*, that temporal (self)exploration must be undertaken as an effort to recover the eternal peace devised by God\(^{138}\) is reiterated in Chapter 20 of Book XIV. In Chapter 1 of Book XV Augustine shows that the existence in the City of Man may anticipate the happiness of the City of God if the earthly life is undertaken as spiritual pilgrimage: “For the City of the Saints is on high, although it produces citizens here below, in whose persons it is a pilgrim until the time of its kingdom shall come. Then, it will call together all those citizens as they rise again in their bodies; and then they will be given the promised kingdom, where they will reign with their Prince, the king eternal, world without end.” In Chapter 26 of Book XII he describes at length the eternal nature of divine creation:

We ought, then, to be all the more ready to say that God alone is the Author of all natures, since He neither uses in His work any material which has not itself been made by Him, nor any workmen who were not themselves created by Him. Moreover, if He were to withdraw His creative power, so to speak, from things, they would no more exist than they did before they were created. When I say ‘before,’ however, I speak with reference to eternity, not to time. For what other creator could there be of time, than He Who made those things whose movements constitute the passage of time?

\(^{138}\)“Let me know Thee, O Lord, who knowest me: let me know Thee, as I am known. … I will confess then what I know of myself, I will confess also what I know not of myself. And that because what I do know of myself, I know by Thy shining upon me; and that I know not of myself, so long know I not it, until my darkness be made as the noon-day in Thy countenance” (*Confessions* X.1).
In contrast, man simply creates transient forms out of preexistent matter: “...there is one kind of form which is imposed from without upon every item of corporeal matter whatsoever: for example, the form given by potters and smiths and that class of artists who paint and mould shapes which resemble the bodies of animals” (De Civitate Dei XII.26). Nevertheless, De Civitate, revealing to man his fallen nature in the universalizing mirror of history, receives divine support. The text invites the reader to transcend a lower spiritual nature. The happiness of the City of God, experienced by illumination by Augustine himself, is projected as the end of history. He describes the difficult nature of the transformative process which in life only brings temporary peace:

No matter how well a man maintains the conflict, then, and no matter how completely he masters such enemies by overcoming and subduing them, some evil thing may still creep in: something which, even if it does not readily take the form of a deed, nonetheless finds expression through the lips, or insinuates itself into the thought. Thus, peace in the full sense does not exist for as long as it is necessary to govern the vices. The battle is full of peril while those vices which resist are being overcome; and even when some of them are conquered, the result is not a secure triumph, but only a rule full of anxiety and effort. (De Civitate Dei XIX.27)

The end of life does not bring an ideal version of the self because the interpretative exploration remains incomplete. The earthly self, like the text of the Confessions whose publication is
postponed even as Augustine approaches death, must be endlessly refined (Stock 1996, 16) in response to the ultimate challenge that is pride:

Yes, Truth, in you I see that when I am praised the pleasure I feel should not be for my own sake but for the sake of the good of my neighbor. But whether this is really how I feel I do not know. In this matter I know less of myself than of you. I beg you, my God, to show me myself, so that I may confess the fault that is in me to my brethren who will pray for me. Let me question myself again more carefully. (Confessions X.37)

De Civitate closes with an emphasis on the incompleteness of textual representation:139 “I do not venture to give any bold account of what the movements of such [incorruptible] bodies will be in the world to come; indeed, I cannot even imagine it” (De Civitate Dei XXII.30). The will to reach God’s peace is strengthened through the observation of a non-enclosable gap between the self’s past action and the image of this action in the mind:

… the saints will have no memory of past evils. They will be set free from them all, and they will be completely deleted from their feelings. Yet the power of knowledge will be so great in the saints that they will be aware not only of their own past suffering, but also of the everlasting misery of the damned. For if they were not to know that they had been miserable, how could they, as the psalm says, for ever sing the mercies of God? Nothing

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139 Stock references Ulrich Wienbruch (1971, 76 - 77) to note that Augustine does not use the term ‘repraesentatio’ (1996, 298).
will give more joy to that City than this song of the glory of the grace of Christ, by Whose Blood we are redeemed. (*De Civitate Dei* XXII.30)

If examined critically, the textualized self-gaining symbolic expression as history - may function like Plato’s mental image: it is a step on the ladder towards understanding. The first stage in this transformation is the realization that the recuperation of humanity depends on achieving a common end: “The society of mortals … was linked by a kind of fellowship of common nature, even though each section of mankind pursued devices and desires of its own. In this condition, not everyone, and perhaps no one, completely attains what he desires, because not all men seek the same end; and so mankind everywhere is generally divided against itself…” (*De Civitate Dei* XVIII. 2). Like the self-exploration of the *Confessions*, Augustine’s conceptualization of history in *De Civitate* aims to orient the reader inwards, to show him that choosing grace is a sign of a strengthened will, which in itself is an expression of God’s redemptive work.

4. The Limits of Language and the Desire for Grace

The idea that the self may be transformed through reading underlying Plato’s decision to put his dialogues into written form becomes a spiritual reality for Augustine. While reading itself only allows a partial transformation, words have the power to invite the contemplative mood

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140 Stock notes that Augustine separates mental images into ‘phantasia’ and ‘phantasma’ whose origin is difficult to retrace, thus rejecting the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence. Man may use mental images to create his worldly self-image (1996, 395).

associated with illumination. The educational function of the teacher is eliminated in the process: “Whatever I read on the art of speaking or debating, as well as on geometry, music, or arithmetic, I managed to understand easily without anyone’s having to act as an intermediary” (Confessions 4.16.36-39, cited in Stock 56). As his rhetoric is redefined to reflect a Christian way of life, speaking is subsumed to reading, ‘telling’ to ‘showing,’ and the ancient debate to the visions of a created reality (Stock 1996, 162). Lisa Freinkel observes that while for Augustine the written word is a sign of speech it is never inferior to it. This perspective is markedly different from the ancient philosophers. The “Plotinian distinction between verbum and vox, between the word as immaterial concept or signified and the word as material signifier … animates Augustine’s respect for writing” (36 – 37). Stock points out that Augustine rates the written word “higher on the scale of inwardness than the auditory and … therefore closer to absolute truth” (254). By making divine speech known to man, Scripture mediates between God’s Word and man’s language (11). In De Civitate he reasserts the importance of the word in achieving illumination:

It is a thing great and most rare for a man, after he has contemplated the whole corporeal and incorporeal creation and found it mutable, to pass beyond it by effort of mind and arrive at the immutable substance of God, there to learn from God Himself that every nature which is not what God is has been made by Him alone. (De Civitate XI.2)

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143 Lisa Freinkel, Reading Shakespeare’s Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 36.
Whether it is spoken or written, the word is only a sign that functions as a reminder of the divine, unchangeable message in the mind of the faithful (234), one that ultimately does not find its full expression in language (11). In *De Trinitate* Augustine more clearly expresses his scepticism concerning language’s ability to convey meaning as Stock argues:

Augustine believes that reading is essential for “spiritual” development in the individual, but he is pessimistic about the degree of “enlightenment” that reading itself confers. As a consequence, his notion of “illumination” is an expression of hope as well as an acknowledgement of the hopelessness of human interpretative efforts. (Stock 1996, 278)

*De Civitate* reinforces the supra-verbal communication between God and man: 144

For God does not speak … through some corporeal creature which resonates in his bodily ears by means of vibrations of the air in the space between the source of the sound and its hearer. Nor does He do so by means of a spiritual being having the likeness of a body … Rather, He speaks by truth itself, if anyone is able to hear Him with the mind rather than with the body: He speaks to that in man which is better than every other part of him which makes him a man, and than which there is nothing better save God alone. (*De Civitate Dei* XI.2)

The vision at Ostia shows that the spiritual trajectory involves a displacement from language towards a superior, post-linguistic vision of God. This process is described in Book XXII.24 of

144 Augustine began writing this work in the same period that saw the emergence of his mature theology.
De Civitate as a spiritual maturation through which an infant becomes a man capable of redirecting desire towards the “Supreme and Immutable Good.”

Augustine’s scepticism concerning language’s communicative nature is intrinsically linked to his concept of the sacred sign (sacramentum) manifesting the spiritual identity that defines the City of God (De Civitate Dei X.5 and 6). The sacred sign is the “visible form of the invisible grace,” a mode of participation that symbolizes the brokenness of the spirit and the sacrifice of the heart:

A true sacrifice, then, is every work done in order that we may draw near to God in holy fellowship: done, that is with reference to that supreme good and end in which alone we can be truly blessed. … A man who is consecrated in the name of God and pledged to God is himself a sacrifice insofar as he dies to the world so that he may live to God. (De Civitate Dei X.6)

The importance assigned to the sacred sign in De Civitate reflects the redemptive perspective associated with spiritually productive interpretations. Erich Auerbach examines Augustine’s figural perspective on history and argues that it implies three stages: the Old Testament is a figura, image, or shadow, for the appearance of Christ which, in its turn, is its fulfillment and also the promise of eternal peace following the Last Judgment. The Eucharist manifests grace

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for members of the church who, having partaken in it, move away from the wickedness of life
(De Civitate Dei XXI.25). It is a reenactment of Christ’s sacrifice that helps man desire redemption.

De Civitate endeavours to persuade the reader that the symbolism of sacrifice is the participatory vantage point from which the interpretation of human nature, reflected in history, must be carried out. As a historical text, it offers a depiction of human nature; nevertheless, the reader should recognize himself in this symbolic image and, having acknowledged the limits of reason, desire the redemptive grace that never fails to reward the soul that yearns for it. The writing of this text is Augustine’s own sacrifice, which he hopes will awaken divine love in the reader: “It seems to me, then, that, with the Lord’s help, I have now paid my debt in bringing this huge work to a close. May those who think it too small or too large forgive me; let those who think it enough not thank me, but join me in giving thanks to God” (De Civitate Dei XXII.30).

5. A Rhetoric of Sacrifice: Authorship and the Christian Teleology of History

The rhetorical structure of De Civitate is informed by the understanding, theorized by Augustine in Book XI of the Confessions, that the experience of the eternal divine may be conveyed through the only intelligible means available to man, which is time-bound language. De Civitate is written from the perspective of a man converted to Christianity who is no longer

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147 Robert Dodaro references De Doctrina 3.89 to note that, in response to the Manichean charge that the Old Testament “diminishes God’s dignity,” Augustine argues that the scriptures have been composed in accord with rhetorical conventions. This implies, says Dodaro, that human authors who write literature that communicates moral principles are, in fact, inspired by God: “By this logic, God is the author of the scriptures in terms not only of their content, but of the rhetorical strategies which the employ.” Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 121. This seems to be what Augustine is suggesting for De Civitate.
concerned with self-representation but with showing to others the way to God. But because the author is himself human he may evoke grace only indirectly, through a critique of man’s history of pride: “...we must not pass over in silence the earthly city also: that city which, when it seeks mastery, is itself mastered by the lust for mastery even though all the nations serve it” (*De Civitate Dei*, Preface). Because it is informed by a spiritual intention, the critique becomes an expression of humility and a sign of the mercy the author feels towards his not yet enlightened fellows: “In the Epistle dedicated to the Hebrews, the apostle says, ‘To do good and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased’” (*De Civitate Dei* X.6).

