Sequestration "into *Atlantick* and *Eutopian* polities": Milton on More*

G. R. HIBBARD

The title of this paper is taken from the most idealistic and optimistic of all Milton's writings, *Areopagitica*, his impassioned plea "For the Liberty of unlicenc'd Printing" first published in 1644. The fundamental idea behind that work, that Truth is bound to prevail over Falsehood, and Reason over Unreason, "in a free and open encounter", has still, I think, to be verified, and remains, in the words with which Sir Thomas More concludes his description of the ideal commonwealth, something which we "may rather wisshe for then hoope after"; but Milton's conviction, at the time when he was writing, that the fields were already white to harvest, and that God was about to "reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men," does not prevent him from launching a strong attack on Plato's picture of the best possible attainable state in the *Laws*, together with some side-glances, I think, at the *Republic*, for what he regards as their frivolous and pernicious proposals, especially where literature is concerned. In the course of it, he writes thus:

If we think to regulat Printing, thereby to rectifie manners, we must regulat all recreations and pastimes, all that is delightfull to man. No musick must be heard, no song set or sung, but what is grave and *Dorick*. There must be licencing dancers, that no gesture, motion, or deportment be taught our youth but what by their allowance shall be thought honest; for such *Plato* was provided of; It will ask more then the work of twenty licensors to examin all the lutes, the violins, and the ghittars in every house; they must not be suffer'd to prattle as they doe, but must be licenc'd what they may say. And who shall silence all the airs and madrigalls, that whisper softnes in chambers? The Windows also, and the *Balcone's* must be thought on, there are shrewd books, with dangerous Frontispices set to sale; who shall prohibit them, shall twenty licensors? The villages also must have their visitors to enquire what lectures the bagpipe and the rebbeck reads ev'n to the ballatry and the gammuth of every *municipal* fidler, for these are the Countrymans

* This paper was originally given as an invited address at the Meeting of the North Central Branch of the Renaissance Society of America held at Carleton University in April 1978.

Arcadia's and his *Monte Mayors*. Next, what more Nationall corruption, for which England hears ill abroad, then household gluttony; who shall be the rectors of our daily rioting? and what shall be done to inhibit the multitudes that frequent those houses where drunk'nes is sold and harbour'd? Our garments also should be referr'd to the licencing of some more sober work-masters to see them cut into a lesse wanton garb. Who shall regulat all the mixt conversation of our youth, male and female together, as is the fashion of this Country, who shall still appoint what shall be discours'd, what presum'd, and no furdur? Lastly, who shall forbid and separat all idle resort, all evill company? These things will be, and must be; but how they shall be lest hurtfull, how lest enticing, herein consists the grave and governing wisdom of a State. To sequester out of the world into *Atlantick* and *Eutopian* polities, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition; but to ordain wisely as in this world of evill, in the midd'st whereof God hath plac't us unavoidably.¹

It is one of the most fascinating, paradoxical, and revealing moments in the history of English culture and civilization. Between them More and Milton, the one born in 1478, the other dying in 1674, span and define the two hundred years of the English Renaissance. They have much in common. Each was a Londoner; each belonged to the middle class, More the son of a lawyer, Milton the son of a scrivener. Each became an eminent Latinist; so much so that they were, along with Bacon, the most widely known and read English Latinists in the entire period; they made their mark in Europe. Moreover, there are striking parallels and no less striking contrasts between their two lives. More was attracted for a time by the contemplative life of a recluse, but, at his father's request, abandoned the idea. Milton, on the other hand, actually spent five or six years of his life studying in seclusion at Horton, but with his father's approval and support. Reluctantly More ceased to be a private citizen and entered the service of Wolsey and Henry VIII. Milton also moved into the world of politics, but though this action forced him to relinquish, for the best part of twenty years, his determination to "leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die" (I. 810), he did not undertake it reluctantly. In 1639, he was in Italy, enjoying the society and the hospitality of learned Italian humanists, much as More had enjoyed the society of Northern humanists, such as Erasmus and Peter Giles, for both More and Milton belonged to an international community of scholars. Nevertheless, on hearing news of impending troubles between the King and Parliament in England, Milton set off for home, not to serve Laud and Charles I, but to wield his pen against them. And, just as More became Lord Chancellor, so Milton became Latin Secretary of the Commonwealth. Each was deeply religious, though their faiths were diametrically opposed. More's religious convictions led him to the scaffold. Milton's religious and political convictions almost took him to the same destination.

