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CHAPTER ONE

# Paradox

THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA*

*There is an Air of Truth apparent through the whole; and indeed the Author was so distinguished for his Veracity, that it became a Sort of Proverb among his Neighbours at Redriff, when any one affirmed a Thing, to say, it was as true as if Mr. Gulliver had spoken it.*

—JONATHAN SWIFT, *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*, 1726

*What I remember now, most of all, is the make-up.*

—MARGARET ATWOOD, *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*, 1985

UTOPIA IS NOTORIOUS for its many paradoxes. How can one travel to a place that is not a place? Can a lie tell the truth? Is the perfect always imperfect? As a mode of thinking, paradox proceeds by antithesis rather than argument, asking us to hold two impossible ideas simultaneously. In this way, paradox operates indirectly, yoking together opposites in search of an insight that defies logic. Logic-defying paradox is integral to the structure of utopia, and it also endows the literary genre with its characteristic mood: playfully philosophical and seriously nonserious.<sup>1</sup> This lively, often maddening tendency toward self-contradiction

is key to the vitality of utopia as a literary form, and it is in the space created by such self-contradiction that this book begins.

Utopia and lying are braided together from the inception of the genre, when Thomas More publishes a fictional traveler's tale written in Latin about a remote island named Utopia, and pretends that his text simply transcribes an eyewitness report narrated by a fabricated adventurer named Raphael Hythloday. This deception begins in the paratextual materials that encase the "truly golden handbook . . . of the new island of Utopia [*libellus vere aureus . . . nova insula Utopia*]." <sup>2</sup> For example, a prefatory letter addressed by More to his "dear" friend Peter Giles places Giles at the fictional scene of first contact with Hythloday. More begins by confessing to Giles that "Truth in fact is the only thing at which I should aim and do aim in writing this book" (31). This "truth" seems to amount to a faithful reporting of Hythloday's words, a memory that Giles also supposedly shares. Yet at times More's memory proves unreliable: he confesses that he and his page disagree about the precise length of a bridge in Utopia. When the two cannot reconcile their different recollections, More turns to Giles for assistance:

So I beg you, consult your memory. If your recollection agrees with his, I'll yield and confess myself mistaken. But if you don't recall the point, I'll follow my own memory and keep my present figure. For, as I've taken particular pains to avoid having anything false in the book [*ne quid sit in libro falsi*], so, if anything is in doubt, I'd rather say something untrue than tell a lie. In short, I'd rather be honest than clever [*potius mendacium dicam, quam mentiar, quod malim bonus esse quam prudens*]. (35)

At this enigmatic moment the reader encounters the first marginal note in *Utopia*.<sup>3</sup> The note focuses our attention on the seeming tautology within More's letter, pretending to explain it away by instructing the reader to "Note the theological distinction between a deliberate lie and an untruth [*Nota theologiam*

*differentiam inter mentiri et mendacium dicere*]” (34–35). This modern English translation distinguishes More’s “*mendacium dicam*” and “*mentiar*” at the level of intention, which seems sensible: unwittingly saying something untrue is certainly different from “deliberately” telling a lie.<sup>4</sup> However, this translation urges greater clarity than may actually be present in More’s Latin text, and for that reason I prefer Ralph Robynson’s early English translation (1557), in which More promises his readers that “I wyll rather tell a lye then make a lie: bycause I had rather be good, then wylie.” The note then adds, “A diuersitie between making a lye, and telling a lie.”<sup>5</sup> This self-referential proposition—that *Utopia*’s narrator will not willingly “make a lie”—as well as the accompanying marginal gloss—which invites readers to distinguish between different kinds of untruths—constitutes the formal crux of *Utopia*.

Despite More’s disclaimer of any “wiliness,” the transaction between this passage and its gloss has the flavor of a game, provoking a tantalizing series of critical questions. What *is* the difference between making a lie and telling a lie? According to the common view, “lying” denotes an intention to mislead; thus, there is no lie if the speaker genuinely believes that what he is saying is true, nor is there a lie if the audience knows they are being told untruths.<sup>6</sup> Does this mean that the passage and its gloss are priming us to wonder about what Thomas More *really* believes or *actually* intends in composing the *Utopia*? Or is its purpose rather to emphasize to the readers of *Utopia* that the text is a fabrication and thus not to be taken at face value? To quote Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Thomas More did “make up” the text of *Utopia* and is not simply repeating what he has been told.<sup>7</sup> Whether or not we want to call More a liar, the claims of the prefatory letter *are* patently untrue, a fact that is implicit rather than stated outright.

If I were to follow the tempting invitation of the gloss and “note” the distinction between “*mendacium dicam*” and “*mentiar*,” I might begin by delving More’s own intellectual context.

That is, I could attempt to distinguish various forms of lying by recovering sixteenth-century concepts of religious casuistry, logical fallacy, poetic fabrication, rhetorical sophistry, proto-scientific hypothesis, or legal perjury. However, that will not be my approach. Rather than drawing on early modern knowledge discourses so as to mark a distinction between telling a lie and making a lie, this chapter will instead allow the paradox unleashed by this passage to remain unresolved. For the formalization of this paradox and its resulting logical impasse, I will argue, constitutes the primary means of utopian invention.

In stating obviously false things and naming them true, *Utopia's* author-narrator, "Thomas More," obliquely conveys the following message: "I am lying." This is an indirect act of what logicians would term propositional self-reference, and it evokes a widely familiar logical paradox known as the Liar's Paradox. The Liar's Paradox first emerges as an ancient riddle which asks, "When I lie and I say that I am lying, am I lying or am I telling the truth?" Any attempt to reason a response to this riddle results in a logical contradiction: the Liar's claim ("I am lying") is true if, and only if, it is false.<sup>8</sup> The irresolvable contradiction created by the Liar's combination of self-reference and negation has perplexed philosophers, logicians, and mathematicians for more than two millennia, linking the work of medieval scholastics to that of twentieth-century meta-mathematicians and cybernetic theorists. In reasoning with the Liar sentence "This sentence is untrue," one can only assert and then deny, assert and deny, assert and deny the truth of the Liar's claim to be lying, an antinomic judgment that indicates how the paradox captures an infinite process within a single formula.<sup>9</sup> In this chapter I will recover how scholastic logicians and modern mathematicians have grappled with the paradoxes of self-reference like that expressed by the Liar's Paradox (Part 1) so that I can describe how the impasse provoked by the paradox shapes the formal make-up of *Utopia* (Part 2). In so doing, I will demonstrate how

*Utopia* uses the abstracting, nonreferential formal techniques of logic and mathematics to inscribe and enclose an infinite, autonomous world.

