

Janusz Tazbir

THOMAS MORE IN POLAND

The article discusses the knowledge of Thomas More's life-history and writings in Poland during the 16th-18th centuries and is based for the most part on Polish old prints from that period. The tragic death of the author of Utopia had rather wide repercussions in Poland especially in the Catholic circles. The first news of More's execution was imported to that country by Erasmus Desiderius who had many admirers and friends there.

More's works, however, were relatively little known in spite of their occurring in some Polish libraries of the 16th-18th centuries. Utopia had pretty sceptical reception what is relevant to the fact that the varied tales about ideal states and societies were rather not widely read in Poland. The first Polish translation of Utopia did not appear until 1947. This is not an evidence of Polish civilization being younger but of its interests having a different deviation.

Thomas More became quite soon widely known, not only in his own country but throughout Western Europe, above all as the author of *Utopia* and, thereby, the founder of a new philosophical and literary kind. Reaching Poland, on the other hand, was More's fame — while he was still alive — as a distin-

guished humanist, "the man most learned in Latin and Greek"¹ and an official of high rank at the court of Henry VII. This is how he appeared to Jan Dantiscus, Sigismund I Jagiellon's envoy to Emperor Maximilian, who visited London in September 1522. Dantiscus was received by Cardinal Wolsey and by the King, and had the opportunity of meeting More (then Treasurer of the Excheques and knighted for a year already), as well as his brother-in-law, John Rastell, a member of the expedition to America.² Dantiscus was not only a skilful diplomat but also a talented poet and an extensively educated representative of the Polish Renaissance.³

The circle of Polish admirers and friends of Erasmus Desiderius of Rotterdam⁴ also found in the latter's letters information on More and, in particular, on the tragic end of the great Chancellor's career. Already in a letter of 27 August, 1528, written from Basel to Jan Łaski (John a Lasco), whom Erasmus had met there four years earlier,⁵ the author of the *Praise of Folly* consoled himself that, although things were not going well in England, he had there a few men on whom he could rely — and More was

¹ Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, MS. 6557, folio 38 (*Tomus XIII Epistolarum Regis Sigismundi Primi et Ioannis Dantisci, Oratori Regis*), and H. Barycz, *W blaskach epoki Odrodzenia [In the Splendour of the Renaissance Era]*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 49-50.

² Cf. *Polski słownik biograficzny [Polish Biographical Dictionary]* vol. IV, Kraków 1938, p. 426.

³ This has recently been discussed extensively by H. de Vocht, *John Dantiscus and His Netherlandish Friends as Revealed by Their Correspondence, 1522-1546*, Louvain 1961.

⁴ This milieu is characterized by K. Żantuan, *Erasmus and the Cracow Humanists; the Purchase of His Library by Łaski*, "The Polish Review", vol. X, No. 2, Spring 1965. The only mention concerning Poland in the preserved correspondence of Thomas More is to be found in the letter to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (dated 21 September, 1526) and refers to the "Chancellor of Poile" (Chancellor of Poland — at that time it was Krzysztof Szydłowiecki); *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by E. F. Rogers, Princeton 1947, p. 370.

⁵ Łaski, a Catholic priest from a wealthy magnate family, stayed with Erasmus for a few months in 1525, and payed for it generously; cf. O. Bartel, *Jan Łaski*, Part I: 1499-1556, Warszawa 1955, pp. 80-84, and: K. Żantuan, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11. After his return to Poland, Łaski settled in Cracow for some time.

one of them.⁶ Five years later (21 March, 1533). Erasmus informed Łaski from Basel that the King had consented to More's resignation from the office of Chancellor. In fact, this letter was for the most part devoted to More.⁷ Erasmus wrote in warmest terms on the qualities of the man to whom he had dedicated his *Praise of Folly*, on his intelligence, education and eloquence, as well as on the way in which he was discharging his duties. "Everybody around says there has never been before so competent and more just a Chancellor", Erasmus wrote and, at the same time, gave Łaski to understand that More had to resign his functions so as "not to diverge from the road of truth and godliness." And, while he did not sentence adherents of the Reformation to death,⁸ he could not, after all, tolerate its progress. The characterization of More's milieu, of his merits and, above all, of his activities as a judge ("he is superior to twenty doctors")—all this shows that Erasmus was aware that the person of the English Chancellor was not too well known in the country to which his letter was addressed.