Augustine opposes the post-reading ideal of illumination and humility to Plato’s philosophical society constructed on earth through rational knowledge: “With wondrous vanity, these philosophers have wished to be happy here and now, and to achieve blessedness by their own efforts” (*De Civitate Dei* XIX.4).

*De Civitate* reinforces the author’s role in strengthening a teleological understanding of history. It demonstrates the importance of looking towards the universal history of humanity in order to see the necessity for grace. The first five books depict the history of the empire to point out that worshipping pagan gods did not help the Romans avoid wars. Augustine criticizes the philosophical core of paganism and argues for a direct relation between Christian belief and the better state. Through references to Plato’s *Timaeus* in Book VIII he points out that, in contrast to the irrational dogma of pagan polytheism, the rational foundations of monotheism speak to its intellectual coherence and ethical validity. Scripture is invoked as proof that the City of God exists and has been created in the very beginning. Books XI through XIV develop the literal reading of Scripture, foregrounding the historical dimension of visible creation. Books XV
through XVIII describe the histories of the two cities. Finally, the last four books explore comparatively the futures of the earthly and heavenly cities through references to prophecies in the Old Testament Psalms and through the perspective of the promise embodied by Christ.

Augustine closes the work by humbly expressing gratitude to God for helping him to carry out the task. The word ‘debt’ indicates that he felt a moral necessity to make known to others the truth that grace is, indeed, possible. The acknowledgment of divine support assigns to the work a symbolic dimension: written as a public defense of Christianity, it is to be regarded as an image of divine eloquence, of creation itself, and an inspired speech: “Novel words, if employed with restraint, enhance human language, just as God’s eloquence becomes more noteworthy through the power of extraordinary events” (Stock 1996, 9). Permeated by the author’s spiritual intentions, De Civitate bridges God’s will and man’s desire to meet the felicitous end to which he has been destined.

I suggested earlier that De Civitate describes Augustine’s own spiritual trajectory, from the spiritual confusion of his pagan life and books to the illuminative experience of conversion and Scripture. The linear temporality takes the reader from an acknowledgment of his own sinful nature to the desire for an existence in a superior reality. Augustine accepts that language may only evoke this experience. However, it is his only means, as a human, to speak of the simultaneity of the non-representable God. And because the completion of the text means that the author has received divine support, it follows that it is this author’s role to strengthen the image of the eternal city on the plane of man’s history.

De Civitate is a sign of the author’s love towards his fellow men, mirroring the divine love that he has experienced. As symbolic image of sacred history, it prefigures for the reader not yet
acquainted with Scripture the sacrificial reality of Christ: “… in order that the mind might walk more confidently towards the truth, the Truth itself, God, God’s son, assuming humanity without putting aside His Godhood, established and founded this faith, that man might find a way to man’s God through God made man” (*De Civitate Dei* XI.2). In doing so, the text prefigures the necessity for Scripture. Stock references Letter 140 to Honoratus, entitled “On the Grace of the New Testament” (written in 412, a mere year before he begins the work on *De Civitate*) to note subtly how “scripture is effectively dissolved into the life of Christ” (1996, 297) as the cry of Psalm 21.2 (22.1) of the Old Testament “My God, my God, look upon me, why hast thou forsaken me?” receives a response from God only when uttered by a crucified Christ: “Jesus transferred this voice to Himself, the voice, no doubt of human weakness, to which the goods of the Old Testament had to be refused, that it might learn to pray and hope for the goods of the New Testament.”

*De Civitate* is the dark glass (XXII.29) through which its reader may glimpse the ideal he shall come to desire.

By universalizing his own spiritual trajectory, Augustine the author becomes a symbol of a teleological history and of a Christian culture to be seen as an expression of man’s effort to work towards salvation. He reveals his humanity but speaks from the vantage point of one who has experienced the grace of God. As a gesture of love, *De Civitate* carries a foundational dimension: it aims to propagate Christian ideals. The author directs his readers to Scripture, the only text that subjects passion to mind, thus preparing man to understand the work of God (*De Civitate Dei* IX.5). Finally, the transformation that takes one from the City of Man to the City of God occurs as an exercise in love that follows the reading of Scripture:

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Now God, our Master, teaches [through the Bible] two chief precepts; that is, love of God and love of neighbour. In these precepts, a man finds three things which he is to love: God, himself, and his neighbour; for a man who loves God does not err in loving himself. It follows, therefore, that he will take care to ensure that his neighbour also loves God, since he is commanded to love his neighbour as himself. Also, so far as he can, he will do the same for his wife, his children, his servants, and all other men. … In the household of the just man, however, who ‘lives by faith’ and who is still a pilgrim on his way to that Heavenly City, even those who command are the servants of those whom they seem to command. For it is not out of any desire for mastery that they command; rather, they do so from a dutiful concern for others: not out of pride in ruling, but because they love mercy.  

(*De Civitate Dei XIX.14*)

As an author, Augustine is a mediating figure. However, unlike Christ the mediator who is the expression of divinity, he only endeavours to stir, by foregrounding the limits of language and of the mind, the desire for participation in the community of love. Moreover, in contrast to the Platonic educator who has seen the truth and preserves a superior position in relation to his students, Augustine is first and foremost a historical being, a fallen man himself who depends on the letter for spiritual transformation. He is never superior to his readers, especially not when he writes himself in the *Confessions*, which is why he must ask them to read him in charity. Unable to shape an ideal self, to convey his own lived life in true words, he must accept that the only state of ideality is that proposed by Scripture. Augustine presents his work as a form of sacrifice.
brought to God, demonstrating grace in man’s will for transcendence. At the same time, the vision of a post-textual ideal is meant to convince his readers that the true spiritual community must be searched beyond the pleasures offered by the senses. As an authorial figure, he symbolizes the consciousness, obtained through belief and illumination, that history must be assumed in order to be transcended.
Gargantua: Authoring the Responsible Interpretation

1. The Inspired Author and the Responsible Interpreter

In the author’s ‘Prologe’ to Gargantua (1534) François Rabelais foregrounds the tension between the work’s literary form and its content, and urges the reader to reach beyond expression to meaning. He suggests that the dichotomy is most beneficial for the interpreter, who will emerge wiser from the effort to grasp the “doctrine plus absconce” and the “sacremens et mysteres horrificques, tant en ce que concerne nostre religion que aussi l’estat politiço et vie oeconomique” (Gargantua 14). But much of the text’s audience is made up of learned men, as Michael A. Screech has observed.\(^{149}\) The references to a philosophical tradition represented by Socrates, whose aesthetically unpleasant physique hid a most refined mind and spirit, and to a literary one represented by Plato and Alcibiades ground the text “in the authority of credible literary figures.”\(^{150}\) The writer’s intellectual stature is indicated through this didactic gesture that places his scholarship and writing in the company of Antiquity’s greats. This strategy simultaneously endows the text with the practical dimension of classical political philosophy.

The author emerges as philosophical figure who, like his illustrious predecessors, engages with his times to suggest possibilities of betterment. By presenting Gargantua as a Socratic project, “ugly outside, profoundly and divinely wise below the surface” (Screech 126 – 128) Rabelais somewhat distances himself from his first work, the popular Pantagruel (1532), to which the Sorbonne had attached accusations of obscenity. He signs Gargantua as ‘L’abstracteur

\(^{149}\) M.A. Screech, Rabelais (London: Duckworth, 1979) 12.

de quinte essence,’ alluding to *Pantagruel*, however without including the original signature ‘Alcofrybas Nasier’ (the anagram for François Rabelais). The reference to Socrates suggests a direct relationship between education and the enlightened community. Most importantly, it reinforces the author’s position, advanced by Plato and reiterated by Augustine and More, at the center of a vision of change. The fiction that is *Gargantua* is projected as a space where man’s nature, represented by the ideal that is the Abbey of Thélème, gains expression through an interpretative process that, says its author, must be informed by good will: “Pourtant, interpretrez tous mes faictz et mes dictz en la perfectissime partie; ayez en reverence le cerveau caseiforme qui vous paist de ces belles billes vezées, et, à vostre povoyr, tenez moy tousjours joyeux” (*Gargantua* 18).

A celebratory view of humanity gains prominence in early modern thought as the cultural developments that generated Pico’s daring stance on interpretation in the fifteenth century, for example, are brought to fulfillment in new social conditions of textuality. Robert Weimann cites Vassilis Lambropoulos to argue that, in the early sixteenth century, “textual forms provide a secular ‘mimesis of redemption’: the redemption of the world through representation, the communion of the word.” The concept of the ideal community is intrinsic to the author’s positive valorization of individual interpretation. Thélème concentrates Rabelais’s core ideas on authorship; “Faictz ce que vouldras” speaks of a joyful way of life inasmuch as it indicates the author’s role in making this life possible:

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Toute leur vie estoit employée non par loix, statutz ou reigles, mais scelon leur vouloir et franc arbitre. Se levoient du lict quand bon leur semployt, beuvoient, mangeoient, travailloient, dormoient quand le desir leurs venoit. Nul ne les esvelloit, nul ne les parforceoyt ny à boyre, ny à manger, ny à faire chose aultre quelconques. Ainsi l’avoyt estably Gargantua. (Gargantua 301 – 302)

Weimann argues for a tension, in the early sixteenth century, between the ‘new conditions of authorship’ created by the ever more extensive use of print and expanding literacy and the “previously established notions of authority” (150) offered by the literature of chivalry or the mode of allegory and by Scripture (3): “What was thus at issue was a somewhat unprescribed use of signs themselves - the appropriation of these signs on the threshold of both new invention and traditional repertoire, of authorial signification and the readers’ unpredictable interpretation of meaning” (150). An unprecedented sense of empowerment emerges from the reader’s unmediated relation with the text, associated with evangelization:

[Readers] might not be enticed to accept ... the gift of an (evangelical) present moment of unmediatedness, if it were not for a promise of freedom, of personal (specifically, spiritual) liberation from subservience to every (other) worldly authority, from worldliness itself, so that humans can now begin doing things with, or even to, this world. Interpretation promised emancipation: acceptance and independence in the civic society. (Lambropoulos xi – xii)
The act of interpretation conciliates, suggests Weimann, the “privatization of meaning” and the Protestant “promises of emancipation,” on the one hand, and the “‘redemptive’ use of secular writing and writing,” on the other hand (4). What results is a reversal in causality between the notion of authority and that of representation, changing the ways in which reader and writer approach the text:

Because authority, including the authorization of discourse itself, was no longer given, as it were, before the writing and reading began, the act of representation was turned into a site on which authority could be negotiated, disputed or reconstituted. Modern authority, rather than preceding its inscription, rather than being given as a prescribed premise of utterances, became a product of writing, speaking, and reading, a result rather than primarily a constituent of representation. (5)

Weimann’s discussion of Rabelais, while wonderfully exploring the writer’s ludic inquiries into the nature of textual signification, focuses mostly on a concern with the fashioning of authorship as a way of appropriating the “means and meanings of the fictional enterprise” (159).152

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152 Weimann is doubtful of Bakhtin’s view, in Rabelais and His World (1965), that Rabelais’s work reflects the verbal excess of a collectivity functioning in a subversive carnivalesque mode. He concedes that Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia conveys adequately the dialogue between oral and literary modes of expression in Rabelais’s time (233). Engaging with Bakhtin is beyond the purposes of my discussion in this dissertation. Nevertheless, I wish to clarify briefly my position since it echoes the historical scholarly dispute regarding Rabelais’s religious beliefs. My perspective is different from Bakhtin’s on two counts: firstly, while I do see how Rabelais, in true humanist spirit, dismisses intolerance and endows fiction, especially satire, with the power to challenge morals, I am sceptical that, a man of learning himself, he would as easily have renounced his affinities with Erasmus, for example, both exemplifying and advocating a new way of life through intertwined literary and scriptural study in favour of a simple image as writer of popular literature. In my readings, I follow Febvre (1942) and Screech (1979) who demonstrated Rabelais’s belief and Evangelism, respectively, to argue that Rabelais attempts to define a spiritual function for his authorial persona. Secondly, Bakhtin does not take into consideration Rabelais’s continuous efforts to obtain control over the material conditions of his authorship. These efforts cannot be disengaged from the concerns stemming from
I suggest that Rabelais’s concerns with authorship must also be read in relation to his evangelism, observed by Screech (1979 and 1992), if his Christian humanist roots and the complexity of the strategy of authorization employed in response to developments in his personal situation are to be understood. Rabelais’s appeal to good will echoes Augustine’s emphasis on spiritual intention as a condition of a productive interpretation. The reader’s ability to participate in the construction of textual meaning, symbolic of his newly found power in the social sphere, must be accompanied by interpretative responsibility and by love.