In asserting that the impasse of the Liar's Paradox generates the form of *Utopia*, this chapter relies on a logical concept of form more familiar to scholastic philosophers than humanist counselors. Logical form is purified of reference and complete unto itself; it is thus, in the words of D. Vance Smith, "unimpeachably stable," providing an ontology in its own right for medieval logicians.<sup>10</sup> The "formalism" of logic (and, eventually, mathematics) is highly rigorous and technical, providing an artificial language that precisely defines each expression in the language. This abstract, theoretical organization of terms allows such a language to become a deductive tool; a "formalized language" is an ideal language that abstracts the structure of thought from its meanings, focusing instead on provability within the system. As the preeminent early-twentieth-century philosopher and logician Bertrand Russell declared in an essay titled "Mathematics and the Metaphysicians," logic, "broadly speaking, is distinguished by the fact that its propositions can be put into a form in which they apply to anything whatever."<sup>11</sup> Logical formulations express syntactical relations, but not variable *semantic* relations, which eliminates the unpredictability of "natural" or "ordinary" language, in which references might be vague, multiple, or otherwise misunderstood. Because such formalized language systems are occupied with provability rather than meaning, they are detached from worldly phenomena. For this reason, in the domains of logic and mathematics, "formal systems" are static, closed systems—not unlike the island of Utopia. Each formal system has a language comprised of symbols developed by inference from a set of axioms; this formalized language renders the system capable of generating abstract formulas.<sup>12</sup> In summary, to quote the philosopher and cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter, "formal systems in mathematics

are collections of rules for churning out *an endless series of mathematical truths* without any regard to meanings or ideas hidden in the shapes being manipulated.<sup>13</sup> Both scholastic philosophers and modern mathematicians were interested in developing a purified logic that manipulates symbols in terms of the laws that govern their combination within a given structure, rather than their interpretation vis-à-vis a reference outside of that structure.

*Utopia* comprises just such an autonomous system, detached from worldly phenomena and complete unto itself. I realize that this is a perplexing claim, in part because the content of *Utopia* so evidently manifests the defining features of the “early modern” era. The structure of the Utopian commonwealth conjoins colonial desire with a resistance to capitalist commercial practices; reveals the expropriation of Indigenous American social, political, and cultural life and knowledge in European political discourse; provides an ironic commentary on classical philosophical speculation; manifests the humanist investment in founding institutions for the production of virtue; navigates the perilous politics of the Tudor court with Machiavellian skill; and in so doing creates a rational pattern for an orderly commonwealth characterized by collectivism and compulsory labor rather than extremity and want.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, one key premise of this book is that the schematic *form* of the text is equally important to *Utopia*’s political energies as well as its profound impact on literary history, and that this form remains imperfectly understood.<sup>15</sup> Without denying *Utopia*’s historical profile, this chapter turns away from the “real” world, forgoes attempts to discern the meaning of *Utopia* via reference to the contexts informing its text, and instead enters the enclosed space of its formal system.

In comparing the form of *Utopia* to the nonreferential, artificial systems modeled by the logico-mathematical disciplines, this chapter outlines a theory of Renaissance art that centers

speculative abstraction rather than mimetic imitation. From the plays-within-plays of popular drama to the perspectival experiments of portraiture to the involuted plots of prose romance, early modern artistic productions are infamously reflexive and often self-referential. For many modern readers, aesthetic reflexivity defines the cultural epoch variably referred to as “Renaissance,” “early modern,” and “Baroque.”<sup>16</sup> That which is “reflexive” is capable of bending back (from the post-classical Latin *reflexivus*, “recoiling” or “directed upon itself”); reflexive literary texts flaunt their preoccupation with their own construction rather than privileging “reality” as the object of representation.<sup>17</sup> In an essay titled “When Fiction Lives in Fiction,” Jorge Luis Borges catalogs paradigmatic instances of early modern reflexivity, including the anonymous story collection *A Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf Layla Wa-Layla*), Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Pierre Corneille’s *L’illusion comique*.<sup>18</sup> Borges compares the literary technique of interpolating a fiction within a fiction common to all these texts to the painting within a painting depicted in Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*. This nesting technique fascinates Borges because it captures the problem of infinity—a painting reflected in a mirror reproduced in a painting, *ad infinitum*—as well as conveying the possibility of an ontological “oneness” in which fiction and reality conjoin.<sup>19</sup>

Though More’s *Utopia* is not included in Borges’s famous catalogue, the recursion whereby an act of self-reference generates an infinite cycle is also evident in this most quintessential Renaissance text. And yet, beyond noting its playful ironies, we remain curiously inattentive to the actual *form* of More’s invention, as well the most radical literary and political implications of that form: its capturing of infinity and the consequential destruction of stable perspective. I conjecture that this is in part because the poststructuralist identification of reflexivity as the organizing condition of all literature *qua* literature is a

“postmodern” idea that has become so familiar as to seem self-evident.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this overfamiliarity inclines literary scholars to discount the distinctiveness of the negating form of self-reference enacted by *Utopia*, which accomplishes something rather different from other metafictional artistic productions of its age.<sup>21</sup> As this chapter will detail, the paradox provoked by the Liar’s Paradox does *not* arrow toward the insight that “reality,” to quote Hernán Díaz, is “an administered construct rather than a mere given,” that is, that fiction and reality have already conjoined in a Borgesian unity.<sup>22</sup> *Utopia* cannot logically resolve the difference between the truth and untruth of its own self-referential proposition, and because of this impasse, the work retains its own distinct ontology. Rather than showing us something about the nature of reality, *Utopia* remains set apart from the wider world, forever predicating its own contradiction.<sup>23</sup>

Even though *Utopia* seals itself off from the phenomenal world, I do not view its antimimetic form as politically disengaged. Rather, in addition to spurring poetic invention, such internal action provides the political agency of *Utopia*’s abstract form, which perpetually summons alternatives to itself, within itself, making up a space of infinite possibility. In arguing that More’s *Utopia* transforms logical abstraction into a mode of poetic invention and political imagination, this chapter joins a broader critical endeavor in the literary humanities that is attempting to articulate the intellectual, ethical, and political resources of formal abstraction, the “drawing away” from the concrete (the term “abstract” is rooted in *ab-*, meaning “away from,” and *trahere*, meaning “to draw or pull”).<sup>24</sup> This work is born out of the conviction that abstraction is not necessarily a refusal to engage with the local, the personal, or the political; it can also comprise the search for new forms of connection across space and time, the search for a different plane of being. My own study of *Utopia* comprises an attempt to account for the peculiar power of its abstract form, which provides a durable structure for the invention (the “make up”) of artificial worlds.<sup>25</sup>