On the strength of all this, or rather of as much of it as he could know in 1644, one might expect Milton to feel a sense of kinship with More, whom he had actually praised in 1642, along with Plato and Bacon, in his *Apology Against a Pamphlet*, for using the device of the imaginary commonwealth "as a mighty Continent wherein to display the largenesse of their spirits by teaching this our world better and exacter things, then were yet known or us'd" (I. 881). On that occasion, however, he had been employing the three of them as a big stick with which to beat Bishop Hall and his *Mundus Alter et Idem*, whereas in *Areopagitica* he is expressing his own most deeply held beliefs. In this context More becomes the enemy. The passage I quoted begins as an attack on the Plato of the *Laws* but then turns into an attack on *Utopia*, which may well be the most radical and adverse criticism that More's work has ever been subjected to. It is the Utopians who are not allowed to spend their spare time "in ryote, or sloughfullenes,"² for in More's commonwealth there are "rectors," known as syphograunts, one of whose duties is to prevent "rioting." Furthermore, there is no place in Utopia for the drunkenness Milton refers to, or for courtesans, those "shrewd books" of *Areopagitica*, or for "idle resort" and "evill company," because in More's words, "There be nether wyn tauernes, nor ale houses, nor stewes, nor any occasion of uice or wickednes, no lurking corners, no places of wicked councelles or vnlawfull assemblies; but they be in present sight, and vnder the iyes of euery man" (p. 169), and especially, one recalls, under the eyes of the syphograunts, whose "chyefe and almost . . . onelye offyce . . . ys to see and take hede that no man sytte ydle" (p. 141). On top of all this, it is the Utopians who regulate dress, together with "all recreations and pastimes," and who have "lectures daylye" (p. 143). As for the traditional festivals and merrymakings of the rural communities, which Milton writes of with affection here, as he does in "L'Allegro," More had virtually abolished them in his blue-print for the new society by leaving no place in it for any community larger than the family yet smaller than the city state. It seems clear to me that Milton's reference to *Utopia* is not a little make-weight thrown in at the end of his attack on Plato, but an explicit indication that More is just as much the target as Plato is.

It is a piquant spectacle, rich in irony, this: Milton, the great Puritan, defending the rights of unregenerate human nature, speaking up for the sunshine holidays that so many of the Puritans wanted to do away with, and, indeed, for "all that is delightfull to man," against the Catholic More. How has it come about? It is evident, I think, that Milton read *Utopia* much as J. H. Hexter reads it, and as More, I believe, meant it to be read. Utopian communism is specifically designed to suppress the sins of Avarice, Pride, and Sloth by leaving them no soil to root in, just

as the penal system of the Polylerites is designed so to affect criminals "that theye can not chuse but be good" (p. 69). But, while Hexter approves of the method and the purpose, both are anathema to Milton. Hexter writes:

If human nature is to grow straight and clean instead of twisted and foul it must be transplanted into a society which will foster such growth. Such a society is Utopia, where there is no money, no private property, no mine and thine.³

Milton, on the other hand, responds to More's vision of the ideal commonwealth by saying: "They are not skilfull considerers of human things, who imagin to remove sin by removing the matter of sin," and then adding the piercing home truth: "Though ye take from a covetous man all his treasure, he has yet one jewell left, ye cannot bereave him of his covetousnesse" (II. 527). Recognizing that the Utopian way of life rests on compulsion and surveillance, he draws the logical inference that More is set on depriving man of his "freedom to choose," of his God-given right to go to the devil after his own fashion, if he foolishly and wickedly prefers to do so. Utopian man is, in Milton's eyes, "a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions" (*ibid*); and Utopian virtue, sequestered "out of the world," is, at best, "a fugitive and cloister'd vertue" (II. 515).

Utopia and *Areopagitica* collide head on, because More and Milton approach the problem of the right ordering of society from opposite directions, and with very different preoccupations in mind. The conflict between them is more than the conflict of two great personalities, it is the articulation of a tragedy which we are still living through, because we have not yet discovered how to reconcile these two lines of approach with one another. There is nothing Aristotelian about this tragedy. It belongs to the tradition that has its roots in the *Antigone* not in the *Oedipus Rex*. Both More and Milton were right, and both More and Milton were wrong. More, revolted by the irresponsibility of kings in their thirst for military glory and by the avarice of the rich in their search for financial security, but touched to the heart by the misery of the poor and homeless, was right to insist that the crying need of the time was for greater social justice and more equality. He was mistaken in thinking that the price for it, a total submission of the self to the well-being of the commonwealth, would ever be willingly paid. Milton, stung to the quick by the reintroduction of censorship through an ordinance of the very Parliament on whose behalf he had written so vigorously and given so generously of his time and energies, was right in holding that "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience" is "above all liberties" (II. 560); but he