In his answer (written around 25 August, 1533), Łaski reported from Cracow to Erasmus that he fully approved of More's decision to resign the office of Chancellor. Łaski, member of a magnate family entrapped in numerous intrigues, wrote: "In the present times, the holding of just these offices, not only forces one to shut one's eyes to many things but also to acquiesce against one's own conscience." It is impossible to undertake anything without incurring danger; in Poland, too, advocates of the Reformation make themselves heard which may bring about dangerous disturbances—stated Łaski (who, incidentally, was later to become a leader of Polish Calvinism).⁹ On 22 August, 1534, Erasmus wrote in a let-

⁶ P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, H. W. Garrod, *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* (quoted below: Allen), vol. VII, 1527–1528, Oxonii 1928, No. 2033, p. 454.

⁷ *Ibidem*, vol. X, 1532–1534, No. 2780, pp. 179–181.

⁸ This problem has to this day remained a matter of discussion.

⁹ P. S. Allen et al., *op. cit.*, vol. X, No. 2862, pp. 294–295. Łaski did not expect that fifteen years later he would become the superintendent of foreign congregations in Protestant London (1550–1553).

ter to the Cracow councillor Jost Decius¹⁰ that he considered quite unlikely the rumour according to which “three best and most learned men of England, the Bishop of London John Stochleus, the Bishop of Rochester John Fisher and Thomas More, until recently the King’s Chancellor, have remained in prison for a long time.”¹¹ Yet the rumour was true: More had been imprisoned already in April 1534 and, in view of the unyielding attitude of the author of *Utopia*, his ultimate fate was sealed.

In his biography of Erasmus, Huizinga gives expression to surprise that Fisher’s and even more so, Thomas More’s death on the block found no reflection in Desiderius’ correspondence in spite of the fact that the loss of two such distinguished and close friends must have been a shock to him. Huizinga adds, however, “some of his utterances may have escaped us.”¹² This is what actually happened and what has recently been noted by Zofia Szmydtowa:¹³ we learn of the tragic fate of More and Fisher from Erasmus’s letters to Piotr Tomicki, Bishop of Cracow since 1524, an outstanding humanist, patron of arts and science, and bibliophile. Tomicki did not know Erasmus personally but they were brought closer together by similar intellectual predilections and high humanistic culture. According to Szmydtowa, the author of *Utopia* and Tomicki had also many traits in common: they were both characterized by great self-control and moderation, invariable cheerfulness, high culture of feelings, readiness to help everybody but especially the wronged and the needy. Finally, Tomicki like More, “would not be put off from his decisions by anybody’s threats or by any danger [...]” (as we read in his 16th-century biography).¹⁴

No wonder, therefore, that Tomicki must have received with

¹⁰ Decius, who met Erasmus in Basel in 1522, was also a historian, economist and secretary to Sigismund I the Jagiellon; cf. K. Zantuan, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹¹ P. S. Allen et al., *op. cit.*, vol. XI, 1534–1536, No. 2961, p. 33.

¹² J. Huizinga, *Erasmus, deutsch von W. Kaegi*, Basel 1951, p. 205.

¹³ Z. Szmydtowa, *O Erazmie i Reju [On Erasmus and Rej]*, Warszawa 1972, p. 160 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 174–175 and 178–179. Cf. also K. Zantuan, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–18.

particular sympathy the news on the sufferings of another distinguished humanist who chose to remain faithful to his principles (and to the Catholic Church). On 28 February, 1535, Erasmus, already seriously ill, informed Tomicki (from Freiburg in Breisgau) that John Fisher, "a greatly learned and very pious man, and Thomas More, England's star of exceptional brilliance until recently the King's Chancellor," still remained in prison because they recognized the Pope as head of the Church, which in England is punished by death.¹⁵ The fact of their death (Fisher was executed on 22 June, More on 6 July, 1535) reached Poland, i.a. by Erasmus's letter to Tomicki. On 31 August of the same year, the author of *Enchiridion* wrote to Cracow: "From the fragment of the letter I am sending to you, you will learn of the fate that befell to the Bishop of Rochester and to Thomas More. England has never had men saintlier than these two. I have the feeling that my own soul died in More's body, it was so so strongly bound to these men — if I may refer to Pythagoras' beliefs."¹⁶ Erasmus could confide this heaviest loss — in such moving terms (overlooked by Huizinga) — only to someone of whose understanding and sympathy he was convinced.