*Part 1: The Liar's Paradox*

*Unless I had a historian's devotion to fact, I am not so stupid as to have used those barbarous and senseless names of Utopia, Anyder, Amaurot, and Ademus.*

—“THOMAS MORE TO HIS FRIEND PETER GILES,  
WARMEST GREETINGS,” 1518

In keeping with this chapter's attention to matters of form, I will argue that everything that happens *prior* to the reader's encounter with the island itself secures the longevity and potency of *Utopia* as a literary space. Indeed, inspired by the pathbreaking work of Elizabeth McCutcheon, I propose that the interpretive crux of what I am calling, after the logicians, the Utopian *system* can be found in the *parerga* or “apparatus” of the text, which posits the Liar's Paradox as a fundamental framework for the *Utopia*.<sup>26</sup> This paratext is, to quote Gérard Genette's influential formulation, the *threshold* to the work.<sup>27</sup> In order to reveal the peculiarly generative power of this framework—an act of self-reference and negation that provokes an unsolvable logical impasse—I will recover a series of classical, medieval, and modern engagements with the Liar's Paradox. In trying (and failing) to “solve” the paradox, these engagements generate complex aesthetic structures that are intriguingly homologous to the form of *Utopia*. Notably, by instigating a reasoning process that can never resolve upon a single answer, the Liar's Paradox provides a compact formula for capturing infinity. Such a concept of infinity would otherwise be inaccessible to human experience, because infinity cannot be enumerated or represented or experienced: it can only be demarcated via a formal abstraction.<sup>28</sup> In this section I will first sift through the range of potential references that tempt us like bait to resolve the puzzle of More's promise not to make a lie. Then, having dispensed with these canny diversions, I will recover some aspects of the long history of the Liar's Paradox so as to delineate the key aspects of utopian

form: its use of enclosure to provide an image of infinity and its establishment of abstract hierarchies that are subsequently transgressed by formal recursions and strange loops.

Because of the complicated structure of nested allusions in More's prefatory letter to Giles, the presence of the Liar's Paradox is at first difficult to discern. One must first wade through a series of references that effectively mask its formal operations. Many have attempted to unlock the mystery of More's promise not to "make a lie" by searching for the meaning of the "distinction" the marginal gloss asserts between "*mendacium dicam*" and "*mentiar*." In evoking the idea of intention, the Cambridge translation by Logan, Adams, and Miller echoes the likeliest source, contained in the grammarian Aulus Gellius's *Attic Nights* [*Noctes Atticae*] (second century CE), a well-known commonplace book of notes on history, philosophy, and grammar.<sup>29</sup> In addition to Gellius's *Attic Nights*, More's letter also evokes the Preface to Lucian's second-century parody of traveler's tales, the *True History* (*Verae Historiae*). Lucian begins the *True History* by making a strange contract with the reader, promising that,

I shall be a more honest liar than my predecessors, for I am telling you frankly, here and now, that I have no intention whatever of telling the truth. Let this voluntary confession forestall any future criticism: I am writing about things entirely outside my own experience or anyone else's, things that have no reality whatever and never could have. So mind you do not believe a word I say.<sup>30</sup>

Lucian was a favorite author of More's. More may, perhaps, have shared Lucian's desire to satirize Plato's notorious analysis of lies in the *Republic*.<sup>31</sup> In this dialogue, Plato infamously criticizes the lies that poets tell about the gods, yet allows for a certain kind of "noble lie," a myth or untruth told by elites in order to maintain social harmony (the lie is "noble" by virtue of its civic

purpose). In this sense, though Plato banishes poets from his ideal commonwealth, the *Republic* nonetheless intimates that social reform requires some degree of fiction-making.<sup>32</sup>

However, if indeed the passage does allude to directly to Gellius and indirectly to Lucian, the marginal gloss's description of the "distinction" between "*mentiar*" and "*mendacium dicere*" as "theological" is strange, given that it appears to frame a citation of pagan works. Distrusting the idea that the words of a pagan grammarian could be honestly framed as "theological," scholars have searched for additional sources that might be hiding behind the allusion to the *Attic Nights*. But curiously, as Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter note, "the distinction does not seem to appear in moral guides by Aquinas, Antoninus, and Silvester, or even by a later authority like Alphonsus Liguori."<sup>33</sup> As Logan, Adams, and Miller concede in what I find to be a delightfully Morean (i.e., oblique) footnote: such a distinction "has not been located in the theological literature" (35). McCutcheon declares more forthrightly that this distinction is not "findable" in the sources; the implication is that either Erasmus or More invented the "theological" distinction. McCutcheon calls the conjuration of theological literature a "red herring," a seemingly plausible yet ultimately irrelevant diversionary tactic.<sup>34</sup>

Whether or not one concedes the point that the allusion to theology is a red herring, the note's potentially fabricated allusion to a "theological distinction" between making and telling a lie introduces an ironic perspective on More's promise to be truthful. The cryptic, misleading gloss suggests that there is a discrepancy between what More is saying about lying and what he *means*, a discrepancy that becomes ever more palpable as the *Utopia* continues. In its potentially ironic assertion of a "theological" distinction between "*mentiri et mendacium dicere*," the note *might* be mocking the scholastics for their notorious fondness for logical puzzles, particularly the Liar's Paradox.<sup>35</sup> A paradox is a logically self-contradictory statement; despite