was wrong in ignoring the brute fact, which *Utopia* so firmly asserts, that liberty, whether religious or political, is of no concern to the man who is never free from the pangs of hunger, or, as Richard Hooker puts it, "that destitution in these [bare food and raiment] is such an impediment, as till it be removed suffereth not the mind of man to admit any other care."⁴ It is true that the issue of absolute poverty was not as pressing in 1644 as it had been in 1516, but it is also true, I think, that Milton's conception of the good society pays little heed to economic considerations. It is, perhaps, not without significance that when he came to draw his own picture of the ideal community, in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, it proves to be one which has no need of raiment, and can have its food for the picking. Adam and Eve, living under the care of God in the perfect union of monotheism and monogamy, do not have to work. The "sweet Gardning labour" they indulge in is a supererogatory tribute to what has since come to be known as the Puritan work ethic, leaving them ample time for the really serious business of life: how to respond to the temptation and the challenge presented by the Tree of Knowledge.

At this point I find myself a long way away from the realities of community life in Renaissance England, though the question of the nature of the godly life and how to live it became an increasingly urgent one in many a family, especially about the time when the sixteenth century turned in the seventeenth, and ultimately had a profound effect on the country as a whole, converting it, to put the change in extreme terms, from merry England into the land of the English Sunday. Hexter provides me with a convenient way back. He writes:

The analysis in *Utopia* is radical. It stands at the opposite pole to the best-known piece of social analysis in Tudor literature — Ulysses' apostrophe to the principle of hierarchy in *Troilus and Cressida*. Shakespeare's splendid lines are only the most superb exemplar of the current orthodoxy. That human nature was red in tooth and claw, that by inclination men were wolves to other men, that they continually tended to fall into the savage war of each against each and that the sole safeguard against such horrors was the maintenance of the serried array of the existing order of society under its current rulers, was the firm conviction set forth to and for those who ruled in Renaissance Europe, to whom it doubtless made good listening. (IV. cxxi)

To that the purist in me retorts that the speech is not an apostrophe at all. But let that go. More to the point, I have my doubts about whether Ulysses' speech did make "good listening" to Elizabeth or James I, supposing that they ever heard it. If it did, they were more patient and, I would add, less exacting auditors than I am. Much given to working

"With windlasses, and with assays of bias," constantly seeking "By indirections [to] find directions out," and completely ineffectual in all his elaborate efforts to get Achilles back into the fighting line, the Prince of Ithaca is, as I see him, the Prince of Platitudes, Polonius in his prime. The play is, I would suggest, as sceptical about the hierarchical principle as it is about heroic war and romantic love. Delivered solemnly as a piece of high thinking — and such is the influence of *The Elizabethan World Picture* on producers and directors that I have never heard it delivered in any other way — Ulysses's speech is, in the theatre, excruciatingly boring. Nevertheless, it does make one contribution to my topic: it provides one of the two occasions on which Shakespeare actually makes use of the word "community." Both have their interest. The first occurs in *1 Henry IV*. In III. ii, the central scene of the play, the King tells his son, in the course of giving him a thorough dressing-down for his dissolute and reprehensible behaviour, that Richard II, to whom he is comparing Hal, appeared far too often in public, and, consequently, was

seen, but with such eyes
As sick and blunted with community,
Afford no extraordinary gaze,
Such as is bent on sun-like majesty
When it shines seldom in admiring eyes. . . . (11.76-80)⁵

"Community" there obviously means "over-familiarity" or "commonness"; its sense is strongly pejorative. The head of the commonwealth, says the king who has usurped the throne, cannot afford to become common property, lest the divine gift be rubbed off the royal gingerbread. Ulysses' use of the word brings it much closer to the sense in which we use it today. He asks:

How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenity and due of birth,
Prerogatives of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place? (I, iii, 103-8)

No editor that I have come across seems to find any difficulty in "communities," though its precise significance is, to me, far from self-evident. Schmidt⁶ very circumspectly glosses it as societies "living under the same regulations," which leaves me asking, "Which societies?" However, the context within which the word appears, together with the construction of those first three lines, moving forward, as they do, from communities to universities, thence to "brotherhoods in cities," signifying, I take it, guilds, companies, and corporations, and then,

finally, to trade with other countries which the companies carried on, suggests to me that the communities in question are the associations of men from which the student or the apprentice comes to join the more specialized communities, such as universities and city guilds, that is to say, the villages and towns of England, which, like so many stones of different shapes and sizes, formed the foundation on which the whole hierarchical structure of society rested. If this is indeed the case, then this instance is very early, for the *OED* gives no example of "community" meaning "a body of men living in the same locality" prior to 1600.