For Rabelais, the author is a spiritual guide who reminds to the reader that knowledge must be subjected to humility. The author is aware of the word’s representational nature and reveals it: the ideal of the Abbey of Thélème is a linguistic construct. The author acts out of duty and subjects the creative act to the common good. Only when interpretation, in itself a creative act, is performed in a similar self-sacrificial mode may the free will of “Faitz ce que vouldras” become an expression of individuality and a true locus of authority. This idea is directly expressed in the Prologue to Gargantua: “Et, posé le cas qu’on sense literal vous trouvez matieres assez joieuses et bien correspondents au nom, toutesfois pas demourer là ne fault, comme au chant des Sirenes, ains à plus hault sens interpreter ce que par adventure cuidiez dict en guaieté de cuer” (Gargantua 12). It gains perhaps its clearest expression in Gargantua’s letter to his son in Chapter VIII of the earlier Pantagruel, particularly relevant to this discussion because of the character’s symbolic authorship of Thélème in Gargantua: “… le saige Salomon sapience n'entre

his early condemnation by the Sorbonne, challenging his aspirations to see his educational ideas validated along with those of his humanist contemporaries.

153 Weimann focuses on Rabelais’s effort to define the authenticity of his own fiction as a way of constructing authority, in response to the vision of an uncontrollable textual semiosis. Interestingly, his discussion on the strategies of authorship does not touch on the important spiritual dimension that Rabelais assigns to the author function at a time when textual production was inextricably linked to the church’s scrutinizing practices.
poinct en âme malivole et science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme, il te convient servir, aymer et craindre Dieu … Aye suspectz les abus du monde. Ne mets ton cœur à vanité, car ceste vie est transitoire, mais la parole de Dieu demeure éternellement."\(^{154}\) In contrast to the divine Word defined by permanence and the promise of immortality (to which the reference to free will alludes), man creates temporal fictions. Nevertheless, insofar as it facilitates transformative experiences, the engagement with fiction demands that the reader manifests in interpretation the same degree of responsibility expected from the author.

2. **God’s Helper: Evoking a Revealed Ideal**

The social dynamics of Thélème are founded on the valorization of individual verbal expression. Whether creative or interpretative, this expression reflects the Thélèmites’ humble understanding that words only indicate paths of action. More importantly, the word’s ability to shape reality for the better stems from the fact that they trust each other to share in the love of things divine: “Par ceste liberté entrèrent en louable emulation de faire tous ce que à un seul voyoient plaire. Si quelq’un disoit «Jouons», tous jouoient; si disoit: «Allons à l’esbat es champs», tous y alloyent” (*Gargantua* 303). By positing that the scriptural message of love should be the foundation and outcome of interpretation, the author ensures that the individuation of meaning strengthens authorial institution through the consciousness that one’s intervention in the social sphere should be morally conditioned. The writer encourages the reader to express his own views, and demonstrates, through the vision of an ideal abbey, how a better society is shaped when the interpretative act is permeated by the values associated with Christian ethics.

Jan Miernowski notes that the invitation “Dilige, et quod vis fac” (“Love and do what you will”) in the Joannis Evangelium Tractatus conveys Gargantua’s Augustinian message. Michael A. Screech elaborates that this particular edict indicates, in true Augustinian mode, that private should come second to common interest. In the same article he argues that although it is difficult to establish a direct relation between Augustine and Rabelais’s views on authorship, the centrality of Saint Paul to both writers may be seen as a strong indicator of their common grounds (1990, 299). Rabelais’s Pauline scepticism concerning language’s ability to convey meaning unless “touched by revelation” (Screech 1979, 438), more openly expressed in Le Quart Livre (1552), permeates the author’s invitation to the reader, in the Prologue to Gargantua, to transcend the word’s literal sense and, like Ulysses escaping the Sirens, bring a higher understanding to textual meaning. It recalls Augustine’s views on the limits of language and suggests that comparable gestures of self-authorization accompany changes in the conditions of textuality. It indicates awareness that meaning ultimately lies with the reader.

Accordingly, the emphasis on signification as process in the ‘Enigme en Prophétie’ subjects all action to a theological teleology of history:

Et quelz repoz en noise si profonde/ Aura le corps de la machine ronde!/ Les plus heureux,
qui plus d’elle tiendront/ Moins de la perdre et gaster s’abstiendront,/ Et tascheront en plus


Screech observes that Rabelais’s theological perspective on signification enables him to claim that the author is a co-author, a collaborator of God. The form that is the fiction of representation posits the scriptural message of love at the basis of social life. By spreading the word of God, Rabelais himself becomes *coadjuteur*\(^\text{157}\) (from ‘adjuvante’ in the Vulgate), a helper of God.\(^\text{158}\) Screech points out that in early works such as *Gargantua*, for example, the writer is particularly concerned with “the moral aspect of man’s collaboration with God” (Screech 1992, 73). The status of author is conditioned on moral grounds, since the *coadjuteur*, drawing on Scripture’s redemptive message, acts upon the best in his nature.

Through the notion of Pantagruelism, the reader becomes himself a co-author. He is enlightened as his creative interpretation is filtered through the scriptural message of love. The Pantagruelist’s love for his fellows is the “moyen et remede” as presented in the Bible. This view had already been advanced in chapter XIX of *Pantagruel*, where the hero asks for such a collaborating position:


\(^{158}\) Screech notes that the term changes into ‘cooperateur’ in Rabelais’s writings of the 1550s (1992, 65).
Riens icy ne me amène, sinon zèle naturel, comme tu la concédé ès humains de garder et
defender soy, leurs femmes, enfans, pays, et famille, en cas que ne seriot ton négoce
proper, qui est la foy; car en tel affair tu ne veulx nul coadjuteur, sinon de confession
catholique, et ministère de ta parolle; … jet e fays veu que par toutes contrées, tant de ce
pays de Utopie que d’ailleurs, où je auray pussaine et auctorité, je feray prescher ton
sainct Evangile, purement, simplement et entièrement. … (Pantagruel 153 - 154)

By limiting his purposes, Rabelais avoids infringing upon scriptural authority. He draws on
the scriptural interpretative tradition to argue that the author enables spiritual and social
enlightenment and simultaneously places responsibility for this change with each and every
interpreter, who becomes a coadjuteur himself. Fiction becomes the space where the readers
engage with reality and are invited to shape it for the better through a play of representations
informed by the scriptural exemplarity.

3. The Limits of Language and the Doctrine of Love

Rabelais’s sophisticated strategy of self-authorization may be traced back to his life, and is
marked by a continuous effort to influence the conditions of his own authorship. Michael B.
Kline notes that, following the success but also the attacks on Pantagruel, Rabelais realized “that
printing was becoming more and more important,” and that “the ‘fruict’ of his book will be
passed on through a printed tradition, rather than an oral one.”¹¹⁵⁹ Moreover, Rabelais is
conscious that the publication of important texts is shadowed by the enormous mass of valueless

literature (Kline 12) on which he himself draws for both *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*. Finally, the need to define the author’s social role may be seen as a response to a perceived lack of control over the publication and distribution of one’s own works. Kline points out that, lacking *privilège*, “‘Alcofribas Nasier’ must have been powerless to stop the pirating of his work,” which resulted in multiple editions of *Pantagruel* being published without the knowledge of its writer. The resulting popularity brought the attention of the Sorbonne which condemned the text for obscenity in October 1533 (15).

Rabelais’s concept of an ideal society addresses this vulnerability associated with the social conditions of authorship. As creator of the fictional world that is Thélème, Gargantua stands for Rabelais himself. The author awakens the reader’s virtue to suggest that the ideal community is composed of enlightened interpreters who see each other, and Rabelais’s own work, through the lens of divine love: “… par ce que gents liberes, bien nez et bien instruictz, conversans en compagnies honesties, ont par nature un instinct et aguillon, qui tousjours les pousse à faictz vertueux et retire de vice, lequel ilz nommoient honneur” (*Gargantua* 302). Fiction is shown as a space where interpretative action, transforming the self, is filtered through spiritual intention.

Enlightened interpreters, the Pantagruelist and the Thélémite, are aware of the conventions that permeate language, fiction, and society. They engage with these conventions creatively:

Premièrement doncques (dist Gargantua), il n’y fauldra jà bastir murailles au circuit, car toutesaultres abbayes sont fièrement murées. (281)

...
Item, par ce que es conventz des femmes ne entroient les hommes si non à l’emblée et clandestinement, feut decerné que jà ne seroient là les femmes au cas que n’y feussent les hommes, ny les hommes au cas que n’y feussent les femmes. / Item, [par] ce que tant hommes que femmes, une foys repc euz en religion, après l’an de probation, estoient forcez et astrainctz y demourer perpetuellement leur vie durante, feut estably [que] tant hommes que femmes là repceuz sortiroient quand bon leurs sembleroyt, franschement et entierement. (Gargantua 283)

The Pantagruelist recognizes that meaning reflects the interpreter’s desire and any attempt to appropriate it most likely stems from pride. The concern with the limits of language is central to Le Tiers Livre (1546), where Pantagruel affirms (perhaps in response to the label of heresy that he will never escape): “C’est abus dire que ayons langue naturel. Les langaiges sont par institutions arbitraries et convenences des peuples: les voix (comme dissent les Dialecticiens) ne signifient naturellement, mais à plaisir.” Thélème itself, which carries strong redemptive undertones, as I have shown in Chapter 1, demonstrates the appropriating nature of interpretation. By subjecting the authorial creation to the phenomenology of the divine utterance Rabelais invites a mode of interpretation that aims to recuperate the author’s spiritual intention rather than to pursue an irretrievable meaning.