More's fate was known in Poland not only from the letters of Erasmus to Tomicki but also from the correspondence between Jan Dantiscus and his Dutch friends. The Emperor's diplomat, Georgius Scepperus, maintaining regular letter contact with Dantiscus, wrote from Lüneburg on 27 October, 1535 that the English king, once a defender of the Church, had sentenced to infamous death many innocent people, among them Fisher and More whose heads had been exposed to the public view on a London bridge. They were so punished because firstly they refused to recognize Henry VIII as the head of the Church in England, secondly they condemned his sinful marriage.¹⁷ In his answer (dated 23 December, 1535), Dantiscus who had known More personally, deplored the execution of so learned and saintly men ("*doctissimorum virorum et vere sanctorum*"). This shows — he wrote — how many

¹⁵ P. S. Allen et al., *op. cit.*, vol. XI, No. 3000, p. 79.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, No. 3049, p. 221.

¹⁷ H. de Vocht, *op. cit.*, pp. 252–253.

saint and good people must suffer for the truth. The tyrant (i.e. the English king) together with the accomplices of his crimes, will not elude God's just judgment for this. With these words, the Polish humanist (and Bishop of Chełmno) acknowledged the news about the death of the author of *Utopia*. On 30 December, 1536, the well-known Catholic polemicist John Cochlaeus partook with Dantiscus of his reaction to the news of Fisher's and More's death.¹⁸ He considered Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury the main culprit of this tragedy.

At the same time, the first prints on More began to reach Poland quite early; the king's physician Jan Antonin, in his letter of 9 August, 1536, addressed to Erasmus Desiderius (at that time already deceased for a month), wrote that he delighted in reading *Expositio Fidelis de Morte D. Thomae Mori*.¹⁹ More's other biographies were read, and information on the author of *Utopia* was found, above all in the works of Sanderus: *De Visibili Monarchia Ecclesiae Libri Octo* (1st ed. 1571) and *De Origine ac Progressu Schismatici Anglicani Libri Tres*, by the same author (1st ed. 1585). Detailed information on the life of Thomas More, on his conflict with the King and of his martyr's death was also contained in Robert Turner's speeches which Archbishop Stanisław Karnkowski, one of the leaders of Counter-Reformation in Poland, had in his library.²⁰ Although all More's works, including *Utopia*, reached

¹⁸ *Acta Tomiciana*, vol. XVII, Wrocław 1968, pp. 674 and 739, and H. de Vocht, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

¹⁹ P. S. Allen et al., *op. cit.*, vol. XI, No. 3137, p. 346. The first edition of this work appeared with no indication of the place and date of publication, the 2nd edition was published in 1536 in Antwerp. Circulating in Poland was also the German translation: *Ein glaubwürdige Anzeigung des Tods Herrn Thome Mori und anderer trefenlicher Manner inn Englland geschehen im Jar. 1535*, with no place of publication, 1536.

²⁰ Cf. R. Turner, *Orationum volumen primum, Coloniae Agrippinae* 1615, pp. 112–124 (speech: *De D. Thoma Anglo, Martyre...*). Dissenters, on the other hand (as, e.g. Jan Laetus, an adherent of the Czech Brethren, staying in Poland, did in 1637), obtained their information on More from Jacques Auguste de Thou (*Historiarum sui temporis*) and from Chapter 27 of Polydorus Vergilius's work (*Historiae Anglicae*); cf. O. Odložilik, *Moravšti exulanti Jiři a Jan Veselšti-Laetove*, "Časopis Matice Moravské", vol. LIV, 1930, No. 1/2, p. 142.

Poland,²¹ in the religious polemics of the 16th–17th century he figured above all as a martyr for the cause of Catholicism, one of the most fervent defenders of papacy. It is in this character, too, that More was cited by the leading writers of Polish Counter-Reformation : Krzysztof Warszawicki, Stanisław Rescius²² and Jakub Wujek.²³ Although More was not beatified until three and a half centuries after his death (1886), and canonized (together with Fisher) only in the 20th century (1935), the king's preacher Piotr Skarga included the English Chancellor among the saint martyrs who gave their life for the faith. According to Skarga's *Lives of the Saints*, he preferred to renounce his office rather than pass (contrary to his conscience) death sentences on the opponents of the King's church policy. Because he would not consent to Henry VIII's adulterous marriage, he was put in gaol. Even there, however, he did not knuckle down and bravely defended himself before public opinion, maintaining that a layman cannot be head of the Church. Sentenced to death for this, he went serenely to the execution; his head was later exposed to public view stuck on a pale. Skarga characterized More as a greatly learned man, the author of treatises against Luther and other heretics (he does not mention *Utopia*). He also stresses the fact that More, although coming from a low social order, did not at all get rich in the high office.²⁴