But, while this is the only occasion on which Shakespeare actually employs the word in something approximating to its commonest modern sense, both the idea and the reality of community have an important place in his work. The key play in this connection is, to my mind, not *Troilus and Cressida* but *Timon of Athens*, where the setting is a city state that proves to be remarkably like early Jacobean England in so far as its social arrangements and tensions are concerned. In it, at the opening of Act IV, the hero, having left, for good and all, the city which has exploited him mercilessly and then treated him with the grossest ingratitude, looks back upon it from beyond its walls, and curses it bitterly and comprehensively. Virtually turning the degree speech of *Troilus and Cressida* upside down, he says:

Piety and fear,
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,
Instructions, manners, mysteries, and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries,
And let confusion live. (11. 15-21)

It is a marvellously succinct yet thorough statement of the way in which a community such as the city of London was, in fact, composed, and of the proper manner in which it should ideally function; of the principles and institutions it should preserve; and, above all, I think, of the positive civilized benefits it should provide for all those who are members of it. The close-packed verse conveys, in its firm wedging of noun against noun, the sense and feel of a dense network of inter-connections and relationships, of smaller communities within the larger whole. First come the duty and fear, both proceeding from reverence, which men owe to God, and which make up the essence of religion. Then follow the great principles of "peace, justice, truth," which penetrate into every household, ensuring "Domestic awe," that is to say, the duty and obedience which all members of the household owe to its head, "night-rest," and "neighbourhood," the friendly and confident

dependence of man on man. And, finally, come the smaller communities of "trades," meaning the various kinds of manual activities, of "mysteries" or professions, and of "Degrees" or ranks, sustained by education, by custom, and by laws.

The terms in which Timon rejects the traditional notion of community and, in particular, the idea of "neighbourhood" which is so central to it, show clearly how much it has meant to him; but he rejects it all the more violently on that account, because his faith in it has been his undoing, and, worse still, has led to the complete reversal of his whole attitude towards his fellow-men. There are, of course, complications to be taken into account. He has indeed given unwisely, not to those in need but to those who already have more than enough. He has also given ostentatiously, and in a manner which allows for no kind of reciprocity. Above all, however, he has based his life on an unwarrantably optimistic view of human nature. He should have listened to the judicious Richard Hooker, who would have told him:

Two foundations there are which bear up public societies; the one, a natural inclination, whereby all men desire sociable life and fellowship; the other, an order expressly or secretly agreed upon touching the manner of their union in living together. The latter is that which we call the Law of a Commonweal, the very soul of a politic body, the parts whereof are by Law animated, held together, and set on work in such actions as the common good requireth. Laws politic, ordained for external order and regiment amongst men, are never framed as they should be, unless presuming the will of man to be inwardly obstinate, rebellious, and averse from all obedience unto the sacred laws of his nature; in a word, unless presuming man to be in regard of his depraved mind little better than a wild beast, they do accordingly provide notwithstanding so to frame his outward actions, that they be no hinderance unto the common good for which societies are instituted: unless they do this, they are not perfect. (I. 188)

Unfortunately for him, Timon has ignored Hooker's second foundation, a mistake that the More of *Utopia* did not make.

Timon's error in believing and acting on the assumption that "We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends?" (I. ii. 97-9), though disastrous for him, is at least a generous one and serves to increase one's impression of him, as the victim of a materialistic society, which, while paying lip-service to the idea of community, has, in fact, used that idea to enrich itself at his expense. Moreover, his fate has a representative quality about it. Partly through their own extravagance, but also through their inability to abandon old ways and learn how to cope with an economic system which was changing fairly rapidly, a considerable number of the aristocracy in Shakespeare's day found themselves deeply in debt; and

the break-up of a large estate, leaving those who had served on it and belonged to it homeless and destitute, as Timon's servants are left, was not an uncommon event. In 1516 More had had Hythlodides say: "where moneye beareth all the stroke, it is hard and almoste impossyble that there the weale publyque may iustelye be gouerned and prosperouslye floryshe" (pp. 104-5). That statement about the damage that money was doing to human relationships looks mild by comparison with the vigour of Timon's denunciation of gold when he accidentally turns some up while digging for roots in the woods:

Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,
 Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.
 Ha, you gods! why this? What this, you gods? Why, this
 Will lug your priests and servants from your sides,
 Pluck stout men's pillows from below their heads —
 This yellow slave
 Will knit and break religions, bless th' accurs'd,
 Make the hoar leprosy ador'd, place thieves
 And give them title, knee, and approbation,
 With senators on the bench. This is it
 That makes the wappen'd widow wed again —
 She whom the spital-house and ulcerous sores
 Would cast the gorge at this embalms and spices
 To th' April day again. (IV. iii. 28-41)

It is not surprising that Karl Marx should have quoted this passage in a note to *Das Kapital* (Part I, Chapter iii, Section 3a). It states in unforgettable terms the dire consequences of substituting "the cold cash nexus" for genuine human relationships.