If a true definition of Pantagruelism as a form of Christian charity does not appear until the Tiers Livre (Chesney 178), the enigma episode in Gargantua’s Book LVI indicates the spiritual communion (in Weimann’s terms) of both author and reader in the Word. Their participation in

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the better community is conditioned by the recuperation of the doctrine ‘absconce’ of love. They provide radically different interpretations while remaining united in their celebratory view of representation:

Le Moyne dist: Que pensez vous, en vostre entendement, ester par cest enigma designé et signifié?

Quoy? (dist Gargantua). Le decours et maintien de verité divine.

Par saint Goderan (dist le Moyne), je pense que c’est la description du jeu de paulme, et que la machine ronde est l’esteuf, et ces nerfs et boyaulx de bestes innocents sont les racquestes, et ces gentz eschauffez et debatants sont les joueurs. La fin est que après avoir bien travaillé, ilz s’en vont repaistre; et grand chiere! (Gargantua 313 - 314)

The Friar’s engagement with the conventions of the traditional monastery is mirrored by the Thélèmites’ evocative usage of language. It indicates their awareness of the difference, in the creative enterprise that is the abbey, between the truth associated with the authentic nature of man, for which Scripture testifies, and the fictions of life. Consequently, action in the ideal community is an expression of freedom in that it reflects the individual’s charitable ends: “Par ceste liberté entrerent en louable emulation de faire tous ce que à un seul voyoient plaire” (Gargantua 303). Michel Jeanneret describes this Christian humanist perspective as an “Evangelical mood” and notes that the Rabelaisian fiction has exegetical implications:
Reading is a state of mind. It requires humility and a complete availability to the Spirit’s guidance. … For the Christian to be infused and transformed by the reading process, he will meditate the Scriptures and intimately unfold their secrets. … Rabelais’s position is typical. … No certainty is ever given to the interpreter. … It is as though Rabelais were appropriating the freedom and endlessness of biblical exegesis.\textsuperscript{161}

The concept of Pantagruelism, indicating the enlightened interpreter who acts upon the awareness that all human creation is representation and is perceived as such by others, reinforces More’s views in the \textit{Utopia} that interpretation must be pursued as a spiritual, transformative experience.

4. Un-challenging Authority

The redemptive perspective of a community of enlightened interpreters is not simply a literary strategy through which Rabelais defines the coordinates of his own symbolic authorial persona. It addresses his concerns with misinterpretation and with the author’s vulnerability as related to the anti-heresy campaigns in France, to which \textit{Pantagruel} alludes. In \textit{Les bûchers du roi: la culture protestante des martyrs (1523 – 1572)}, David El Kenz explores the persecution by the Catholic Church, through monarchy, of those perceived to be spreading reformist views.\textsuperscript{162} Ironically, among these victims was Etienne Dolet, the printer who in 1542 undermined Rabelais’s attempt to restore his relationship to the Sorbonne by publishing unauthorized editions


of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* shortly after Rabelais had expurgated them of some sensitive passages.\(^{163}\)

By closing *Gargantua* with the episode of Thélème, Rabelais makes a powerful statement on the role of the author in the recuperation of the ideal community promised by Scripture. Like Rabelais, who had no control over the publication and interpretation of *Pantagruel*, *Gargantua* appears to have no authority over how the enigma will be interpreted and yet is celebrated by Friar Jean as an empowering figure. Jean’s worldview, shared by *Gargantua* and Rabelais, is permeated by the scriptural message at the core of ‘grand chiere!’, reaffirming the author’s role in preventing the heresy that lurks in the shadows of interpretation by positing love as filter and outcome of learning.

Screech observes that the enigma’s ‘double-twist’ - the text appears to describe a tennis match while functioning as a “call to resist persecution for the Gospel” (Screech 1979, 196 and ff) - may be seen to reflect concerns with the “suppression of liberal theology in France, if humanist, evangelical, Catholic religion became effectively smeared with the taint of heresy” (202) following a meeting between Francis I and the Pope in the fall of 1533 (and, it may be added, anxiety resulting from Rabelais’s own difficult relation with the Sorbonne). True to the promise in the ‘Prologe,’ *Gargantua* is where pressing issues are discussed and where more tolerant realities are envisioned. Most importantly, the ideal community of Thélème demonstrates that, in the context defined by new textual practices and disputes associated with the Reformation, the author functions as factor of stabilization, ensuring the coherence and spiritual advancement of the Christian society of readers.

The author’s commitment to disseminating the message of the Gospel adds ideality to the act of interpretation. The felicitous abbey evokes salvation insofar as it speaks of the life written as fiction, open by the writer to the reader to shape according to the scriptural message: “Gargantua … offrit tout son pays de Thélème, jouste la riviere de Loyre, à deux lieues de la grande forest du Port Huault” (Gargantua 281). This optimistic view of humanity is visible in Friar Jean’s Socratic refusal to govern an existing abbey. Knowledge of language’s representational nature and of man’s difficulty to achieve self-knowledge leads one to reinforce existing structures of spiritual (as opposed to worldly) authority, mirroring the way in which Rabelais claims for himself a space parallel to that of the Creator: “Car comment (disoyt il) pourroys je gouverner aultruy, qui moymesmes gouverner ne sçauroys? Si vous semble que je vous aye faict et que puisse à l’advenir faire service agreeable, oultroyez moy de faire une abbatie à mon devys” (Gargantua 280).

Thélème, then, stands for an existential mode permeated by Scripture’s message of love advanced by fictions such as Gargantua. This position mirrors Rabelais’s evangelism while affirming the Catholic precept of appropriate interpretative mediation:

Croiez vous en vostre foy qu’onceus Homere, escrivent l’Iliade et Odysée, pensast es allegories lesquelles de luy ont beluté Plutarche, Heraclides Ponticq, Eustatie et Phornute, et ce que d’iceuex Politian a disrobe? Si le croiez, vous n’aproxchez ne de pieds ny de mains à mon opinion, qui decrete icelles aussi peu avoir esté songéez d’Homere que d’Ovide en ses Metaphorphoses les sacrements de l’Evangile, lesquelz un Frere Lubin, vray croquelardon, s’est efforcé demonstrer. (Gargantua 15 – 16)
As all interpretative restrictions are mocked, action is permeated by morality: “Iceulx, quand par vile subjection et contrainte sont deprimez et asserviz, detournent la noble affection, par laquelle à vertuz franchement tendoient, à deposer et enfraindre ce joug de servitude: car nous entreprenons tousjours choses defendues et couvoytons ce que nous est denié” (Gargantua 303).

The emphasis on morality strengthens the author’s evangelical position: “Jamais ne feurent veuz chevaliers tant preux, tant gualans … que là estoient; jamais ne feurent veues dames tant propres, tant mignonnes, moins fascheuses … à tout acte muliebre honeste et libere, que là estoient” (Gargantua 304). As each of his readers becomes able to act upon love, the writer becomes an inspired guide who creates intellectual experiences that bear redemptive value.
1. The Earthly Ideal Society as Sign of Salvation

Textual authority and the ideal society remain interconnected in the work of Francis Bacon, who integrates the vision of an earthly paradise with the scriptural promise of redemption. Steven Matthews argues that Bacon places his Instauration - the project that aims to recuperate, through science, man’s position as lord of creation - within the historia sacra that begins with creation, continues with the fall and the incarnation of Christ, and ends with the new heaven and earth. Bacon sees his project as “fulfillment of specific prophecies” and proof that “the providential hand of God was clearly at work.” The philosopher amends “the standard narrative of sacred history, weaving the Instauration into his exegesis of the Scriptures and his presentation of Church history.”

The 1627 New Atlantis conveys Francis Bacon’s ideas regarding the philosopher-scientist’s central social and spiritual role in the creation of an earthly Christian ideal society. King Solamona founds the House of Salomon upon learning the Old Testament Genesis story, where man is given a position of knowledge and power over the rest of creation. The House is a scientific institution, unparalleled in its study and interpretation of nature through experimental work. The life and structure of the ideal Bensalemite society reflects the advancement of learning enabled by such work. This ideal society is a stage in a process that will culminate in an ultimate illumination, bringing knowledge of causes.

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The scientific work follows an illumination experience. Solamona creates the House upon finding that the world was created in six days: “… our excellent king had learned from the Hebrews that God had created the world and all that therein is, within six days: and therefore he instituting that House, for the finding out of the true nature of all things (whereby God might have the more glory in the workmanship of them, and men the more fruit in the use of them) did give it also that second name” [the College of the Six Days’ Works] (WFB 3 146). The episode of the revelation of the New Testament to the interpreters of the House reinforces the view that the scientific work is enabled by grace: “give us the interpretation and use of it in mercy; which thou dost in some part secretly promise by sending it unto us” (WFB 3 138). The trajectory of scientific experimentation and interpretation that begins with the author’s illumination is a new history. DeCook has shown that the emphasis on revelation responds to the “epistemic instability” in early print culture (Johns 172) and to Bacon’s own concerns with authority. Furthermore, to the extent that it is enabled by an individual whose mind is strengthened by arduous theological study, the scientific endeavour testifies to man’s will to be saved.165 The scientific authoring of the ideal is presented as part of God’s redemptive plan for man and ongoing work of grace.166

Bacon had advanced his scripturally-informed views on scientific progress in the Novum Organum (1620), where he argued that knowledge, lost through the fall, may be recovered in part with the help of the scientist/philosopher: “For man by the fall fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this


166 See DeCook for an ample discussion on the revelatory nature of Scriptures in Bacon’s New Atlantis.
life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts and sciences.”

The vision of an earthly ideal to be realized through human effort echoes Thomas More’s perspective in *Utopia*. It testifies to Bacon’s optimist epistemology in professing that the rational soul, created separately and not subjected to the laws of nature, has the “capacity for complete knowledge of nature” (Bacon cited in Jardine 90).

Matthews argues that the view that mankind’s advancement through knowledge is part of God’s plan (39) indicates affinities with Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* and his discussion on free will, on which Bacon builds to emphasize that participating in the restoration is a sign of human industry (39). Bacon fully adopted the term ‘Instauration’ by 1620, when he started using it to describe what he perceived to be an ongoing phenomenon that only reinforced his reading of Scripture. The philosopher believed that “he was on the cusp of an age of the world in which human knowledge was going to see tremendous advances, according to the divine plan” (52). Nevertheless, the Instauration, and by extension the fictional society of the New Atlantis, remains a human project. Most importantly, it depends on an interpretation of nature that will bring “comprehension of the entire created order” (39).