apparently valid reasoning from true premises, it leads to a logically unacceptable conclusion.<sup>36</sup> The Liar's Paradox is an ancient one, discovered in the fourth century BCE by Eubulides of Miletus (ca. 440–ca. 380 BCE), a slightly older contemporary of Plato and a founder of the Megarian school of logicians.<sup>37</sup> First circulated in the form of a riddle (*pseudomenos*), the Liar's Paradox asked, "A man says that he is lying; is what he says true or false?"<sup>38</sup> This riddle, sometimes called simply "The Liar," soon became notorious in classical antiquity: Athenaeus reports that the poet and grammarian Philetas (ca. 340–285 BCE) perished from lack of sleep due to worry about the riddle.<sup>39</sup> Despite its apparent notoriety in antiquity, the first formulation of the Liar does not appear in the extant literature until Cicero's *Academica priora* (45 BCE), which invites readers to "Consider therefore whether you will approve the following syllogism: 'If you say that you are lying and speak the truth, you are lying [*Si dicis te mentiri verumque dicis, mentiris*]; but you do say that you are lying and speak the truth; therefore you are lying.'<sup>40</sup> The other primary ancient source for the Liar's Paradox is the *Attic Nights*, in which Gellius describes a series of "amusing sophistries and enigmas" discussed when spending the Saturnalia at Athens.<sup>41</sup> The narrator recalls seven questions put to the group during one such gathering, including the following: "When I lie and admit that I lie, do I lie or speak the truth? [*Cum mentior et mentiri me dico, mentior an verum dico?*]"<sup>42</sup> As these early treatments found, any attempt to reason with "the Liar" produces a logical self-contradiction, and neither Cicero nor Gellius offers a solution in their texts. The unsolvable paradox arises from the riddle's combination of self-reference and negation.

Because of these contradictions, one might dismiss the Liar's Paradox as a trivial or meaningless game. Certainly, it does nothing to solve the ostensible problem of distinguishing between "*mentiar*" and "*mendacium dicam*," which is easily resolved

by referring to the belief and intention of the speaker, that is, Thomas More. Such sophistries were disdained by Aristotle, yet successive generations of philosophers have treated the Liar's Paradox as a deep problem.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, repeated attempts at solving the paradox will culminate in twentieth-century insights that shed light on the function of self-reference in More's *Utopia*. In the Middle Ages, the Liar's Paradox became known as an "Insoluble [*insolubilia*]," and medieval logicians invented a number of complicated variants of the riddle.<sup>44</sup> "The Liar," as it was known, was a popular instrument of inquiry in medieval philosophy, discussed at length by a number of authors from the late twelfth century onwards (Paul of Venice listed fifteen different solutions to the paradox, which was also treated by Ockham, Buridan, and other major figures).<sup>45</sup> To quote just one medieval formulation of the paradox, Adam of Balsham's *Ars disserendi* (1132) asks "whether he lies who says nothing but that he lies [*An mentiatur qui nichil nisi se mentiri dicit*]" and "whether he says the truth who says nothing but that he lies [*An vere dicat qui nichil nisi se mentiri dicit*]."<sup>46</sup> After its medieval heyday, the Liar's Paradox next achieved a comparable philosophical prominence in the early twentieth century, when Bertrand Russell noticed that its logical structure was identical to a number of recently discovered mathematical paradoxes.<sup>47</sup> Debates between Russell and the mathematician Henri Poincaré led to a renewal of interest in logical paradoxes of all kinds, such that the Liar's Paradox went on to play a significant role in the evolution of metamathematical thought in the twentieth century, along with other paradoxes of self-reference.<sup>48</sup>

Despite more than two millennia of attention, logicians have yet to agree on a way of resolving the Liar's Paradox, that is, they have yet to eliminate its contradictory outcome.<sup>49</sup> Although philosophers have not satisfactorily "solved" the paradox, the stakes of the problem have long been evident: medieval logicians already realized that the logical contradiction of the Liar's

Paradox arises from the attempt to produce a certain kind of self-reference.<sup>50</sup> The Liar, as Hofstadter explains, provides a sentence that “refers . . . to the very sentence which it is.”<sup>51</sup> To quote the logicians William and Martha Kneale, the paradox thus reveals “the oddity of trying to make a statement say something about *its own* truth or falsity.”<sup>52</sup> As a result, Alexandre Koyré explains, “The Liar appears as a typical antinomic judgment: the truth of the asserted proposition entails its falsehood; its falsehood, in turn, entails its truth.”<sup>53</sup> Such attempts to reach a logical conclusion might conceivably proceed *forever*; for this reason, Rosalie Colie refers to the Liar’s Paradox as a classical paradox of infinite regress, forever oscillating between assertion and denial.<sup>54</sup> This infinite regress is the direct consequence of the Liar’s self-referentiality coupled with the negation of its own truth value.

To solve the Liar’s Paradox, one must somehow prevent logical propositions from referring to themselves. Such prevention requires the institution of strict rules that govern the artificial system into which the Paradox intrudes. This can be accomplished by the delineation of a series of hierarchical levels of abstraction within the system, each separated from the level below. For example, Russell attempted to solve such paradoxes of self-reference by developing a ramified “Theory of Types,” a formal language organized into an infinite hierarchy of orders of propositions. As Russell explains,

If we now revert to the contradictions, we see at once that some of them are solved by the theory of types. Whenever “all propositions” are mentioned, we must substitute “all propositions of order  $n$ ,” where it is indifferent what value we give to  $n$ , but it is essential that  $n$  should have *some* value. Thus when a man says “I am lying,” we must interpret him as meaning: “There is a proposition of order  $n$ , which I affirm, and which is false.” This is a proposition of order  $n + 1$ ; hence the man is not affirming any propositions of order  $n$ ; hence

his statement is false, and yet its falsehood does not imply, as that of “I am lying” appeared to do, that he is making a true statement. This solves the liar.<sup>55</sup>

The Theory of Types prevents a proposition from making a statement about the set of which it is itself a member. The primary aim of this theory was to prevent the constitution of a universal set, a Set of sets, whose members are all sets including itself. In other words, this artificial hierarchy (which distinguishes order  $n$  from order  $n + 1$ , etc.) was designed to forbid paradox, which is depicted as a looping back between distinct hierarchical levels, a phenomenon Russell referred to as a “Vicious Circle.” Translated into the realm of set theory, Russell’s Vicious-Circle Principle states that whatever involves all of a collection must *not* be one of the collection.<sup>56</sup> In Hofstadter’s words, Russell thus “invented an elaborate (and infinite) hierarchy of levels, all sealed off from each other in such a manner as to definitively—so he thought—block the dreaded virus of self-reference from infecting the fragile system.”<sup>57</sup>

Elegant though it may be, it was quickly apparent that Russell’s solution to paradoxes of self-reference had drawbacks, particularly in the context of natural languages (as opposed to the formalized languages of mathematics), in which sentences regularly and innocuously refer to themselves (as in the seemingly harmless self-referential sentence, “I am speaking English”). The failure of Russell’s theory of types to foreclose self-reference even within a closed, formalized system was ultimately demonstrated by the mathematician Kurt Gödel, whose first incompleteness theorem states that in any consistent formal system  $F$  within which a certain amount of arithmetic can be carried out, there are statements of the language of  $F$  which can neither be proved nor disproved in  $F$ .<sup>58</sup> Thus, for any such consistent formal system, there will always be statements about natural numbers that are true, but that are unprovable within the system. This theorem is the mathematical equivalent of the Liar’s Paradox.