From the evidence I have offered so far, it would seem that Hexter would have been well advised not to set Shakespeare in opposition to More. But there is further evidence of the same kind to come. Not long before he wrote *Timon* Shakespeare had written *King Lear*. Its significance is, of course, inexhaustible; but whenever I read it, one of the most exciting things it has to offer me is the moments in it when I have the sense of an electric spark leaping, as it were, across the gap of the ninety years that separate it from *Utopia*. That sense is, I think, at its strongest in IV. vi, the tremendous scene of "reason in madness," a topic which itself asks to be linked to Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae*. Speaking to the blind Gloucester, the mad Lear tells him:

A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in thine ear; change places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?

And then, as a kind of vision presents itself to his eye, he continues:

The usurer hangs the cozener.
 Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
 Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
 And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
 Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it. (11. 150-167)

I find it difficult when reading that not to hear behind it and chiming in with it the impassioned words of Hythlodaye's peroration:

Therefore when I consider and way in my mind all thies commen
 wealthes which now a dayes any where do florish, so god helpe me, I
 can perceau nothing but a certain conspiracy of riche men, procuringe
 their owne commodieits vnder the name and title of the commen
 wealth. (p. 303)

I am not, let me make it clear, suggesting that Shakespeare had *Utopia* specifically in mind when writing *King Lear*, though there is nothing inherently unlikely in that possibility; what I am saying is that his old mad king sees through the pretentious facade of order and degree with the same clarity as More does. Moreover, he sees through it for the same reason: he has witnessed and felt what absolute destitution means and he is filled with compassion for those who suffer it. There is much in sixteenth-century literature, as there is in the statute book, about rogues, vagabonds, and masterless men. A great deal of it regards them as an unmitigated and intolerable pest; some of it finds their wiles and their thieves' cant entertaining. More and Shakespeare stand alone in their capacity to set the reality of houseless poverty vividly and piercingly before us in all its "loop'd and window'd raggedness" (*King Lear*, III, iv. 31), a description which may well owe something to the ruined abbeys and monasteries of Shakespeare's day which had, before they were dissolved, provided some of the homeless with at least a temporary lodging. Equally striking is the similarity between the proposals both Lear and Gloucester make for alleviating some at least of the misery and More's communist solution of the problem. Lear says:

Take physic, pomp;
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
 And show the heavens more just. (III. iv. 33-6)

And Gloucester, almost echoing him, prays to the heavens:

Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man
 That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
 Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly;
 So distribution should undo excess,
 And each man have enough. (IV. i. 67-72)

Unfortunately, by the time they reach this understanding of the need for a greater equality in the distribution of man's worldly goods, neither Lear nor Gloucester has much, except his recently acquired wisdom, to give to anyone.

Shakespeare, it seems to me, stands with Hooker in his recognition that desirable though men may find the idea of community in the abstract, any real community requires laws, and the power to enforce those laws, if it is to sustain itself and achieve the ends for which it exists. Howhere in his writing is this realism more in evidence, to my mind, than it is in *The Tempest*, where, for the second time in his career, he actually makes a dramatic comment on an ideal society. The society in question is one

that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kinred, but common . . .⁷

The words are, of course, Montaigne's in his essay "Of the Caniballes," as translated into English by John Florio; and the society described there is that of the American Indians, as Montaigne pictured them. Shakespeare took those words, and more from the same essay, and put them into the mouth of the good but somewhat muddle-headed old counsellor Gonzalo, much as, rather more than twenty years earlier, he had taken the radical ideas of John Ball and put them into the mouth of Jack Cade in *2 Henry VI*. Like Cade, Gonzalo imagines himself a king who will use his absolute power to impose a communist equality on his subjects, which is, one recalls, precisely what More's King Utopus did. The process has the immediate effect of setting Montaigne's ideas in a highly critical light.