Brian Vickers observes that the intrinsic connection between theology and science characteristic of Bacon’s philosophy is already apparent in the early *Confession of Faith*,

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In this text he clearly posits that natural laws have been created by God:

He created heaven and earth, and all their armies and generations, and gave unto them constant and everlasting laws, which we call *Nature*, which is nothing but the laws of the creation; which laws nevertheless have had three changes or times, and are to have a fourth and last. The first, when the matter of heaven and earth was created without forms: the second, the *interim* of every day's work: the third, by the curse, which notwithstanding was no new creation, but a privation of part of the virtue of the first creation: and the last, at the end of the world, the manner whereof is not yet revealed. So as the laws of Nature, which now remain and govern inviolably till the end of the world, began to be in force when God first rested from his works and ceased to create; but received a revocation in part by the curse, since which time they change not. That notwithstanding God hath rested and ceased from creating since the first Sabbaths, yet nevertheless he doth accomplish and fulfil his divine will in all things great and small, singular and general, as fully and exactly by providence, as he could by miracle and new creation, though his working be not immediate and direct, but by compass; not violating Nature, which is his own law upon the creature. That at the first the soul of Man was not produced by heaven or earth, but was breathed immediately from God; so that the ways and proceedings of God with spirits are not included in Nature, that is, in the laws of heaven and earth; but are reserved to the law of

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his secret will and grace: wherein God worketh still, and resteth not from the work of redemption, as he resteth from the work of creation: but continueth working till the end of the world; what time that work also shall be accomplished, and an eternal sabbath shall ensue. Likewise that whensoever God doth break the law of Nature by miracles (which are ever new creations) he never cometh to that point or pass, but in regard of the work of redemption, which is the greater, and whereto all God's signs and miracles do refer. (WFB 7 220 – 221)

Vickers argues that Bacon’s scientific views rely on a literal understanding of the biblical stories of creation. Bacon considers the Bible significant not just in matters of belief, but cites it “for apt material in politics, history, ethics, natural history, astronomy and many other forms of knowledge” (xli). Vickers draws on Spedding to show that Bacon’s views of science as mediator of man’s greater destiny are framed by the history of humanity as described by Scripture: “the entire scheme of Christian theology, - creation, temptation, fall, mediation, election, reprobation, redemption, - is constantly in his thoughts; underlies everything; defines for him the limits of the province of human speculation” (WFB 7 21 in Vickers xxxvi – xxxvii).

2. Authorship and the Ideal Society in Early Modern Print Culture

Adrian Johns argues that, in early modern Europe, printing was “put to use to create and maintain knowledge about the natural world” (6). Johns observes the theological perspective on natural knowledge, which is understood as “knowledge of Creation and of humanity’s place within it” (6). Scientific endeavour is validated through the reading of Scripture. This is a time,
notes Johns, when “arguments connecting the reading of Scripture to the human frame and the soul became central to the discrimination of true faith from error, and even from heresy” (409).

Johns argues that Francis Bacon’s perspective is that natural knowledge and printing should be controlled by the state: “Regarding himself primarily as a statesman and royal counsellor, he wished to establish an administrative mechanism for generating natural knowledge that would best serve the advancement of the crown. The best natural philosopher, in this vision, would be the best state official” (50). Bacon’s involvement with the politics of print reflects the effort to prevent the dissemination of faulty knowledge that would prevent the advancement towards a ‘Kingdom of Man.’ Through the powers of the ‘absolute prerogative,’ the royal institution defines a space where human action mirrors the divine intervention in the natural world: “both were divinely willed events superseding normal laws” (251). Against the publication of unreliable scientific treatises and illegitimate authorship, textual credibility is built by restricting the publication of knowledge and its usage to a small group of royal licentiates (49 – 50).

Bacon’s argument for the regulation of print implies that he sees himself among those who deserve to have their work published. This position stems from a profound belief in the value of his own contribution. In Instauratio Magna’s “Epistle dedicatory” to King James, he declares: “I have provided the machine but the stuff must be gathered from the facts of nature” (WFB 7 12). Martin Elsky observes that Bacon intensified his philosophical and scientific efforts during times of political failure. Martin Elsky, “Shakespeare, Bacon, and the Construction of Authorship,” in Reading and Writing in Shakespeare edited by David M. Bergeron (Cranbury and Mississauga: Associated University Presses, 1996) 257.
himself as enabler of social progress, were written during the last years of Elizabeth’s reign, when his career stalled, and following his impeachment for bribery, respectively (257). The philosopher does not doubt his talent (255) but must stabilize his own social situation. Elsky observes that “the moral authority that Bacon claimed was connected to his definition of his scientific works as enduring and disinterested; enduring in contrast to political, courtly works that addressed occasions of the moment; disinterested in contrast to courtly, political writing whose goal was his own courtly, political advancement” (256). Bacon’s authorial image and status depended on the strategic integration of philosophy and politics.

In the *New Atlantis*, the creation of the ideal society is enabled by two authorial functions: the foundational and the interpretative. Bacon assumes these functions in his real-life authorship of the Instauration project. I have suggested that Scripture, in its trans-historical situation as expression of grace, enables Solamona’s illumination. The information that God created the world in six days leads to the creation of the House of Salomon. Solamona intuits the existence of an organizing principle behind divine creation within a determinate temporal interval. The impulse to create a scientific institution reflects the belief that unfolding the causes underlying the six-day creation will restore man to his original position. This idea reflects Bacon’s conviction that “all search for knowledge is dominated and controlled by certain universally applicable organizing procedures” (Jardine 2). It informs his notion of aphorism, enabling scientific progress by inviting further inquiry. Importantly, Solamona is a spiritual figure. His illumination is the moment when he manifests the ‘innocency’ of the prelapsarian man through the acknowledgment of mystery. The king’s experience of grace (if unacknowledged as such) is echoed later in the narrative when the Interpreters of the House of Salomon, confronted with the
miraculous apparition of the New Testament, admit that time and divine help is required to understand and apply its teachings. Jardine observes that Bacon employs the notions of ‘experiment’ and ‘experience’ interchangeably in accord with their usage in early modernity (137). Experience demands science by pointing beyond itself towards a reality that must be unfolded through interpretation. This interpretation remains spiritually productive only insofar as it acknowledges the need for further inquiry: “Lastly, we have three that raise the former discoveries by experiments into greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms. These we call the Interpreters of Nature” (WFB 3165).

Bacon appropriates the foundational and the interpretative functions for his authorial self-representation. The inductive method in Novum Organum testifies to the practical value that Bacon assigns to both the vision of the Instauration and to his ability to generate interpretative methods. He observes the universal principles from the patterns made apparent through experiments and refines them in linguistic expressions that convey the true generalities associated with those principles, thus enabling scientific advancement: the third and final stage of the inductive method (Jardine 96). The figure of the author is irreplaceable for the creation of the ideal society. The effort to subject the printed word to state regulation is truly a battle for the knowledge that brings spiritual and social advancement. However, the true value of the Interpreter resides with that which remains a mystery for the others: “And this we also do: we have consultations, which of the inventions and experiences which we have discovered shall be published, and which not: and take all an oath of secrecy, for the concealing of those which we think fit to keep secret: though some of those we do reveal sometimes to the state, and some not” (WFB 3165).
3. Scripture, Revelation, and the Authorial Imagination

No explanations are offered, in the *New Atlantis*, regarding the nature of Solamona’s vision that leads to the foundation of the House of Salomon. How does one come to envision such a society? What faculty makes possible such a glorious projection of a lost past into the future, a projection whose validity is demonstrated over and over again by the scientific progress achieved by Bensalem over millennia? Exploring the sequence of developments that led to the society encountered and described by the anonymous sailor-writer may shed light on the nature of this quality, which I consider key to understanding the role of the ideal in Bacon’s construction of authorship. Having become acquainted with the depiction of creation in Genesis, Solamona has the vision of an earthly Paradise. This vision is informed by the intuition of a direct relation between knowledge of the nature of things and a higher spirituality. It is the mental image of a ‘good’ place that triggers the scientific quest meant to materialize the king’s intuition in the progressive manner represented by the House of Salomon’s interpretative approach to nature. Solamona’s intuition of an organizing principle behind the world of natural phenomena lacks an experiential basis understood traditionally as observation. Perhaps the most important feature of this understanding is that it is not distorted by the Idols of the mind. The fact that it occurs in the absence of the material Scripture - the Bensalemites miraculously receive the Old and the New Testament later - reinforces its emancipation from perception. DeCook observes that, in the *New Atlantis*, Scripture is literally taken out of time to suggest that it encompasses all history:

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171 They are of four kinds: idols of the Nation or Tribe, idols of the Cave, idols of the Theatre, and idols of the Palace.
“Paradoxically, it exists before it is written, and furthermore exists as an established canon of
texts before the historical process of its canonization” (209). It is a “self-interpreting and totally
complete archive, a site of comprehensive, self-contained memory” (210 – 211), a “fantastic
archive in which revelation is fully present,” unaffected by history and time (219 – 220).
Solamona intuits the divine order of nature; at the same time, the institution of the House of
Salomon indicates that the king also grasped the teleology inherent in Scripture, which comes to
inform the House’s gradual discovery of nature’s secrets. Inasmuch as man has ‘more fruit’ in
the use of these discoveries, the society of Bensalem points beyond itself at all times in a
continuous gesture of praise to a God who wills man restored to ideality.

I suggest that Solamona’s superior mode of understanding is based on imagination. To be
sure, throughout his works Bacon discusses imagination as subject to desire and therefore an
impediment, rather than an enabler, of knowledge. Nonetheless, it is imagination, which along
with memory and reason makes up the rational soul that is ultimately responsible for moving one
to action by presenting an envisaged possibility as ‘good’:

For Sense sendeth over to Imagination before Reason have judged: and Reason sendeth
over to Imagination before the Decree can be acted; for Imagination ever precedeth
Voluntary Motion: saving that this Janus of Imagination hath differing faces; for the face
towards Reason hath the print of Truth, but the face towards Action hath the print of Good.
(WFB 3 382)
Lisa Jardine observes the recuperative undertones in Bacon’s theory of knowledge, where this faculty makes known “the earliest intellectual images” to reason (91). Imagination “depicts in the mind images of individual past experiences, whose record has been stored in the memory. … [It] always works with what has actually been experienced or described in the past. It cannot create the components of a fictitious compound image” (91). The validating reference to Ecclesiastes i.9, 10 (“There is no new thing upon the earth”) in Essay LVIII where Bacon shows that “Plato had an imagination that All knowledge is but oblivion” suggests that imagination may indeed be seen as recuperative mode of understanding. The Advancement of Learning allows the possibility of a ‘fortified’ imagination, informed by the divine edict in Genesis 3:19 “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (WFB 3 381). The scientific work associated with the House of Salomon, also named College of the Six Days’ Works, symbolizes man’s earthly existence as spiritual modus vivendi in anticipation of salvation.

Moreover, in De Augmentis Bacon concedes that ”the divine grace uses the motions of the Imagination as an Instrument of Illumination, just as it uses the motions of the will as an instrument of virtue” (WFB 4 406). Solamona, seen as ‘divine instrument,’ plays perfectly into this mode of divine action. His imagination is not that of the ordinary man who fits knowledge to the particulars of his situation, “ministering to themselves thereby weak fears or vast desires,” (WFB 3 266 – 267) but of a moral man devoted to the well-being of his people: “This king had a large heart, inscrutable for good, and was wholly bent to make his kingdom and people happy”

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172 Jardine references Katharine Park, “The Imagination in Renaissance Psychology” (M.Phil. diss., The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1974), to argue that, in the sixteenth century, a concept of imagination as faculty that mediates between sense and reason had replaced the system of internal faculties specific to the Middle Ages.
(WFB 3 144). Drawn simply from the information of the six-day creation, his vision of the ideal testifies to the authorial mind’s susceptibility for revelation. Informed by Scripture, it enables the scientific pursuit of knowledge:

… for, saith our Saviour, *You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God*; laying before us two books or volumes to study if we will be secured from error; first the Scriptures revealing the will of God, and then the creatures expressing his power; for that latter book will certify us that nothing which the first teacheth shall be thought impossible. And most sure it is, and a true conclusion of experience, that a little natural philosophy inclineth the mind to atheism, but a further proceeding bringeth the mind back to religion.