Russell's conception of a formalized mathematical system in terms of a hierarchy of levels or frames, as well as Gödel's demonstration of the impossibility of securing the distinctions among such levels, has proven to be an evocative paradigm for discussions of artistic self-reference in literature, painting, and music. The most famous such case is Hofstadter's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (1979), which finds what Hofstadter terms Gödelian strange loops in such self-referential works as M. C. Escher's drawings and Johann Sebastian Bach's fugues. In such artworks, levels that are ordinarily seen as hierarchical—such as that which draws and that which is drawn—turn back on each other, creating what Hofstadter terms a “Tangled Hierarchy.” “A Tangled Hierarchy,” Hofstadter explains, “occurs when what you presume are clean hierarchical levels take you by surprise and fold back in a hierarchy-violating way.”<sup>59</sup> Language potentially creates strange loops when it talks about itself, whether directly or indirectly. In Hofstadter's words, “something *in* the system jumps out and acts *on* the system, as if it were *outside* the system”; we sense a “topological wrongness” with the inside-outside distinction blurred.<sup>60</sup> This is precisely how the theorist N. Katherine Hayles defines reflexivity: “*Reflexivity is the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates.*”<sup>61</sup> Citing Gödel, Escher, and Borges, Hayles continues, “reflexivity has subversive effects because it confuses and entangles the boundaries we impose on the world in order to make sense of the world. Reflexivity tends notoriously towards infinite regress.”<sup>62</sup>

Such a loopy entanglement is one of the signal achievements of *Utopia*. More creates a sense of “topological wrongness” whereby the formal system seems to act upon itself rather than being subject to the demands of author or world. As I will detail in the next section, *Utopia* achieves this topological wrongness by stratifying its own discourse into levels and then looping back across levels previously marked as distinct. As in Russell's Theory

of Types, this stratification cannot resolve the impasse that follows from the self-referential proposition contained in the Liar's Paradox, which negates its own truth value ("This sentence is false"). While *Utopia's* first marginal gloss might tempt us into using ideas of intention or worldly reference as an anchor to fix the meaning of the text and distinguish between *mentiar* and *mendacium dicam*, in fact the problem of distinction unleashed by the paradox *cannot be solved*. The question of the "real" falls by the wayside, as *Utopia's* proliferating frames attempt to include its own several discursive levels within a single logical set.

In order to highlight the *logical*, as opposed to the rhetorical or narratological ramifications of *Utopia's* elaborate looping structure, in the second part of this chapter I will argue that More's text is an abstract formal system akin to the artificial mathematical systems of Russell and Gödel. My formalized reading contends that the oft-observed movement between "worlds" in *Utopia* isn't from life to art, as indicated in Harry Berger Jr.'s influential formulation in "Second World, Green World."<sup>63</sup> Rather, the constitutive movement of *Utopia* is one that traverses different levels or sets *within* an already abstract system characterized by hierarchy and enclosure. Furthermore, it is the crossing of those schematic levels, rather than any external reference to the phenomenal world, that produces the most radical energies of the text: namely, its ability to proliferate its own form by negating itself. The uniquely abstract formalization of my argument suggests that *Utopia* generates its most profound "meaning" precisely because the design of the system makes it impossible to escape its closed and hermetic world. This comprises the power of the utopian form, which generates antinomies that simultaneously sustain and threaten its own totalizing structure. To put it another way, the ideological force of *Utopia* is its form, which denies stability to its own totalizing system. We can reckon with this mind-bending action by behaving like the logicians and turning away from the empirical, such that our interpretation remains captive within the insular, infinite world of *Utopia*.

## *Part 2: The Form of Utopia*

*My dear Peter, I was absolutely delighted with the judgement of that very sharp fellow\* you recall, who posed this dilemma regarding my Utopia: if the story is offered as fact (says he) then I see a number of absurdities in it; but if it is fiction, then I think More's usual good judgement is wanting in some matters.*

—“THOMAS MORE TO HIS FRIEND PETER GILES, WARMEST GREETINGS,” 1518; COMMENTARY BY GEORGE M. LOGAN, ROBERT M. ADAMS, AND CLARENCE H. MILLER, 1995<sup>64</sup>

*\* The identity of this sharp fellow is unknown—if indeed More didn't invent him.*

The “main” text of *Utopia* formalizes the paradox of self-reference introduced in the Letter to Giles and in so doing recursively predicates mutually contradictory things. From the beginning, “Thomas More,” a figure within the fiction of *Utopia*, entangles the roles of author and narrator in a strange loop, thereby making the artist part of the system being made up by the artist. The philosophical strategies deployed against the Liar's Paradox prompt me to explore the effects of this entanglement from *within* the abstract formal system of *Utopia*, rather than positing a determinate historical “frame” as a means of interpretation. In fact, I would posit that any attempt to discern More's “intention” or “politics” results in an irresolvable antinomy that simply returns the reader to the space defined by the fiction. As many readers and scholars have found, one of the most disorienting aspects *Utopia* is how difficult it is to locate a “frame” *outside* of its system. For example, *Utopia*'s precipitating historical contexts—Tudor economic privation and European colonialism—are already, like the killer in the classic horror film, *inside* the narrative. Thus, *Utopia* manages to preemptively enclose its own literal causes within its fictional space.

Indeed, space itself becomes central to More's invention. Part I of this chapter recovered a number of philosophical and logico-mathematical treatments of the Liar's Paradox in order to assert that *Utopia's* dynamic frames create an elaborate series of hierarchical enclosures that allow the text to construct infinite space. Here, I will begin by providing a more detailed analysis of the formal system that comprises the *Utopia*, demarcating its levels to expose generative moments of level-crossing, or self-reference and negation. As is often noted, *Utopia* includes an elaborate supporting apparatus of letters, maps, alphabets, and other attestations to the empirical truth of the island (whose Greek name means either "no place" or "not-place"), an apparatus that in subsequent editions was expanded with further letters and woodcut images. These various textual elements are seemingly intended to validate the elaborate fiction at the center of the volume, which presents Hythloday's report as a true travel narrative akin to Amerigo Vespucci's popular *Four Voyages* (described in two widely read pamphlets published in 1503 and 1505). In keeping with this pretense, More insists that he is not the author of his "handbook" but merely its recorder. Like the island of Utopia itself, accidentally encountered by an intrepid European explorer, this apparatus allows More to present the text of his treatise as *discovered* rather than made up.