This, however, is but a beginning. It is the relationship between the essayist's picture of a society which needs neither laws nor magistrates, because its members behave naturally and therefore rightly, and the rest of the play that I wish to consider. Before the shipwreck takes place, the island, which has "everything advantageous to life," is inhabited by Prospero and his daughter, together with their two servants, Ariel and Caliban. In numbers and in the patriarchal control Prospero exercises, they approximate closely to the average English family of Mr. Laslett's *The World We Have Lost*. But it is not a happy family. Ariel, though well disposed, wants his freedom; and, while the head of the household has done his best to educate Caliban, much as George Herbert would have recommended, he has met with no success at all. Caliban, a creature of the senses, alive to his very fingertips in a way that makes all the other characters in the play, including Prospero,

look decidedly anaemic, and living in a kind of twilight of consciousness, will have none of it. Driven by the urge of the belly and the urge of the loins, he can only be kept under by the use of force; and the same method is required to compel him to work, an activity he loathes. Small though the population of the island is, it can scarcely be said to exemplify the community spirit.

No more can the two main groups who arrive from the ship. Stephano and Trinculo do, it is true, strike up an alliance with Caliban, but its purpose is to murder Prospero and take possession of Miranda and the island. As for the court party, finding themselves in the sort of situation which is supposed to bring out the best in men and lead them to co-operate with one another, Antonio and Sebastian react to it by attempting to murder Alonzo, even though, at the time when they reach this decision, they have, to the best of their knowledge, no prospect whatever of making their way back to Naples. It needs the constant vigilance and active intervention of Prospero, equipped, very significantly, with superhuman powers, to prevent the island from degenerating into something rather like that other island which William Golding writes about in *The Lord of the Flies*. In the end, the play's attitude to Montaigne's picture of the natural society and to his essay as a whole remains an ambivalent one. Caliban is infinitely preferable to the vulgar and vulgarizing savages of urban Europe, Stephano and Trinculo; and they, in turn, are preferable to, because less dangerous than, the unscrupulous, treacherous, royal savages, Antonio and Sebastian. To this extent Shakespeare is in agreement with the great essayist. But it is equally plain that, all this said, Caliban is still that in human nature which has to be restrained and subdued by force before any community can come into being. I do not pretend that this is all the play is about, or even what it is primarily about, though Prospero's wry response to Miranda's ecstatic outburst of wonder and delight, when she first sets eyes on the court party, suggests that I may not be so far out after all. The new community which emerges at the end of *The Tempest* is one that has been forged by the skill and intelligence of a Prospero who now takes into account those darker aspects of humanity which he so disastrously ignored twelve years before when he was Duke of Milan.

Now, there is a most interesting parallel, probably fortuitous, because I do not want to suggest that *The Tempest* is a socio-political allegory or anything of that kind, between what happens on the magical island and what happened in sixteenth-century England. The great internal problem which the country had to face during that period was the one that More had so clearly seen and responded to: endemic poverty of a kind, and on a scale, that left existing communities and institutions at a complete loss as to how to deal with it. Let me quote W. K. Jordan,

who writes thus:

England after the beginning of the fourteenth century was becoming a much more complex society, not only in the countryside at large but in the rapidly growing and prospering towns. Various ecclesiastical institutions and most particularly the monasteries and the many large hospitals, began to assume a larger role in the relief of at least conspicuous indigence, while in the towns the craft gilds in their various forms, undertook, usually under ecclesiastical auspices, the most effective social insurance and concern that the mediaeval world was to know. Then came the immense disaster accompanying the decline of the mediaeval society, resulting in a steady decay of institutions and of social attitudes . . . The decay of manors, the savage and destructive waves of plague, foreign and internecine wars, and the slow erosion of civil and economic order not only vastly worsened the problem of poverty but spawned a new kind of poor with which the sixteenth century sought to deal in an amazed and awkward incertitude. So convulsive was this long period that a once stable society was torn apart and masses of men – the dispossessed, the masterless, and the incompetent – were literally set in motion by irresistible forces as they sought first work that was not to be had and then alms which society was neither equipped nor disposed to give.⁸

As we all know, a solution was eventually worked out through a slow process of gradual understanding and of trial and error. It took the form of the Poor Law of 1597. Underlying that law lies the recognition that the problem was a national problem which could only be solved by the country as a whole becoming one community. Using the basic communities of the parishes as its instruments, the state literally forced men into taking responsibility for one another. To this extent More was at last vindicated. Two, to me, rather surprising consequences followed. The Poor Law, was, in large measure, the fruit of the efforts of preachers, moralists, and writers, who had succeeded in creating a national conscience responsive to the sufferings of those who were genuinely unable to find work. But this new-found conscience did not sit back, as it were, and breathe a sigh of satisfaction when the Poor Law was passed. It had developed a momentum of its own, which goes far towards explaining what at first sight seems something of an anomaly: the degree to which writers, including the Shakespeare of *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*, continued to attack the sin of avarice and to plead the case of the poor well into the seventeenth century, when the Poor Law was already taking effect, and when private charity, especially from the much satirised merchant class, was increasing at an unprecedented rate.