(WFB 3 221)

Solamona’s vision may be described as actualization of the image of the ideal associated with the memory of Paradise. The experiential basis for the interpretative and experimental enterprise represented by the House is the contemplative work that man was created for and carried out before the fall, which Bacon describes in the *Advancement of Learning*:

After the creation was finished, it is set down unto us that man was placed in the garden to work therein; which work so appointed to him could be no other than work of contemplation; that is, when the end of work is but for exercise and experiment, not for necessity; for there being then no reluctance of the creature, nor sweat of the brow, man's
employment must of consequence have been matter of delight in the experiment, and not matter of labour for the use. \(WFB\ 3\ 296\)

The impulse for learning that Bacon associates with human nature, whose highest expression is the House of Salomon, is recuperated as a spiritual state through an understanding that true knowledge does not pretend to grasp the divine mysteries but evokes them so as to reinforce the divine nature of creation: “For these limitations are three. The first, \textit{that we do not so place our felicity in knowledge, as we forget our mortality}. The second, \textit{that we make application of our knowledge to give ourselves repose and contentment, and not distaste or repining}. The third, \textit{that we do not presume by the contemplation of nature to attain to the mysteries of God}” \(WFB\ 3\ 266\). Mystery does not refer to an epistemological limit but to a moral one, namely the inability to discern good (the ‘good’ associated with the divine creation) from evil, as shown in the \textit{Filum Labyrinthis}:

… the knowledge of nature, by the light whereof man discerned of every living creature, and imposed names according to their propriety, was not the occasion of the fall; but the moral knowledge of good and evil, affected to the end to depend no more upon God's commandments, but for man to direct himself; neither could he find in any Scripture, that the inquiry and science of man in any thing, under the mysteries of the Deity, is determined and restrained, but contrariwise allowed and provoked; for concerning all other knowledge the Scripture pronounceth, \textit{That it is the glory of God to conceal, but it is the glory of man (or of the king, for the king is but the excellency of man) to invent}; and again, \textit{The spirit of}
man is as the lamp of God, wherewith he searcheth every secret; and again most
effectually, That God hath made all things beautiful and decent, according to the return of
their seasons; also that he hath set the world in man's heart, and yet man cannot find out
the work which God worketh from the beginning to the end; shewing that the heart of man
is a continent of that concave or capacity, wherein the content of the world (that is, all
forms of the creatures and whatsoever is not God) may be placed or received. (WFB 3 500)

The achievements of the House at the moment of the encounter depicted by the New
Atlantis validate Solamona’s vision - and by extension Bacon’s Instauration project - as part of
God’s plan for humanity. A better society is an achievable endeavour: Bensalem, like Bacon’s
Instauration, speaks to the possibility to recover man’s dominion over creation, a sign that God’s
redemptive work is taking place but nevertheless one that reflects the processual nature of man’s
work and eventually its limits.

A brief comparison of the theological and scientific modes of knowledge in Bacon’s work
may offer further insight into the ways in which the authorial imagination’s susceptibility to
divine illumination establishes a spiritual basis for an unprecedented approach to the
interpretation of nature. In theology, says the philosopher, ‘placets’ are obtained through divine
inspiration. They may be seen to correspond to the first principles obtained through induction,
and constitute the basis for further inductive investigation based on reason. Theological
knowledge bears, then, a dual nature, revelatory and interpretative:
The use of human reason in religion is of two sorts: the former, in the conception and apprehension of the mysteries of God to us revealed; the other, in the inferring and deriving of doctrine and direction thereupon. The former extendeth to the mysteries themselves; but how? by way of illustration, and not by way of argument. The later consisteth indeed of probation and argument. In the former we see God vouchsafeth to descend to our capacity, in the expressing of his mysteries in sort as may be sensible unto us; and doth grift his revelations and holy doctrine upon the notions of our reason, and applieth his inspirations to open our understanding, as the form of the key to the ward of the lock: for the later, there is allowed us an use of reason and argument secondary and respective, although not original and absolute. For after the articles and principles of religion are placed, and exempted from examination of reason, it is then permitted unto us to make derivations and inferences from and according to the analogy of them, for our better direction. (WFB 3 479 – 480)

Bacon is careful to assert that “In nature this holdeth not; for both the principles are examinable by induction …” (WFB 3 480). Commonly, the interpretation of nature starts from an experience that relies on senses vulnerable to the false appearances generated by the idols of the mind, who work by suggesting that knowledge is displayed for immediate grasp:

Let us behold it in another instance, namely, *That the spirit of man, being of an equal and uniform substance, doth usually suppose and feign in nature a greater equality and uniformity than is in truth.* Hence it cometh that the mathematicians cannot satisfy
themselves, except they reduce the motions of the celestial bodies to perfect circles, rejecting spiral lines, and labouring to be discharged of eccentrics. ... For if that great work-master had been of an human disposition, he would have cast the stars into some pleasant and beautiful works and orders, like the frets in the roofs of houses; whereas one can scarce find a posture in square or triangle or straight line amongst such an infinite number; so differing an harmony there is between, the spirit of Man and the spirit of Nature. (WFB 3 395 – 396)

The *New Atlantis* demonstrates that the scientific interpretation that enables true progress is carried out from a spiritual perspective. It begins from a moment of divine inspiration when the mind acknowledges the mystery behind creation and it relies on Scripture, enabling revelation, and on the scientific text, describing the gradual accumulation and inductive refinement of knowledge (DeCook 219 – 220).

4. **Mediating Humility: Language and Contemplation**

Bacon suggests that his contribution to the history of Restauration finds its highest expression in the scientific method put forth by the *Instauratio Magna*. The value of this method resides in its ability to point beyond itself and, in doing so, to evoke an extra-linguistic ideal. Bacon describes it as mirror of truth that manifests its utility for the advancement of society only insofar as it enables the contemplation of the divine order:

... the contemplation of truth is a thing worthier and loftier than all utility and magnitude of works; ... this long and anxious dwelling with experience and matter and the fluctuations of
individual things, drags down the mind to earth, or rather sinks it to a very Tartarus of turmoil and confusion; removing and withdrawing it from the serene tranquillity of abstract wisdom, a condition far more heavenly. Now to this I readily assent; and indeed this which they point at as so much to be preferred, is the very thing of all others which I am about. For I am building in the human understanding a true model of the world, such as it is in fact, not such as a man's own reason would have it to be; a thing which cannot be done without a very diligent dissection and anatomy of the world. But I say that those foolish and apish images of worlds which the fancies of men have created in philosophical system must be utterly scattered to the winds. Be it known then how vast a difference there is (as I said above) between the Idols of the human mind and the Ideas of the divine. The former are nothing more than arbitrary abstractions; the latter are the creator's own stamp upon creation, impressed and defined in matter by true and exquisite lines. Truth therefore and utility are here the very same things: and works themselves are of greater value as pledges of truth than as contributing to the comforts of life. (WFB 4 110)

The consciousness of limit informs Bacon’s views on language in general. Jardine notes that, in his natural philosophy, knowledge is conveyed through aphorisms, verbal representations that render truth in a fragmentary and non-contextual manner.\(^{173}\) The aphorism enables progress by inviting the reader to apply the observation it describes to multiple fields, thus allowing generalizations. While the cumulative effect of these generalizations describes a trajectory of progress, the aphorism itself “leaves room for suspicion that there are many more behind” (WFB

Its representational power lies in its ability to point beyond itself, to demand further inquiry. To a certain extent, it may be seen to stand for the fragmentary nature of human knowledge, which requires divine help in order to become fruitful. The aphoristic delivery of knowledge in the *Instauratio* and the fact that the narrative of the *New Atlantis* is unfinished indicate the importance of the notion of incompleteness in Bacon’s thought. Because it is inherent in the idea of limit, the understanding of incompleteness enables the scientific work and the contemplative work in the state of paradisiacal ideality. Because it underlies the idea of beginning, it allows Bacon to indicate the *Instauratio*, and perhaps the absent end of the narrative of *New Atlantis*, as the starting point of a history that leads to ideality. As the author acknowledges the moral limits of knowledge, man’s recuperation of lordship over creation is not simply a realizable enterprise but one that is already taking place to glorify God through this gesture of humility.

The universal dimension of Bacon’s authorial figure, who stands for the whole of humanity, and the symbolic nature of his ideal, which is shown as an expression of salvation history, become more clearly apparent at the end of the *New Atlantis*. Having acknowledged that “the End of our Founding is the knowledge of Causes” (*WFB* 3 156), one of the Fathers of Salomon’s House indicates that accepting the refusal of moral knowledge is the condition for man’s true spiritual advancement: “We have certain hymns and services, which we say daily, of laud and thanks to God for his marvellous works: and forms of prayers, imploring his aid and blessing for the illumination of our labours, and the turning of them into good and holy uses” (*WFB* 3 166). The interpreters must pray that God shows them the holy ends, the spiritual purposes to which they may employ their findings. In this passage, the intellectual humility of the
Interpreters of the House reinforces Bacon’s effort to integrate the ideal of the Restauration with the history of salvation. The importance of humility to man’s recuperation of the lost Paradisiacal status is conveyed in the 1623 *History of the Winds*, a text that more clearly makes the scriptural message a condition of scientific authority:

… the sciences are confined to certain and prescribed authors, and thus restrained are imposed upon the old and instilled into the young; so that now (to use the sarcasm of Cicero concerning Caesar’s year), the constellation of Lyra rises by edict, and authority is taken for truth, not truth for authority. Which kind of institution and discipline is excellent for present use, but precludes all prospect of improvement. For we copy the sin of our first parents while we suffer for it. They wished to be like God, but their posterity wish to be even greater. For we create worlds, we direct and domineer over nature, we will have it that all things are as in our folly we think they should be, not as it seems fittest to the Divine wisdom, or as they are found to be in fact; and I know not whether we more distort the facts of nature or our own wits; but we clearly impress the stamp of our own image on the creatures and works of God, instead of carefully examining and recognizing in them the stamp of the Creator himself. Wherefore our dominion over creatures is a second time forfeited, not undeservedly; … If therefore there be any humility towards the Creator, any reverence for or disposition to magnify His works, any charity for man and anxiety to relieve his sorrows and necessities … and to approach with humility and veneration to unroll the volume of Creation, to linger and meditate therein, and with minds washed clean from opinions to study it in purity and integrity. (*WFB* 5 132)
To this end, the *New Atlantis* also foregrounds the charitable nature of authorship. In the *Advancement of Learning* Bacon suggests that a disposition to serve others reflects a virtuous nature: “… the term of Duty is more proper to a mind well framed and disposed towards others, as the term of Virtue is applied to a mind well formed and composed in itself; though neither can a man understand Virtue without some relation to society, nor Duty without an inward disposition” (*WFB* 3 428). Elizabeth McCutcheon examines the cherubic iconography associated with the extraordinary apparition of the Father of the House in the *New Atlantis*. She argues that it echoes St. Gregory and St. Paul’s arguments for the fulfillment of knowledge in love, and that it reflects Bacon’s own dedication to bringing to fruition, for humanity, the knowledge obtained through illumination. McCutcheon cites Bacon’s views on charity in the *Advancement of Learning* in support of this argument and notes that, despite his appropriation of the means of knowledge, the angelic symbolism does not indicate a Faustian or Promethean position but one that is “profoundly Christian and humanitarian, concerned with life, well-being, and well-doing.” In the *New Atlantis*, the cherub symbolizes man’s spiritual potential, the ability to “read the book of nature more actively and more humbly,” and the “connection between work and good works” that Bacon projects upon his own world to define the Christian ethics underlying his action (354).

