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Utopia Simplified: Thomas Lupton's *Siuqila*

Thomas Lupton's *Siuqila* is one of the earliest utopias published in English. It appeared in 1580, almost 30 years after the first edition of the English translation of Thomas More's *Utopia*. Unlike its more famous predecessor, Lupton's work received little critical attention. No mention is made of it in numerous histories of utopias and utopian thought. In fact the only references to *Siuqila* appear in Gibson's and Sargent's bibliographies.¹ The reason for this critical neglect may have been its extraordinary dullness, exceptional even in a genre not particularly esteemed for exciting plots and brilliant dialogues. Nevertheless, despite its unimpressive aesthetic quality, *Siuqila* is an important text which illustrates the process of the simplification of the genre pattern introduced in *Utopia* which began after the text was translated into English in 1551 and became a part of the vernacular middle-class culture.

Echoes of More reverberate already in the full title of the book which, like the title of *Utopia*, introduces two opposed points of view of the two interlocutors. But whereas in *Utopia* the two different points of view implicit in the title were introduced by subtle punning on the name of the island and the disjunction of the best state of commonwealth and the island of Utopia,² Lupton makes his point directly by means of actual dialogue between two characters:

¹ R.W. Gibson, *St. Thomas More: A Preliminary Bibliography of His Works and of Moreana to the Year 1750*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1961.

Lyman Tower Sargent, *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975. An annotated bibliography*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979.

² Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, Yale University Press: New Haven 1965.

Siuqila, Too good, to be true; Omen, Though so at a vewe, Yet all that I tolde you, Is true, I upholde you; Now Cease to aske why? For I can not lye. Herein is shewed by waye of Dialogue, the wonderful maners of the people of Mauqsun, with other talke not frivolous.

However, the dialogic character of the title is only superficial as the two speakers do not represent opposed viewpoints. The same can be said of the very name of the perfect country Mauqsun, a Latin translation of the word Utopia, though deprived of the ambiguity and self-contradiction of the original: Mauqsun is Nusquam (Latin for „nowhere“) in reverse. The names of the two speakers Omen (Nemo — Nobody) and Siuqila (Aliquis — Somebody) are constructed in accordance with the same principle, a far cry from the complex semantics of the names of *Utopia*'s characters Raphael Hythlodæus and Morus. In constructing the names of his characters Lupton relies on the medieval tradition of Nemo stories (Nobody cannot lie: „Now cease to aske me why For I can not lye“) and medieval allegory (Siuqila's name brings to mind Everyman). The name of the main speaker (Omen — Nemo) is in keeping with the name of the perfect country (cf. king Utopus and Utopia), while the name of his interlocutor characterizes him as Everyman, sinful and weak but trying to lead a godly life, with whom the reader can identify.

The dialogue constitutes the principal mode of discourse in both *Utopia* and *Siuqila*. Lack of any narrative frame in Lupton's work leads to a certain awkwardness of the presentation of the dialogic situation which must be introduced by means of a theatrical soliloquy delivered by Omen:

Meruayle what fellowe this is that comes towardes me thus speedily — he thinkes belike to haue some succour here, but he is much deceyued; for we neuer goe to trouble anye; neyther any shall trouble us. What art thou sirra? What is thy name? From whence dost thou come? And what wouldst thou haue? (p. 1)

Unlike More's *Utopia* which is structurally dialogical, i.e. dialogue based on opposite viewpoints lies at the basis of the work's structure, Lupton employs dialogue only as a superficial external form. The role of Omen's interlocutor is reduced to asking questions and expressing approval of what he is told: „In deede you haue sayde well“, „Truly an excellent good order“, „That is very true“, „I am sure of that“, „Yea in deede“.

The questions asked by Siuqila are not intended to challenge Omen's ideas or initiate a polemical exchange about the principles and institutions of the land Mauqsun. He only asks for more information or expresses his wholehearted approval. The dialogue occasionally develops in an associative manner: the problem of drunkenness leads to the question of self-murder which, in turn,

brings up the subject of laws regarding murder. On other occasions a new subject is introduced by a question which suddenly changes the theme of the dialogue.

The dialogue in *Siuqila* does not express different ideological positions as the interlocutors are in perfect agreement about everything and the only thing about which they disagree concerns the admittance of Siuqila into Mauqsun. The conflict is used to reveal the ideal, non-material nature of the perfect country which does not seem to be of this world:

Siuqila. I truste I shall behaue my selfe in such order, that none there shall mislike me.

Omen. Well, to be playne, you cannot come there, for we keepe none but suche as are borne and bred in our own Countrey, therefore no straunger can dwell with us, for if they shoulde, we should rather learn theyr Uices, than they follow our Vertues. [...] Are you not flesh and bloude? are you not a sinner?

Siuqila. Yes truly that I am, or else I were a lyer.

