

The Recollections of Thomas More's Ghost

I

I drew lots for a haunt, locked still
in innumerable repetitions; decades have
framed an asbestos of time
crawling through the windows
of homes where I was witness
to children born into hairshirts
annulling their essences,
and the steady hands
tearing rinds from archetypes,
for careful strokes of Abraxa
in arguments where ends of prepositions
are of like length and distance.

II

What i hear of physics i sleep
away, and ignore my sore neck
from 1535. Vespucci disturbs dreams
in their hammocks of Latin where
far from Locke's orchard, gunpowder
spelled what else than rain rusted
ploughwheels in the west to cardinal reds.

III

As i woke, my hand brushed a bowl of
sycamore figs from the bedside;
their overripe skins cankering
as i throw them across the lawns.

IV

My senses have fevered and i am a sow
teething on its crate. I see Wolsey
flinch from my compressed sacraments,
building within themselves whatever they can –
aenemic, equidistant, unspoken things.
But at least they are not Oaths. I feel
walls for double doors I can open
beyond the nexus of possession,
to a space again, instead of places
marked with uncertain frames –
noli me tangere carved into handles
– withdrawing at the pace of our steps forward.

'The Recollections of Thomas More's Ghost', follows the conscience of Thomas More as a ghost, who wakes up in a stranger's house after drawing the lots every ten years (as in Utopia, More details that the inhabitants of Utopia will change houses every ten years by 'drawing lots'), in which the relativity of memories are scattered amongst his new knowledge of the past since his death, such as developments in science (in this case physics, which he wants to forget, to 'sleep away') and history. More, during these decades, watches the development of families and wonders from his observation of human nature the certainty of progress towards a utopia, with a typically postmodern anxiety. In the first section, More at a point in the distant

future watches children born into hairshirts (which More himself wore, and thus incites his empathy) to evoke the human condition of isolation in a chaotic universe, for which More as a Catholic believes they are born into a process of repentance. There is a reference to 'careful strokes of Abraxa [the original name of Utopia]', referring to the ambitions of humanity for constant social improvement that is reached by tearing 'rinds' – the layers of ideal worlds that have to be torn away in order to reach a greater archetype. However, More also makes the connection that the limits of a utopia correspond to the limits of language – that the 'ends of prepositions are of like length and distance', unwittingly echoing Wittgenstein's claim that 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'. In the second section, More experiences nightmares of America that are reminders that the supposed 'promised land' has failed its utopian promises, hence the 'cardinal reds' of the ploughs that are the blood of native peoples, evidence that the philosophies of John Locke hence 'Locke's orchard' referring both to the Edenic landscape of the New World, but also Locke's theory of property which would inevitably overwhelm Americans with notions of materialism, which would result in the genocide of the Native Americans and the exploitation of the land – hence the 'earnest plough'.

In the third section, the 'sycamore figs' refer to the symbol of the Ancient Egyptian poem 'The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor', (arguably one of the first pieces of utopian literature) in which the figs represent abundance and fertility, although in this section they have spoiled, and thus More throws them across the lawn, so that they will return to the earth. In the final section, More explores more philosophically the nature of our search for utopias, and questions their potential for achievability from his own experiences of the future and past, using progress, as explained through 'doors' which appear to withdraw from our approaches.