According to the events narrated in Book I, after a chance meeting on the streets of Antwerp, More, Hythloday, and Giles agree to return to More's house. "There in the garden we sat down on a bench covered with grassy turf to talk together" (47); as part of this conversation, Hythloday narrates a dinner party he once attended at Cardinal Morton's home in England, during which time he described a variety of polities he had encountered on his travels, thereby narrating a series of inset utopian fictions. The constitution of each of these kingdoms throws into relief the extreme disparities in wealth that characterize Tudor England. At the end of his narration of the dinner party, Hythloday declares forthrightly to More and Giles what has already

been heavily implied by the anecdotes from his travels, that is, that “I am wholly convinced that unless private property is entirely abolished, there can be no fair or just distribution of goods, nor can the business of mortals be conducted happily” (103). More and Giles immediately express skepticism about the feasibility of such a socioeconomic system, at which point Hythloday declares that he has already seen such perfect governance in action, on the island of Utopia. He proposes to describe that commonwealth so as to persuade More and Giles that such a society could and does exist. This wager—“If you had seen them, you would frankly confess that you had never seen a well-governed people anywhere but there” (105)—provides the formal bridge to Book II, which consists of Hythloday’s extensive description of Utopia.

The fiction of *Utopia*’s composition and publication forms an initial frame for the traveler’s tale. It is first unfolded in the opening lines of the prefatory letter addressed by More to Giles:

My dear Peter Giles, I am almost ashamed to be sending you after nearly a year this little book about the Utopian commonwealth, which I’m sure you expected in less than six weeks. For, as you were well aware, I faced no problem in finding my materials, and had no reason to ponder the arrangement of them. All I had to do was repeat what you and I together heard Raphael relate. Hence there was no occasion for me to labour over the style, since what he said, being extempore and informal, couldn’t be couched in fancy terms. And besides, as you know, he is a man not so well versed in Latin as in Greek; so that my language would be nearer the truth, the closer it approached to his casual simplicity. Truth in fact is the only thing at which I should aim and do aim in writing this book.

I confess, my dear Peter, that having all these materials ready to hand left hardly anything at all for me to do. Otherwise, thinking through this topic from the beginning and

disposing it in proper order might have demanded no little time and work, even if one were not entirely deficient in talent and learning. And then if the matter had to be set forth with eloquence, not just factually, there is no way I could have done that, however hard I worked, for however long a time. But now when I was relieved of all these concerns, over which I could have sweated forever, there was nothing for me to do but simply write down what I had heard. (31–33)

Despite More's disclaimer of any compositional effort, these first lines immediately establish the characteristic verbal style of the entire volume—the use of elaborate grammatical and rhetorical negations—as well as announce one of its most persistent themes: the pursuit of “truth.” Playfully, the letter affirms its commitment to truth in the form of an elaborate deception. Indeed, though “Thomas More” and “Peter Giles” are real, historical people who did in fact coincide in residency in Antwerp in 1515 while More was on a court delegation to the Low Countries, they are also literary characters animated by More, and here we meet them as such. To put it another way, in reading this letter, we are already *inside* the fiction of Utopia, though we might not realize it at first. As McCutcheon has noted, this is the first of many instances in which More entangles and thereby marks the frames that ostensibly separate the different spaces that comprise the fiction.<sup>65</sup> To a sophisticated reader, this letter's straightforward assertion of simplicity communicates a meaning different from the literal sense of the words.<sup>66</sup> We seem to be squarely in the realm of humanist irony, a posture modeled on the classical idea of the philosopher as one who distances himself from commonsense understandings of the world. This philosophical model usefully doubles as a method of social distinction in that it excludes those less canny readers who are unable to perceive the “other,” or implied, sense of the letter.<sup>67</sup>

As McCutcheon has argued, this prefatory letter provides a kind of hermeneutics instructing us how to go about

interpreting the text of the *Utopia*. Those instructions are implicit rather than stated outright, and in this case, produce an irony: the letter *means* something other than what it says. When More professes to adopt a simple style, he draws our attention to his own rhetorical sophistication; when he disclaims any labor of composition, he invites us to appreciate his own artistry. These messages are transmitted at a different level from the purely denotative meaning of the letter (at the denotative level, the words of More's letter mean precisely what they say). This unwritten, "metacommunicative" level frames the exchange between More and Giles and provides the reader with implicit instructions for decoding the meaning of the messages offered within the frame. And the message of the prefatory letter is that of the Liar: this proposition is lying about itself. As we now know from the above history I have constructed of the Liar's Paradox, the impasse generated by the Paradox is more disruptive than a merely generalized sense of irony (in which meaning is understood to reside *elsewhere* than in the literal words of the text). When we encounter a seemingly ironic claim in *Utopia*, we aren't simply being instructed that the author means something other than what the text says. Rather, we're drawn into a paradox akin to the Liar's Paradox, wherein every attempt to move outside of the text onto the more stable ground of its meaning simply pulls us further back inside. The truth of the Liar's Paradox isn't elsewhere; it's alternately both here and there, forever.

The relationship between the elaborate framing devices of *Utopia*, including the letter to Giles and the description of the island of Utopia, has long obsessed scholars, particularly since Hexter's discovery of indirect evidence that More composed the description of the island in Book II first and wrote Book I second, as a belated addition that frames the presentation of the island of Utopia.<sup>68</sup> Any reader who comes to the text hoping to read a straightforward description of "the new island of Utopia" must first submit to the demands of its complex and elaborate frame, one that is further multiplied by tales within

tales. In order to reach that firsthand description of the island, the reader must first pass through all prior narrative levels, moving from the prefatory letters, to the journey into the garden in Antwerp, to the description of Cardinal Morton's dinner party, to the wager, and at last to Hythloday's report of what he has seen on the marvelous island of Utopia. This nested structure, I am arguing, emerges in response to the impasse created by the Liar's Paradox. Like Russell's theory of types, every question the text posits about itself requires the construction of a new narrative level, one that promises to resolve the problem, but in fact only necessitates the addition of further levels within the work, *ad infinitum*.