Omen. Then we wil not trust you, nor put it in prooffe; as godly men as you haue broken as great promises as that; Therefore set your hearte at rest, you may not come there, nor you shal not come there. (p. 4-5).

The contradiction inherent in Omen's last words is soon resolved when he informs Siuqila that he would have to be satisfied with a description of the country.

Barring the visitor from the utopian land is the most radical formulation of one of the most characteristic features of the utopian genre — the isolation of the ideal country from the outside world and restricted contacts with foreigners who are treated with suspicion bordering on paranoia. Lupton's suggestion that no one who is „flesh and bloude“ can be allowed into the perfect country and lack of any geographical details as to its location enables him to avoid a major contradiction inherent in all Christian utopias (the possibility of establishing perfect order in a world that is imperfect by its very nature). His solution implicit in Omen's words „You may not come there, nor you shal not come there“ seems to move the perfect order into the realm of a mental construction that can only exist as a state of mind, as a model to be contemplated in order to improve the existing state of affairs, though with no hope of ever implementing it in full. This is confirmed by Lupton's reversal of More's axiology of space (the farther from Europe the closer to perfection). In *Siuqila* the contrary holds true: „I hoped the further the better: but founde by profe, the further the worse“ (p. 2). In effect, the search for perfection should be conducted within one's soul rather than in any definite spatial location. Accordingly, Siuqila's journey in search of a good country is invested with allegorical significance. The places that he meets on his way represent the different obstacles on the human road towards perfection (e.g.

his encounter with the wicked Papists). The perfect land — Mauqsun is naturally found at the very end of his quest:

Siuqila. o sir, I am comē from the furthest partes of the worlde I thinkē, there is no place nor Countrey but I haue byn in it I beleue, (Except this where you dwell) my name is Siuqila, a sinner I confesse, but one that feares God, loues his word, esteemes equitie, and abhors wickednesse, my chiefe desire is to find out such a countrey and people, as are altogether affectioned, as I am. (p. 1).

Lupton devotes more attention to the critique of European ways than to the description of the perfect state, which brings the text closer to the tradition of medieval complaint about the general corruption of the world. In fact, each aspect of Mauqsun is introduced by means of contrastive comparison with Europe. The miserable state of affairs in Europe is immediately contrasted with a description of the happy solutions employed in Mauqsun. The dominant rhetorical device is antithesis. Like More's litotes, antithesis becomes the underlying figure of the text as a whole.

The world of *Siuqila* is based on the axiological confrontation of two contrasted domains: Mauqsun and Europe. This corresponds to Hythlodæus' view of the relationship between Utopia and Europe and constitutes one of the characteristic features of the utopian genre, based on the simplification of the axiological structure of More's *Utopia*. Mauqsun is characterized by such „goodnesse, godlinesse, obedience, equitie, vertuous lyuing, plaine dealing, and true meaning, that all the earth is not the lyke, for we haue such commendable customes and excellent orders, and so well kepte and observed, that you would thinke them incredible if you did heare them” (p. 4). The praise of Mauqsun, which is never challenged in any way by *Siuqila*, is accompanied by a series of unfavourable comparisons with Europe all proceeding in accordance with the following pattern:

Siuqila. I feare it is Too good to be true, which if it be, I woulde to God it were so with us [...]

Omen. I remember you sayd euen now, that you feared my words were Too good to be true: but I beleue verilie that these your words are Too euil to be false. (p. 9-10)

The author makes every attempt to ensure that none of his readers will have any doubts as to the meaning of his work. Instead of complex irony underlying the prefatory matter in *Utopia*, Lupton makes his purpose and method quite plain in „The Epistle Dedicatorie”:

It is harder for the reporter thereof to tell a lie, than for a common lier to tell a true tale, which must needes be graunted, if his name called OMEN, and the name of his Countrey Mauqsun (before

mentioned) be aduisedly marked and considered, especiallie e conuerso construed. (The Epistle Dedicatorie)

The same idea is repeated by Omen who refuses to allow Siuqila to enter his country: „I am called OMEN, and my country is called Mauqsun, therefore the place is not meete for you to be in, unlesse you can liue foodlesse, (I had almost saide faultlesse)” (p. 6).

The physical non-existence of the ideal country is in itself an accusation of the Europeans who have not managed to establish it themselves despite their knowledge of the Revelation.