²¹ They are at present to be found, i.a., in the old prints departments of the Libraries of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Gdańsk and Kórnik, of the University Libraries in Warsaw and Wrocław, of the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, of the Main Library of the University in Toruń, in the City Library in Toruń, as well as in the Czartoryski Library in Cracow (e.g. the 1518 edition of *Utopia*) and in the H. Łopaciński Library in Lublin.

²² S. Rescius, *Vita D. Stanislai Hosii*, in: *Stanislai Hosii Epistolae*, vol. I, Kraków 1879, p. LXV (*Acta Historica*, vol. IV).

²³ J. Wujek, *Dialysis*, Poznań 1580, folio H₄. More is cited here, together with John Fisher and other Catholics, whom Protestants tried to convert to their faith "by sword and fire."

²⁴ P. Skarga, *Zywyoty świętych [Lives of the Saints]*, Part 2, Kraków 1585, pp. 1125–1126.

One hundred years later, Jan Kwiatkiewicz in his *Roczne dzieje kościelne* [*Annals of Church History*] wrote in similar terms of Thomas More (under the year 1535). He notes that the English King sentenced to death John Fisher and Thomas More because “they condemned the divorce with Catherine and refused to recognize the king as the head of the Church of England.” More openly opposed the King, invoking the Bible, and forbade his own daughter to weep after him. His head, before being exposed to public view, had been boiled for a long time, so as to make it seem smaller.²⁵ Neither Skarga nor Kwiatkiewicz (both Jesuits, for the rest) were original in their works: *The Lives of the Saints* were partly a compilation (from Thomas Stapleton and other authors) while Kwiatkiewicz borrowed abundantly from *Annales Ecclesiastici* by Baronius and from *Annalium Ecclesiasticorum* by Abraham Bzowski who had devoted several pages to More’s case.²⁶ Sanderus, on the other hand, was the main source for the Dominican friar Aleksander Dowgiało who, in the beginning of the 18th century, cited many details from Thomas More’s life. In accordance with the customs of the Baroque period, they also contained anecdotes intended to amuse the reader (e.g. the story that More’s two wives were both of short stature because, as he said himself, from two evils he would always choose the lesser). At the same time, however, Dowgiało presented More as the ideal of a good judge; he wrote much of his modesty, devoutness and profound sense of justice. When the King adopted Reformation, More resigned his office. He would not be broken in prison, nor would he yield to the persuasions of his wife and daughter. With the same courage with which he had reprimanded the King for living with a con-

²⁵ J. Kwiatkiewicz, *Roczne dzieje kościelne* [*Annals of Church History*], Kalisz 1695, fol. 658. Also referring to More is B. Rychlewicz, *Kazania[...] na cały rok* [*Sermons[...] for the Whole Year*], Kraków 1698, p. 159, in connection with a severe condemnation of luxury and of seeking sumptuous clothes and jewels.

²⁶ A. Bzovius, *Annales Ecclesiasticorum*, vol. XIX, Coloniae 1630, pp. 866–871; cf. also *ibidem*, pp. 506 and 848.

cubine,²⁷ he went to his death that earned him “the crown of the saint martyrs.”²⁸

Writing on More in Poland were, above all, the Jesuits because they had at heart the fate of their confrères martyred in England. Thus, they availed themselves of every opportunity to show in disadvantageous light the King who had established Reformation in that country, and to recall martyrs for the faith, first of all Thomas More. It was only in a play produced in 1736 on the stage of the school theatre at the Zamość Academy, that More was presented somewhat differently. Disregarding historical truth, the anonymous author presented More’s appointment to chancellorship and Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon as facts that occurred at the same time (while actually they were separated by twenty years). The English King, prompted by debauchery and drink, sentences Catherine to banishment and her offended father declares war on England. In response to More’s admonitions, the King has him imprisoned and then decapitated. The novel motif in this play consists in the fact that More appears in it as a fighter (and martyr) not for the Catholic faith alone. He defends above all the laws and liberty of his country, threatened by the monarch’s licence and tyranny. Such an approach to the problem could have resulted from the traditions of the Zamość Academy which had always endeavoured to bring up youth in the spirit of patriotic attachment to basic Polish freedoms.²⁹