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174 “… knowledge bloweth up, but charity buildeth up; not unlike unto that which he delivereth in another place: If I spake (saith he) with the tongues of men and angels, and had not charity, it were but as a tinkling cymbal; not but that it is an excellent thing to speak with the tongues of men and angels, but because if it be severed from charity, and not referred to the good of men and mankind, it hath rather a sounding and unworthy glory than a meriting and substantial virtue” (*WFB* 3 266).

175 Elizabeth McCutcheon, “Bacon and the Cherubim: An Iconographical Reading of the New Atlantis,” *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972) 351.
The *New Atlantis* ends with the interpreter’s gesture of generosity towards the sailor: “And so he left me; having assigned a value of about two thousand ducats for a bounty to me and my fellows. For they give great largesses, where they come, upon all occasions” (*WFB* 3 166). The episode echoes *Instauratio Magna*, where Bacon argues that his work amounts to nothing less than to an extraordinary gift to humankind: “Of myself I say nothing; but in behalf of the business which is in hand I entreat men to believe that it is not an opinion to be held, but a work to be done; and to be well assured that I am laboring to lay the foundation, not of any sect or doctrine, but of human utility and power” (*WFB* 4 21). The argument had been introduced by the “Epistle dedicatory” to King James, where it is shown that “after the lapse of so many ages, philosophy and the sciences may no longer float in air, but rest on the solid foundation of experience of every kind, and the same well examined and weighed” (*WFB* 4 12). The importance of this statement for understanding Bacon’s focus on strengthening his authorial position cannot be overemphasized: like the *New Atlantis*, *Instauratio Magna* is not simply a work of maturity but is written at a time when Bacon realizes that his political career had come to a conclusion (Elsky 208).

The scientist-philosopher of the *New Atlantis* is a spiritual figure. Having strengthened his mind through theological study, he is aware that language cannot convey knowledge. This perspective has important implications for Bacon’s real-life self-representation: because illumination is intrinsic to the scientific investigation, the founder of the scientific project and the interpreter who ensures that the ideal society is coming into being will always have an affinity with mystery. This author understands that the ultimate meaning - the final causes, which are the holy uses of the results, and eventually salvation - come from God. While Bacon presents himself
as symbol of humanity, depending on grace for advancement, the acknowledgment of limit validates his effort to restrict the publication of knowledge: the printed word must always point beyond itself towards the author’s mind which is the locus of divine illumination.
Conclusion

Empowering Words: The Universal Core of a Teleology of Expression

In *Oceana* (1656) James Harrington emphasizes law over passion and argues that natural philosophy is a stabilizing response to a fallen language and humanity (Johns 290). He suggests that a perfect commonwealth based on equality may be shaped if the divine creation is taken as model of order. The politician must examine history to observe how change reflects human imperfection and be inspired by the principles of permanence that inform natural law. Because he implies a natural dynamics of politics, Harrington is eventually perceived as advancing subversive views and is accused of treason and incarcerated under Charles II. In his self-defense speech, after the 1661 arrest, Harrington defines in constructive terms the tension between the authority of monarchy, on the one hand, and the private or political thought which he associates with moral philosophy, on the other hand:

My lord, there is not any public person, nor any magistrate, that has written on politics, worth a button. All they that have been excellent in this way have been private men, as private men, my lord, as myself. There is Plato, there is Aristotle, there is Livy, there is Machiavel. My lord, I can sum up Aristotle's 'Politics' in a very few words: he says, there is the Barbarous Monarchy - such a one where the people have no votes in making the laws; he says, there is the Heroic Monarchy - such a one where the people have their votes in making the laws; and then, he says, there is Democracy; and affirms that a man cannot be said to have liberty but in a Democracy only. ... I say Aristotle says so. I have not said
so much. And under what prince was it? Was it not under Alexander, the greatest prince then in the world? I beseech you, my lord, did Alexander hang up Aristotle? did he molest him? Livy, for a Commonwealth, is one of the fullest authors; did not he write under Augustus Caesar? Did Caesar hang up Livy; did he molest him? Machiavel, what a commonwealthsman was he! But he wrote under the Medici when they were princes in Florence: did they hang Machiavel, or did they molest him? I have done no otherwise than as the greatest politicians: the King will do no otherwise than as the greatest princes.\footnote{176}{Henry Morley, Introduction to \textit{Ideal CommonWEALTS. Comprising: More’s Utopia; Bacon’s New Atlantis, Campanella’s City of the Sun and Harrington’s Oceana} (New York: Dedalus Edition, 1988) xii – xiii.}

Robert Appelbaum observes that by fashioning the educated subject into a political actor in \textit{Oceana} Harrington conciliates a view of author as architect of the ideal with an egalitarian perspective on learning.\footnote{177}{Robert Applebaum, \textit{Literature and Utopian Politics in Seventeenth-Century England} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 184.} Political problems may be resolved through appeal to the first principles, which an introspective reader may grasp in both nature and self (184). A difference between author and reader may still be felt as the latter’s political identity is defined according to the parameters envisioned by the former (187).

Harrington’s egalitarianism gains momentum in the gendered discourse of Margaret Cavendish’s \textit{Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World} (1666). Lee Cullen Khanna observes that Cavendish’s text is “structured by its representation of the struggle for discursive authority and its figurations of female power.”\footnote{178}{Lee Cullen Khanna, “The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and Her Blazing-World,” in \textit{Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference} edited by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Komerton (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994) 18.} The female author, struggling to assert the
originality of her own creative self, invites the reader to become a master of his own world, equal to the king himself:

... I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be Margaret the First; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as Alexander and Caesar did; yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made of a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one’s power to do the like. ¹⁷⁹

The social critique of the Blazing World stems from Cavendish’s frustration at being excluded from the world of science in which she felt intellectually at home, as Jonathan Sawday notes. ¹⁸⁰

At the same time, the escapism inherent in Cavendish’s vision must be read in the context of the seventeenth century materialism. The tension between an authoritarian centre that cannot be challenged and the individual mind remains a central topic in John Locke’s work, although his take on the issue has different nuances. In the Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (1689), Locke differentiates between the ‘civil’ and ‘philosophical’ uses of language, between rhetoric and signification, and emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the word. Robert Pattison observes how this differentiation rearranges, in the eighteenth century, the relationship between

¹⁷⁹ Margaret Cavendish, “To the Reader” introducing The Description of a New World Called The Blazing World (London: Penguin, 1994) 124.

the private and the social uses of language in an economy driven by the original contribution of the individual:

The philosophy of Locke embodies an attitude toward language that is fitted for worldly success. Its emphasis on the highly personal nature of language grows out of and reinforces a society that stresses individual initiative, and its demand for clarity and precision of thought facilitates practical communication of all kinds, whether scientific or commercial.\textsuperscript{181}

Echoes of Locke’s natural rights theory of property may be observed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century professionalization of authorship in Europe. Interestingly, this period also sees the proliferation of literary works describing ideal societies. A growing reading public and improvement of publishing practices that allowed one to maintain ownership over one’s own product informed, says James Van Horn Melton, the author’s new political position:

To the extent that the ideal of the public sphere rested on the assumption that print was the medium best suited for the effective and rational articulation of public opinion, the function of authors became central. They were simultaneously teachers and tribunes, seeking to educate the public while also representing its interests \textit{vis-à-vis} those who exercised formal

power over it. In the process authorship acquired an autonomous function in Enlightenment culture that seemed to mirror its new marketability.\textsuperscript{182}

At the same time, works such as Jonathan Swift’s \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} (1726) and Samuel Butler’s \textit{Erewhon} (1872) (in England), Voltaire’s \textit{Candide} (1759) and Mercier’s \textit{L’An 2440} (1771) (in France) reflect, along with the numerous other fictions of the ideal state, the tension between a view of literature as entertainment and the authorial impulse to orient readers in the new socio-economic climate. On the one hand, the numerous and eccentric forms taken by the ideal society, which may be situated underground, in outer space, on some imagined unmapped territory, or even in the future, affirm the author’s imaginative force. On the other hand, as Raymond Trousson observes, this diversity responds to the readership pressure: “… le public est friand de cette littérature d’imagination qui le dépayse à bon compte, propose la révolution au coin du feu et comble les aspirations nostalgiques à la cité parfaite, sans engager le bourgeois dans d’autres aventures que celles de l’esprit.”\textsuperscript{183} Moreover, the revival of allegory and of moral critique in this interval may be seen to reflect, and respond to, the incongruence between individualism and the enlightenment associated with literacy, and that between the importance gained by the demands of a larger, but frivolous readership (Melton 11 and ff.) and the difficulties posed by class to individuality. Trousson observes that the eighteenth-century European ‘utopias’ raise these very questions and, in so doing, question the validity of the Platonic and Morean project of the ideal -

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\textsuperscript{183} Raymond Trousson, \textit{Voyages aux Pays de nulle part} (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1975) 115.
\end{flushright}
namely, the spiritual perspective that guides interpretation - for the new economic and cultural climate:

Qu’est-ce que l’utopie? Un univers idéalement réglé, où l’individu se fond harmonieusement dans le tout, où égoïsme et intérêt particulier sont exclus ou du moins dirigés de manière à servir l’ordre général. Mais si, justement, une société était un alliage de contraires? Et que devient l’individu dans ce mécanisme d’horlogerie? Et l’idéal utopique est, du même coup, mis en procès. (156)

To give one last example of how the notion of an ideal society is employed by authors to engage with the politics of representation, let us turn to the powerful symbolism in *Gulliver’s Travels*. William Bowman Piper shows how Swift’s symbolic strategies disengage the reader from reality. The author forces the reader to take responsibility for interpretation and, implicitly, to evaluate his own ideas against the world:

His unavoidable activity simply in reading the *Travels* is to test the “naked, undisguised ideas” herewith aroused in him by these words. … Such a reader will continually struggle to identify and to judge the train of ideas such trains of language raise in his mind, ideas he can never attribute to and thus never blame on an external nature of things. He may reject all those ideas he can attribute to Gulliver and/or condemn as foolish; he must accept responsibility for the rest.\(^{184}\)

These authors encourage the readers to think critically and to take responsibility for their interpretations. This pedagogic impulse may be read as a sign that the vision of the ideal society is never truly disengaged from its original educational purpose.

While this brief discussion on the relationship between textuality and the notion of an ideal society from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries cannot possibly do justice to the role held by literature in complex economic and political transformations, it does confirm the productivity of the interpretive model proposed in this dissertation. Conceptualized in relation to a transformative discourse meant to reshape the literate community to become one of fulfilled spiritual individualities, the notion of an ideal society is never truly separated from the politics of representation. It mirrors the politics of textuality at each point in time; the written ideal, enabling the spiritual and later the political enlightenment of the reader, is invariably offered as instrumental to the advancement of the community.