The perfection of Mauqsun is a result of good laws which are few in number and their strict observance and execution, which provides another contrast with Europe: „I perceyue you haue many good lawes and euill kept; but we haue but fewe, and vrye well kepte” (p. 34). These laws and their execution are described not only discursively, but also by means of short didactic tales functioning much in the same way as medieval exempla. The device appeared in a rudimentary form in More's *Utopia* (e.g. the story of the Anemolian ambassadors), but here it is used far more extensively both as practical illustration of general principles and as a compositional device aimed at introducing some entertaining factor into an otherwise intensely monotonous speeches of the Omen and *Siuqila*. The tales are devoid of any spatial or temporal details, the characters are not even given proper names, they simply represent certain social roles and functions (a surgeon, a deceiver, a rich man, an ungrateful son, a wicked man, a judge). Characteristically, all the events described in these tales which involve violations of moral norms occurred long ago („I heard one say when I was young, that in the olde time long agoe...”, „There was one with us long since”). This realizes one of the fundamental principles of utopian fiction: the past of the fantastic world represents the author's (and the reader's) present, whilst the present state of the happy land is the postulated and desired future of the author's world.

The underlying principle of social life in Mauqsun and its laws is the biblical principle „Whatsoeuer you woulde that men shoulde doe to you, euen so do yee to them.” Thus, the offender, besides other punishments applicable in a given case, must suffer the same fate as his victim. For example, a wicked surgeon who did not treat the poor man's wound properly has exactly the same wound made by the executioner and then receives the same treatment as the poor man did.

Other types of punishments include confiscation of property to be distributed among the poor, imprisonment, and being forbidden to speak for a certain period. However, the most interesting are the „semiotic” punishments which involve the offender having to wear a sign of his crime in public. The examples of such crimes suggest that the book and its author would not be particularly popular with present day feminists. For instance, „if a woman should beate hyr husbande wyth us, that is not able to rule hir, she shold haue hir husbands

apparel put on hir backe, with a sword gyrded to hir, and so shold ride through euery streete in the Towne where she dwelles: and the men that are hir next neyghbours shal guard hir, and say in the streetes as she rides, This is the woman that hath beaten hir husband..." (pp. 49-50). Interestingly enough the role of the husband in the punishment is not made quite clear.

Other „semiotic“ punishments are less theatrical though equally wearisome: someone who breaks a promise must wear for one year an inscription saying „a promise breaker“, a deceiver must wear on his breast „This is a deceiver“, and a liar must wear on his sleeves letters H and L for „Hurtfull Lyer“.

In contrast to *Utopia*, Lupton's work is heavily charged with didacticism. This didactic purpose is revealed quite openly in the Dedication and Introduction to the reader: „If the whole discourse thereof be wel marked, I doubt not but that it wil like the godly, please the honest, and warne the wicked“. The author who obviously wishes to avoid any ambiguity as to the seriousness of his purpose summarizes his work both in the Dedication and the introduction:

As I have published this (gentle reader) to pleasure and profite many, do I wyshe the meaning thereof not to be hyd from any, which, though I haue described at large in my former Epistle, yet for that I thinke many will not reade the same (whyche I wishe they woulde:) herein I haue displayed the effecte and discourse thereof ...

(The Preface to the Reader)

The marginal notes — which in *Utopia* contributed to its overall polyphonic effect — here function as purely didactic devices pointing to the most important parts of the discourse and supporting the ideas advanced by the speakers, e.g. „Rightly said“, „Marke“, „Marke this well“, „Note“, „Consider this saying“, „A meruellous thing indeede“, „Worthy the noting“, „That is very true“.

Apart from these differences, there are also some minor similarities and straight-forward borrowings from More. For example, in the following passage *Siuqila* uses almost the same preacher-like imagery when talking about drunkenness as Hythlodacus in his harangue against the sin of pride:

I like your order and laws for drunkards so euill, that I would it were auctorized and executed with us. if this monstrous roote were pluckte up by the rootes, manye mischiefs of force must needes wüther away, that spring out of the same, which before at large is declared (p. 60).

As in *Utopia*, all people in Mauqsun „keepe one fashion and order in their apparell“ and those dressed in costly and fashionable clothes are laughed at:

If any with us happe to chaunge the fashion of his apparell, and go otherwise than the antient custome of our Countrey doth allow: he shall not only be pointed at and mocked therefore, but also noted

of such inconstancie, that he shall neuer after be called into any office or place of credite (p. 22).

An even subtler borrowing from More can be sensed in the following statement by Omen: „Perhappes they take playe in steade of praye: it is but the mistaking of one letter“ (p. 26) emulating P. Gillis' and Hythlodacus' Latin wordplay *servire/inservire*:

„Fine words!“ declared Peter. „I meant not that you should be in servitude but in service to kinks.“

„The one is only one syllable less than the other,“ he observed.

(p. 5)

These minor similarities only strengthen the reader's impression of the essential difference in treatment of the theme of the ideal country by More and Lupton. And yet *Siuqila* is much closer to the genre model than More's work. The ambiguous and ironic presentation of the ideal in *Utopia* can hardly be used as a vehicle for social and political propaganda providing straightforward answers and unquestionable solutions. The advantages of the simplified structure in which every element was used to amplify the persuasive effect of the whole did not go unnoticed by later authors who, with few notable exceptions such as Swift and Shakespeare, adopted the less demanding model first used by Lupton.