On the whole, however, the rather laconic information on More

²⁷ A. Jurgiewicz maintained already in the 16th century that Sanderus had obtained from More’s papers the information that Elisabeth I was born from incestuous relations of Henry VIII with his own daughter Anne Boleyn (A. Jurgiewicz, *Anatomia libelli famosi et scurrillis Andreae Volani Lvoviensis Apostate*, with no place of publication, 1591, folio C₃).

²⁸ A. Dowgiało, *Niebo sprawiedliwym, piekło grzesznikom przez historyje i przykłady* [Heaven for the Just, Hell for the Sinners, through Stories and Examples], vol. I, Supraśl 1714, pp. 50, 66–67, 459–461.

²⁹ Preserved has only been a synopsis of this play [called *Messis immortalium trophaeorum ex triumphalibus palmis Thomae Mori cancellariae Angliae*], published by J. Turnau, *Messis trophaeorum Thomae Mori*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego,” series A, No. 2, 1956, pp. 211–218.

fail to touch upon any general problems that might arise in the readers' minds in connection with More's fate — such as the question of relations between Church and State³⁰ or the limits of the subject's obedience to the ruler. Another noteworthy fact is that neither the Catholic nor the Protestant sources on the executed Chancellor mention that he was the author of *Utopia*. This does not mean, however, that this work remained unknown in Poland in the period of Renaissance and Baroque. Dantiscus and Hosius read it and in the writings of several Polish political authors we can find not only traces of the lecture of *Utopia* but even certain borrowings from that work.

The unquestionably most distinguished among these authors, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, in his work *De Republica Emendanda* (1st ed. 1554), formulated the postulate of the universal obligation of work (whether intellectual or physical) which resembles to a certain extent the compulsion of work (in the trades or on the soil) that existed in *Utopia*. Both More and Frycz condemned big lords surrounding themselves with a train of loafers. According to both writers, it is idleness that leads to thieving. We also find in both authors the institution of election of priests by the faithful.³¹ While concurrences with *Utopia* in Modrzewski's work may be incidental, Jacopo Paleolog was undoubtedly a careful reader of this work. This eminent representative of Italian heterodoxy was active in the 16th century in Poland, Moravia and Transylvania. In a manuscript left by him, *Catechesis Christiana* (1574), written in the form of dialogues, there appears, among others, a young Indian named Telephus. He relates that prior to the discovering of America, his ancestors lived a completely idyllic life. They hated wars, engaged mainly in the cultivation of land and did not know money. As far as forms of cult were concerned, com-

³⁰ Writing with a certain approval of the execution of More and Fisher was the already cited Protestant Jan Laetus — cf. Note 20.

³¹ Pointing to these concurrences is W. Voisé, *Frycza Modrzewskiego nauka o państwie i prawie* [*Frycz Modrzewski's Science of State and Law*], Warszawa 1956, p. 114; on the other hand, E. Lipiński, *De Copernic à Stanislas Leszczyński. La pensée économique et démographique en Pologne*, Paris 1961, p. 46, emphasizes the differences between Frycz and More.

plete tolerance prevailed. Anyone could worship God any way he pleased; Telephus's countrymen worshipped the stars and the moon but, in so doing, they were paying tribute to the supreme deity which had created all that. The Czech scholar, Dostálová, compares respective fragments of *Utopia* with the Paleolog manuscript (published after four hundred years only) and demonstrates that the above ideas were beyond any doubt borrowed from *Utopia*.³²

Taking More's *Utopia* as his model, especially as regards the construction of the work, was the distinguished publicist of Polish Counter-Reformation, Krzysztof Warszawicki. To begin with, the name of his work: *De Optimo Statu Libertatis* (Cracow 1598) referred to the English writer's treatise (*De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia Libri Duo*). Warszawicki was undoubtedly familiar with the work of More whom he mentions in his works as a saint martyr for the cause of Catholicism.³³ He must have met the beginnings of More's cult during his stay in London in 1554 (at the wedding of Philip II with Mary Tudor). He studied his epigrams and it would have been most unlikely for him not to know *Utopia*, at that time already translated into several languages.