At the end of the nineteenth century, cinema became, like previous technologies of representation and communication, intimately linked to the conceptualization of an ideal society. Cinema, drawing narrative inspiration from literature, influenced in its turn the modern novel, whose narrative aesthetics are marked by the ideologically significant identification of the viewer with the camera. Reflecting the particularities of the new visuality, anti-utopias and dystopias replace utopia’s educational optimism with an oppressive, aesthetically-charged...

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experience of the alternative society and question the very possibility of improvement.

Influenced by pre-cinematic technologies, H.G. Wells offers in *The Time Machine* (1895) a description of travel in time to what proves to be a disappointing future.\(^\text{187}\) The alternation of light and dark images, combined with sound, confuses the reader unfamiliar with the cinema’s visual perspective on reality:

There is a feeling exactly like that one has upon a switchback - of a helpless headlong motion! I felt the same horrible anticipation, too, of an imminent smash. … The dim suggestion of the laboratory seemed presently to fall away from me, and I saw the sun hopping swiftly across the sky, leaping it every minute, and every minute marking a day.\(^\text{188}\)

It was the same anticipation of an ‘imminent smash’ that, in December 1895, led some of the Lumières’ audience to run for their lives, fearing that the image of the train projected on screen would crush them. The excitement that precedes the journey is undermined by the nausea and fear induced by the accelerated movement of images. The unpleasant sensations generated by the time travel may be seen to anticipate the profound disappointment of the traveller when confronted with the man of the future who has returned to animal stages. The absence of change, the hero notes, weakens the intellect, while the omnipresence of beauty results in an inability to

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\(^{187}\) In his paper “H.G. Wells, ‘Cinematicity’ and the First Sight of the Cinematograph,” presented at *Cinematicity 1895: Before and After*, The University of Essex, 24-25 March, 2006, Andrew Shail argued that the visualizing techniques made possible by the technical developments in pre-cinema, such as the magic lantern and Edward Muybridge’s photographs in motion, can be traced in Wells’s pre-1895 and 1895 stories, demonstrating his close interest in the technologies of the moving image. Furthermore, his experience of the cinematograph became evident in the literary techniques used in his writings immediately after February 1896.

appreciate it. The little intellectual potential left, limited to the dominant Underground, is owed to, and shaped by technology.

Wells’s work is followed by a literary tradition that confirms the fundamental role held by the technologies of cinema in the conceptualization of anti-utopia and dystopia. The new visual language is employed to create an aesthetic of oppression and to force the reader into this reality, as if experiencing it on the screen. The individual’s sole possibility of resistance against the totalitarian state, George Orwell shows in *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), depends on his ability to preserve a relation between language’s expressive and referential functions, which the system constantly threatens in its effort to confuse and control the individual. The reciprocal fascination between anti-utopias and dystopias and cinema is also visible in the way novels pertaining to this genre have been repetitively adapted for the screen; an entire cinema of dystopia emerges, in the twentieth century, from this relationship of interdependence. The anxiety of the close-up, of the inescapable eye, indicates the affinities between dystopia and cinema.

As the individual ‘experience’ of the ‘ideal’ replaces its conceptualization, the problem of representation is revisited. The Word/Image relationship illustrates the ideologies of cinema: language, regarded by the previous two centuries and by twentieth-century Structuralism as arbitrary, becomes one’s last (and desperate) resort in the attempt to preserve individuality, as well as the channel through which a totalitarian system attempts to break down thought. Simultaneously, the image, traditionally seen as natural sign, is revealed as a manipulated construct that accomplishes an insidiously repressive function through its omnipresence and through a particularity very specific to cinema which is to make symbols of low order (of little
human value) gain superior meaning by conferring on them “aesthetic-visual superiority.” This re-presentation of both mediums, fully explored by Orwell, to give only the pregnant example of Nineteen Eighty Four, reflects the displacement, enabled by cinema’s technical specificities, from metaphysical and fixed symbols towards shifting, lower order symbols (Raleigh 219 – 227).

A cultural reaction to this process, perhaps mirroring a comforting need for a familiar, fixed referent is that the word gains an ontological function, defined however not so much as referentiality but as existential transgression. The purpose of the dominating regime is to overcome what is perceived as a crisis of representation: the individual’s impulse to create an existence that is not defined by the proposed societal values (226). The assimilation of the individual by the totalitarian state takes place through man’s aesthetic sensibility which, unlike ideas or religion - socially determined and therefore easily challenged - is the realm of human desire. This is why a true anti-war film, for example, cannot exist: “… no matter how negatively the theme is constructed, the positiveness of the visual appeal, the excitement and drama will nevertheless reverse the moral value. Even to speak of excitement and drama, aesthetic or narrative, is to admit of an appeal that negates the desired value teaching” (226). As the viewer becomes the camera, the clash between aesthetics and the inculcation of low-value symbols, permeating the ‘static’ visual arts (226), is annulled. The anti-utopian loss of hope for a better future and the totalitarian societies of dystopia are found naturally in this space where ethical questions concerning the intersection of individual and society, of viewer and Big Brother, have lost meaning. In Wells’s own words:

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I forget that a Utopia is a thing of the imagination that becomes more fragile with every added circumstance. … This Utopia is nearly done. All the broad lines of its social organization are completed now, the discussion of all its general difficulties and problems. Utopian individuals pass me by, fine buildings tower on either hand; it does not occur to me that I may look too closely. To find the people assuming the concrete and individual is not, as I fondly imagine, the last triumph of realization, but the swimming moment of opacity before the film gives way. To come to individual emotional cases, is to return to the earth.  

Günther R. Kress argues that computers and the technologies of information determined in the past three decades a displacement from social practices informed by the word and writing to an existence and worldview of the image and of the screen. More importantly, the concept of textual community has been reinforced. By positioning the word within its space according to the logic of the image, the computer screen reiterates and reinforces the social production of the text. The new media demand the user’s engagement and participation in the design of the communication act (6). The mode of transcendence associated with the new media restores an interactivity more specific to oral than to a print-based culture separating text, reader, and writer. Simultaneously, the internet’s capacity for circulating information without storing it, for example, changes the focus from memory towards attention, from a temporal mode of

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spiritual transcendence towards a spatial “self-transcendence in avatars” that liberate “the self from the restrictions and constraints of the organic” (21).

The power once belonging to the author is now redistributed among readers, who may alter a text (such as an email, for example) at will (Kress 6). But this empowerment is illusory as the democratization of authorship lessened significantly the authority traditionally associated with the author and the text. The consequences become apparent in the reader’s perception of the text, which is seen to be less the expression of an exceptional imagination and more of a practical instrument that may be transformed or discarded after it has accomplished its temporary role:

The processes of selection which accompanied the bestowal of the role of author brought authority. When that selection is no longer there, authority is lost as well. The promise of greater democracy is accompanied by a levelling of power; that which may have been desired by many may turn out to be worth less than it seemed when it was unavailable. ... Writing is becoming ‘assembling according to designs’ in ways which are overt, and much more far-reaching, than they were previously. The notion of writing as ‘productive’ or ‘creative’ is also changing. Fitness for present purpose is replacing previous conceptions, such as text as the projection of a world, the creation of a fictional world, a world of the imagination. (6)

The new media user’s transformative engagement with text/image reduces differences between cultural groups, social categories, or age groups. The emphasis now falls on the individual user whose presence may be felt in the particularities of his creative intervention. But this individual
is no longer a person: he is an identity, an ‘avatar’ who adapts his discursive participation according to the communicational circumstance.

A pattern of change becomes apparent in the practice of adapting the text to its social function. This change reflects the meaningful re-ordering of the elements associated with imagistic interpretation, on the one hand, and the construction of identity, which consists of a perpetual creation and management of various communicational identities, on the other hand. How is this change different from the transformation proposed by utopia? I have argued that utopian thought is informed by a belief in the written word’s power to enable the better society through the reader’s transformative engagement with a discourse designed to recover a higher humanity. I have also shown that the post-utopian fiction of the ideal reinforces the text’s fundamental role in defining a space of creativity and meaning parallel to that of Scripture. Finally, I suggested that in anti-utopian and dystopian works all spiritual and socio-political transcendence is refused as the Word becomes the territory where the fight for interiority and individuality is taking place. In the social context defined by participation in the new media, transcendence is redefined as displacement between social identities. The concept of an ideal community is no longer linked to the promise of spiritual self-fulfillment or even to social and political representation. Reading and interpretation promised inclusion and validated the textually-enabled transformation of man’s inner and outer realities. The new media equate existence with participation in communication and presence in the database. All identity changes are permitted here; what is not accepted is absence from this order. Absence is the true difference, perceived by the community as unacceptable act of transgression and punished by an exclusion that equates social death.
The displacement from metaphysics to ideology with the promise of empowerment as class and to mandatory engagement with media as condition of existence is a displacement from ideality towards the social promises of representation. Meaning no longer stands for a higher humanity to be pursued, but reflects the ontology of the new media. Katherine Hayles explains this process:

Meaning is not guaranteed by a coherent origin; rather, it is made possible (but not inevitable) by the blind force of evolution finding workable solutions within given parameters. Although pattern has traditionally been the privileged term (for example, among the electrical engineers developing information theory), randomness has increasingly been seen to play a fruitful role in the evolution of complex systems. … Indeed, it is not too much to say that in these and similar models, randomness rather than pattern is invested with plenitude. If pattern is the realization of a certain set of possibilities, randomness is the much, much larger set of everything else, from phenomena that cannot be rendered coherent by a given system’s organization to those the system cannot perceive at all.193

The virtuality of the new media means that representation - as social, political, transcendental concept - is no longer a critical issue for the author or for the community of users. If action transforms only the reality of one of the user’s multiple identities, then one choice does not truly matter from the other. The symbol still stands for retrieval, however not of meaning but of stored

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information. Lev Manovich points out that the new media favours paradigm over syntagm. The narrative is defined as movement between databases, while the database itself, through its logic, can never generate a narrative.¹⁹⁴ The logic of cyberspace is a continuous transformation of virtual reality, a transformation that does not say anything about or to the human actor.

What mode of thought does this entail and how is it reflected by the notion of an ideal society? The new media appear as fulfillments of the original utopian promise, where engagement with the text generates an empowered individual who may act meaningfully upon reality. But between William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) and Stieg Larsson’s *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2009), through the Baudrillardian *Matrix* (1999), the ideal is no longer conceptualized as something to be either attained or resisted. A new philosophy of language and social critique emerges from the displacement between worlds and a parallel disengagement from both, indeed, a disengagement from the very idea of community as space of shared meaning. The protagonist’s appearance and actions owe something to both, but offer allegiance to none. The result is a solitude that feeds upon the real and virtual to fulfill immediate purposes. If the word is employed within the page according to the logic of the image, as Kress suggests, if the condition of being is simply presence and, finally, if existence is defined by the potential of randomness rather than by the realization of the pattern, then the ideal is the recuperation of humanity. Individuality emerges from the story while the visual trajectory that stands for existence, unfolding between databases, regains a trace of teleology from the notion of search, threatening to unveil the limits of the reality paradigm.

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