It is this growth of private charity which is the other surprising consequence of the passage of the Poor Law. The main motives behind it appear to be two. The first is the one I have already touched on: it became increasingly difficult for the man of substance to stand out

against the assault of exhortation directed at him, even if he felt tempted to do so, which in many cases he probably did not. The second is more subtle. Faced with a threat from the state, these same men of substance preferred to do the job themselves rather than be compelled to do it by churchwardens, parish overseers, and justices of the peace. The Milton in them, if I may so put it, helped the More in them to come out, with the result that the provisions of the Poor Law did not have to be applied very often. But that law was always there in the background, a great "two-handed engine" standing ready to put pressure both on those who might be reluctant to pay their dues and assist their needy fellow-men and on those who sought to live, as the most contumacious of the sturdy rogues and vagabonds did, by the labours of others while making no contribution whatever to the community themselves.

How did it all work out in the parishes, those essential cogs in the great machine, in the early seventeenth century? In this, the concluding part of my paper, I draw some evidence from one who was both an idealist and an extremely practical man. It was in 1626, when he was in his thirty-third year, or very shortly before that date, that George Herbert made his momentous decision to abandon all hope of a public career and dedicate his life to the service of God. He had himself ordained; but then a period of ill health and indecision intervened, so that it was not until 1630, when he had less than three years to live, that he became the rector of Bemerton, a mile or so from Salisbury. He was married, and he and his wife, having no children of their own, took the three orphaned daughters of his sister Margaret Vaughan to live with them. Together with their servants, whom Herbert refers to in the plural without giving their exact number, they were, at least in size, a typical family of that class at that time. Taking his parochial duties and responsibilities very seriously indeed, as one would expect of him, Herbert put together a little book, entitled *A Priest to the Temple or, The Country Parson his Character, &c.*, which was finally published, nearly twenty years after his death, in 1652. It is, I think, one of the most informative documents we have not only about the life of a parson but also about the life of his parish in what was, in effect, the golden age of the Church of England; and I shall quote extensively from it.

Herbert's household, like every other household of the time, is firmly patriarchal. He tells us explicitly that "The Parson is very exact in the governing of his house, making it a copy and modell for his Parish."⁹ Moreover, that household is strictly hierarchical. The parson respects his wife, but also keeps an eye on her running of the house, and makes a careful distinction between the way in which he treats his children and the way in which he treats his servants: "He keeps his

servants between love, and fear, according as hee findes them; but generally he distributes it thus, To his Children he shewes more love then terrour, to his servants more terrour then love; but an old good servant boards [comes close to] a child" (p. 241). However, those of his servants who can read "are allowed times for it," and those who cannot are taught to do so (p. 240). Furthermore, viewing his parishioners as an extension of the family, he also does everything in his power to encourage them, including the servants, to read. Throughout he has two main aims: first to make them "Christians, and then Commonwealths-men" (p. 239). His chief instrument in achieving these ends is his insistence on the virtue of charity; he exercises it himself, and he does all he can to inculcate it in others. But unlike Timon of Athens, he is discriminating in his way of exercising it. Approving whole-heartedly of the Elizabethan Poor Law, he writes:

He [the parson] first considers his own Parish, and takes care, that there be not a begger, or idle person in his Parish, but that all bee in a competent way of getting their living. This he effects either by bounty, or perswasion, or by authority, making use of that excellent statute, which bindes all Parishes to maintaine their own. If his Parish be rich, he exacts this of them; if poor, and he able, he easeth them therein. But he gives no set pension to any; for this in time will lose the name and effect of Charity with the poor people, though not with God: for they will reckon upon it, as on a debt; and if it be taken away, though justly, they will murmur and repine as much as he that is disseized of his own inheritance. (p. 244)

But, while his primary concern is with creating and developing a strong sense of community within his own parish, Herbert's parson also seeks to extend that sense more widely. Using precisely the word "Neighbourhood," which has such a central place in Timon's description of the community as it should be, Herbert writes:

Especially, if God have sent any calamity either by fire, or famine, to any neighbouring Parish, then he expects no Briefe [does not wait to receive letters patent authorizing a collection to be made in parish churches]; but taking his Parish together *the next Sunday, or holy-day*, and exposing to them the uncertainty of humane affairs, none knowing whose turne may be next, and then when he hath affrighted them with this, exposing the obligation of Charity, and Neighbour-hood, he first gives himself liberally, and then incites them to give; making together a summe either to be sent, or, which were more comfortable, all together choosing some fitt day to carry it themselves, and cheere the Afflicted. (pp. 253-4)

There is much about Herbert's ideal parson that reminds one of Chaucer's "povre PERSON of a toun" in *The Canterbury Tales* and emphasizes how little that ideal had changed in the course of two and a

half centuries, despite the intervening Reformation. In nothing do they resemble one another more than in their tough-mindedness in dealing equally with all their parishioners, no matter what their rank. Of Chaucer's parson we are told:

To drawn folk to heven by fairnesse
By good ensample, was his businesse:
But it were any person obstinat,
What-so he were, of heigh or lowe estat,
Him wolde he snibben sharply for the nones. (Prologue, 11.519-23)

Herbert's parson, demanding seemly and disciplined behaviour from his entire congregation, also makes no exception, for

If there be any of the gentry or nobility of the Parish, who sometimes make it a piece of state not to come at the beginning of service with their poor neighbours, but at mid-prayers, both to their own loss, and of theirs also who gaze upon them when they come in, and neglect the present service of God, he by no means suffers it, but after divers gentle admonitions, if they persevere, he causes them to be presented. (p. 232)

This procedure was no idle one. The presentation of the name of the offender to the bishop on his next visitation of the parish could lead to that offender's excommunication, which meant his exclusion not only from the communion service but from all church services and church activities; which, in turn, amounted to his total exclusion from the community, since all communal activities centred on the parish church.

Herbert's parson is similarly exacting in carrying out his other aim: that of making his parishioners good Commonwealths-men. Regarding idleness as "the great and nationall sin of this Land," he insists that every man should have a calling, including his own children. He does his best to make his eldest son a parson, and is prepared to apprentice his younger sons and daughters to some reputable trade. Nor does he hesitate to tell the idle young gallant to make himself useful in

advancing the publick Stock, and managing Commons, or Woods . . . But if hee may bee of the commission of Peace, there is nothing to that: No commonwealth in the world hath a braver Institution then that of Justices of the Peace; For it is both a security to the King, who hath so many dispersed Officers at his beck throughout the Kingdome, accountable for the publick good; and also an honourable Employment of a Gentle, or Noble-man in the Country he lives in, inabling him with power to do good, and to restrain all those, who else might both trouble him and the whole state. (p. 276)

Nor does the parson's influence in knitting his small community into the larger whole end on these dizzy heights; there is still a further step which he should encourage those with laudable ambitions to take. After telling the young noble or gentleman that he should frequent the ses-

sions and the assizes, and sometimes "go to Court," he gives him this piece of advice:

When there is a Parliament, he is to endeavour by all means to be a Knight or Burgess there; for there is no School to a Parliament. (p. 277)

That statement is rich in unconscious irony. At the time when the words were written no parliament was sitting, and no parliament would sit until seven years after Herbert's death. But when it did eventually sit in 1640, first as the Short Parliament, and then as the Long Parliament, what a school it proved to be! Herbert was absolutely right. But, while John Milton was delighted by the readiness and aptitude the members showed in learning their lessons, and while the young More who had stood out against Henry VII's demands for money in the Parliament of 1504 would, no doubt, also have approved of their proceedings, I do not think that Herbert, had he lived to see it all, would have shared the feelings of either.

At the end of the chapter which he devotes to "The Parson preaching" Herbert remarks: "The Parson exceeds not an hour in preaching, because all ages have thought that a competency" (p. 235). It is good advice; I take it; and therefore conclude.

University of Waterloo

Notes

1. *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven and London, 1953-), II. 523-26. Subsequent citations from Milton's prose refer to this edition, and, for convenience, appear, in parentheses, in the text. The same method is used for other works that are cited more than once.
2. *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More*, ed. J. H. Lupton (Oxford, 1895), p. 143.
3. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Vol. IV, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter (New Haven and London, 1965), cxxiii.
4. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. Christopher Morris (London, 1954), I. 189.
5. The text used for all quotations from and reference to Shakespeare's writings is that of *The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London and Glasgow, 1951).
6. Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare-Lexicon* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1923).
7. *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, done into English by John Florio, with an Introduction by Thomas Seccombe (London, 1908), I. 259.
8. W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660* (London, 1959), pp. 55-56.
9. *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1941), p. 239.