The nested narratives of Book I are interleaved by an ongoing dialogue among More, Hythloday, and Giles about the service that a humanist philosopher owes to prince and commonwealth. For many scholarly readers, this dialogue of counsel constitutes a mimetic fiction of what Joel Altman famously termed the "Tudor play of mind." In arguing on both sides of the question—should a philosopher enter royal service?—the debate between More and Hythloday represents the explorative character of early modern thought. Ambivalence was carefully cultivated in the Tudor schoolroom, with the result that arguing on both sides of the question became a primary method of political inquiry, theological speculation, scientific investigation, and moral development in the sixteenth century.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, the staged disputation between More and Hythloday could be read as a performance that establishes that Thomas More, *himself*, is equipped to live a responsible public life. This is, one might argue, the *real* value of the back-and-forth, which establishes the *ethos* of the author of the *Utopia*. A touch less cynically, one might also understand the fictional dialogue of counsel in Part I of *Utopia* as enacting a standard humanist protocol for practically resolving difficult questions, one that uses a divided perspective to triangulate a moderating course of action.<sup>70</sup>

What I am proposing in this chapter is that expert readers forestall this plausible interpretation long enough to notice the

abstract form of the debate between More and Hythloday, which functions like a binary operation that fails to combine into a solution because it keeps turning back on itself. Examined from this formalist perspective, the relationship between More and Hythloday's conversations and similar concerns in the prefatory material constitutes another strange loop, as More both accepts and denies the value of his own advice. Early in the conversation, Giles expresses polite amazement that Hythloday has not joined the court of a prince:

My dear Raphael. . . I'm surprised that you don't enter some king's service; for I don't know of a single prince who wouldn't be very glad to have you. Your learning and your knowledge of various countries and peoples would entertain him, while your advice and supply of examples would be helpful at the counsel board. (51)

More concurs, advising that "you would be an extraordinary counsellor to any king in the world" (53). Hythloday demurs, but More continues to press the case:

I am fully persuaded that if you could overcome your aversion to court life, your advice to a prince would be of the greatest advantage to the public welfare. No part of a good man's duty—and that means yours—is more important than this. Your friend Plato thinks that commonwealths will be happy only when philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers. No wonder we are so far from happiness when philosophers do not condescend even to assist kings with their counsel. (81–83)

In response to this entirely conventional description of the civic responsibility of a humanist scholar, Hythloday proposes a hypothetical scene of counsel. In this imagined scene, Hythloday advises an imaginary king that "his honour and his safety alike rest on the people's resources rather than his own" (91). Hythloday underscores this advice with yet another embedded story

from his travels, featuring the Macarians, whose king must take an oath that he will never have more than a thousand pounds in his treasury; to his credit, he “cared more for his country’s welfare than for his own wealth” (95). Hythloday then asks More whether such ideas might profitably be set before a king and court. And so, in response to the urgent question of how the philosopher should shape the political life of his country, the text creates additional levels within the fiction. What masquerades as a concrete proposition about political philosophy—that is, as a piece of political *content*—in fact simply enacts in miniature the ramifying procedures of Utopian form.

Not surprisingly, More recommends against sharing such unwelcome counsel with any king, for, “What good can it do? When your listeners are already prepossessed against you and firmly convinced of opposite opinions, how can you win over their minds with such out-of-the-way speeches?” (95). More continues, “there is another philosophy, better suited for the role of a citizen, that takes its cue, adapts itself to the drama in hand and acts its part neatly and appropriately. This is the philosophy for you to use” (97). This alternate way works via *indirection*: rather than announcing uncomfortable opinions outright, “by an indirect approach, you must strive and struggle as best you can to handle everything tactfully [*sed obliquo ductu conandum est atque adnitendum tibi uti pro tua virili omnia tractes commode*]—and thus what you cannot turn to good, you may at least make as little bad as possible” (97).<sup>71</sup> In Ralph Robynson’s early English translation, More here advises that Hythloday adopt a “crafty wile and a subtell trayne” when attempting to counsel a prince.<sup>72</sup> This advice directly echoes and inverts the dilemma expressed in More’s prefatory letter to Giles, a recursion made evident in Robynson’s translation, in which More promises Peter Giles that he intends to be good rather than “wylie” (in other words artful, crafty, guileful, devious). These two avatars of “Thomas More,” narrator and author, alternately avow their own craftiness and steadfastly renounce such

artfulness, offering readers no means of resolving upon which promise is “true” or “real.”

Hythloday, like the Thomas More of the prefatory letter to Giles (and unlike the Thomas More who lives within the main text of *Utopia*), disdains his new friend’s suggestion that he practice a “crafty wile.” “The only result of this,” Hythloday declares, “will be that while I try to cure the madness of others, I’ll be raving along with them myself. . . . Whether it’s the business of a philosopher to tell lies, I don’t know, but it certainly isn’t mine” (97–99). He later adds, “As for that ‘indirect approach’ of yours, I simply don’t know what you mean” (99). Hythloday and Thomas More (the writer of the prefatory letter) speak for authenticity while Thomas More (the literary character in conversation with Hythloday in Antwerp) advocates an acquiescence to fiction. This argument echoes the antinomy first introduced in More’s letter to Giles, that is, the difference between lying and “making a lie.” But it does not resolve that antinomy, it merely enacts it once again at another level of the fiction. This is no moderating truth procedure but rather the predication of a contradiction capable of cycling in on itself forever.

I have recounted the sequence these exchanges in such pedantic detail to demonstrate how the moments when various avatars of “Thomas More” pretend to tell us what they *really think* about how to govern a commonwealth are formalizations of the impasse provoked by the Liar’s Paradox. Pages ago, the letter to Giles and its gloss have already tempted us to make sense of its contradictory assertions by zeroing in on More’s intentions in making up the *Utopia*. This recurring mirage of authorial intention includes the final misdirection that concludes Book II, when, in a direct address to the reader, More confesses,

When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that not a few of the laws and customs he had described as existing among the Utopians were really absurd. These included their methods of waging war, their religious practices, as well

as other customs of theirs; but my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy. This one thing alone utterly subverts all the nobility, magnificence, splendour and majesty which (in the popular view) are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth. But I knew that Raphael was tired with talking, and I was not sure he could take contradiction in these matters. . . . So with praise for their way of life and his account of it, I took him by the hand and led him in to supper. (247-49)

Here, at the end of the journey, the character Thomas More reminds us once more that there is a gap between what he says to Hythloday and what he truly believes. And by now we are well primed to suspect that this seemingly direct confession of More's true belief is ironic. But though we may suspect with good reason that our author does not *mean* what his narrator says (that, for example, "nobility, magnificence, splendour and majesty . . . are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth"), this does not guarantee that "Thomas More" means the opposite of what "Thomas More" says. The cumulative result of this wily indirection, which warns *us* against connecting words to referents or expressions to intentions, is that the full "meaning" of the text remains obscure or, perhaps, paradoxical. To adopt the terms if logic, the text of *Utopia* recursively predicates mutually contradictory things. We haven't moved closer to "reality," only further away.

Any attentive reader will notice that the lengthy disagreement about how to advise a prince, and whether one should directly state one's true opinion, is providing us with a clue as to the mode of the text, and not a very subtle one, at that. But though we know we are being directed, indirectly, we still haven't been told how to distinguish between the dead end and the correct path out of the maze. The danger, as Hythloday already intuits, is that *Utopia* is so wily that any intended message, if such a thing exists, has been lost in a welter of contradictory alternatives. This abstract view of the dialogue, a view

I have been patiently constructing in this chapter, allows us to see that the seeming disputation between fictional characters does *not* enable action (*if* action is understood as something that would move us out of the text and into the world), because the recursions of the dialogue have no evident terminus (as attested by the proliferation of the textual apparatus in the years after *Utopia's* publication). Rather, *Utopia* simply continues to inscribe additional levels within its own system. The text generates intractable antinomies and uses them make up a multi-leveled artificial realm. This self-unfolding is what delivers us to the island of Utopia in Book 2, suggesting that the island is the enactment of a metaphysical impossibility (the Set of all sets, which is a member of itself).<sup>73</sup>

When, if ever, are we allowed to move outward from *Utopia* into the world it is presumably intended to explain, to talk about *meaning* as well as form? Every attempt to escape the system simply provides an opportunity for another recursion within the programmatic space of the fiction. Take, for example, one of the later letters appended to *Utopia* in the years following its first publication. In this letter, More's friend Peter Giles explains to a fellow humanist named Jérôme de Busleyden why it is that More cannot report the precise location of the wondrous island of Utopia, despite having learned about the island from Hythloday, supposedly one of Vespucci's actual companions. Giles explains:

As for More's difficulties about locating the island, Raphael did not try in any way to suppress that information, but he mentioned it only briefly and in passing, as if saving it for another occasion. And then an unlucky accident caused both of us to miss what he said. For while Raphael was speaking of it, one of More's servants came in to whisper something in his ear; and though I was listening, for that very reason, more intently than ever, one of the company, who I suppose had caught cold on shipboard, coughed so loudly that some of Raphael's words escaped me. (27)

This cough, an “unlucky accident,” is an interpretive crux akin to the marginal gloss on *mendacium dicam*, one that appears at the very moment that the text must identify the physical location of Utopia and situate the “no-place” within the actual world. The cough sharply foregrounds the complicated exchanges between fiction and reality—or, rather, between “inside” and “outside”—within and around the text of *Utopia*. This fictional sailor has caught a cold on Vespucci’s “real” voyage (albeit a voyage that itself had already been fictionalized in a series of sensationalized traveler’s reports), and his cough prevents Giles from learning the precise latitude of the island of Utopia, which, according to the fiction, can be reached on a journey between what we would call the “real” locations of Brazil and the European continent. The cough not only justifies More’s omission of this latitude but also lends verisimilitude to the invented dialogue between two men (More and Giles) and a fictional character (Raphael Hythloday).

Is Peter Giles lying when he reports this “unlucky accident”? In one sense, yes; certainly he is lying. Raphael Hythloday did not exist until Thomas More wrote *Utopia*, there never was any conversation in the garden in Antwerp, certainly not one interrupted by the eruption of an ill-timed cough. At the same time, it seems mistaken (or at least naïve) to charge a fiction with deception—as Philip Sidney writes in the *Defense of Poesy* (ca. 1579), “What child is there, that, coming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes?”<sup>74</sup> Ostensibly deriving from outside the space of *Utopia*—the letter is penned by Peter Giles, not Thomas More, a person presumably with independent agency, added only after the text had already been in published circulation—the cough in fact functions as yet another recursive pull-back into the maze of the system. Like More’s promise to “tell a lie” rather than “make a lie,” the cough marks a strange loop; it signals the impossibility of escaping the space of *Utopia* by referring to what it “means.” When faced with such attempts, utopia continues to both refer to and negate its own truth propositions rather than allow its readers to revert to a world outside of itself.

I hope it is now evident that the emphasis on truth and lies in the prefatory apparatus of *Utopia* was part of a devious ruse, an attempt to distract readers with questions of signification and belief, which are matters of philosophy and rhetoric, when in fact the primary energies of utopian fiction are generated via self-reference and negation within a closed system, that is, as matters of logic and mathematics. One of the many trap doors set by *Utopia* is that in seeming to posit truth and falsity as an interpretive paradigm, these prefatory letters tempt us to resolve the opposition in some kind of solution, to move too quickly from the realm of fiction to that of “actuality.” But we might instead follow a different path. The form of *Utopia* animates virulent contradictions—namely, the paradox of a form that refers to the negation of itself rather than attempting to represent the world—transforming them into a dynamic space. This pure formalism, ironically, constitutes utopia’s radical political potential: its ability to reroute the reader’s experience and confound their perspective, thereby converting enclosure into an engine of unpredictable and unrelenting expansion. The work takes on a new character of freedom, but that freedom is inside rather than outside of its own perfectly paradoxical space.

### *Epilogue: Utopian Studies without Utopia*

*We organise here, a lovely, perverse refuge, and within its mazy spaces we will gather and enclose all that we need.*

—ELIZABETH PRICE, “A RESTORATION,” VIDEO AND SOUND  
INSTALLATION AT THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM,  
OXFORD, U.K., 2016

My recovery of how the Liar’s Paradox instigates the artificial system inscribed by *Utopia* reveals how More’s model of literary invention turns away from worldly phenomena and refuses representational reference, not unlike the scholastic philosophers so often derided by the cosmopolitan humanist

*(continued...)*

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