Warszewicki's work was written in the form of a dialogue and is divided into two parts. In the first part, the critical element is prevailing while in the second we find specific suggestions for the organization of a better system of government. This resembles the construction of *Utopia*, the obvious difference consisting of course in the fact that in Warszawicki's opinion such a better system was an absolute monarchy, governed in a lordly fashion while More

³² Cf. Jacobi Chii Palaeologi, *Catechesis Christiana dierum duodecim*, ed. R. Dostálová, Varsoviae 1971, pp. 62–63 and 55, and A. Pirnát, *Die Ideologie der Siebenbürger Antitrinitarier in den 1560^{er} Jahren*, Budapest 1961, pp. 87–88. Familiar with More's *Utopia* was also Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius).

³³ Cf. K. Warszawicki, *Memorabilium rerum et hominum coaevorum descriptio*, Cracoviae 1585, folio Hb₂ (More's name, preceded by an "s" is listed under the heading "scriptores"); by the same author, *De morte et immortalitatae animae*, in: *De cognitione sui ipsius libri tres*, Cracoviae 1590, folio 86, and *De concilio et conciliaris principis liber*, Rostochii 1597, folio S verso.

thought of a classless society, knowing no tyranny and class distinctions. Both Warszewicki and More introduce three characters of which only two actually carry on the dialogue. The third person (in *Utopia* — Peter Egidius, in Warszewicki's book — Filip Padniewski) only renders the conversation of the other two easier.³⁴

In *De Optimo Statu Libertatis*, the second participant of the discussion is the Polish diplomat and humanist Jan Ocieski, of whom we know that his attitude towards the vision outlined by More was sceptical. In a manuscript, lost today, Ocieski wrote that laws should be made so as to take into account live people and their needs. Both Plato and Morus, on the other hand, in writing their works, had in mind only ideal individuals. And yet, the author of *Utopia*, whom "the people let die at the hand of the executioner", should have known better the "human flock." The lack of bread and garlic has always been more important to them than "the overthrow of altars and the taking away of general freedom," Ocieski wrote. Łukasz Opaliński, a Polish political writer of the middle of the 17th century, expressed similar views on More's work. This well-connected magnate wrote that he left "Thomo Moro" the liberty of establishing in his imaginary Republic such conditions as he liked. He himself, for one, preferred to listen to advocates of political realism like e.g. Eprius Marcello, a Roman senator of the early Empire, cited by Tacitus.³⁵ Jan Sachs from Gdańsk also stated that although More in the second book of his *Utopia* excluded lawyers from his ideal State, he himself would rather agree with the Spanish jurist, F. D. Saavedro who had written that it was impossible to dispense completely with lawyers.³⁶

On the other hand, More was at the same time referred to with approval by Aleksander Aron Olizarowski, professor in the Vilna Academy, a fervent defender of the peasants and advocate of

³⁴ Pointing to these concurrences is T. Wierzbowski, *Krzysztof Warszewicki, 1543–1603 i jego dzieła [Krzysztof Warszewicki, 1543–1603 and His Works]*, Warszawa 1887, pp. 211–212.

³⁵ J. Tazbir, *Prehistoria polskiej utopii [The Prehistory of Polish Utopia]*, "Przegląd Humanistyczny," 1966, fasc. 3, p. 19.

³⁶ (J. Sachs), F. Marinius, *De scopo reipublicae Polonicae, Vra-tislaviae* 1665, p. 147.

strong royal power. The demand contained in his treatise *De Politica Hominum Societate*, that gentry youth should learn trades and commerce, was supported by the authority of the English utopian. Indeed, in *Utopia*, "the republic established in the wisest manner on the basis of reason", all inhabitants are obliged to physical work. The total population is engaged there in the cultivation of land; in addition, everybody is learning some trade (lighter for women, harder for men). Olizarowski treats with evident approval the system prevailing on the island invented by More, and especially, the obligation of work existing there. At the same time, however, he sees the model of an ideal State in the "guild system of the English towns"³⁷ rather than in More's ideal vision.³⁸

All we have cited above, shows however, that the interest in *Utopia* was minimal in Poland. Its 16th- and 17th-century editions in our libraries have been preserved in excellent condition. The margins free of any notes show that *Utopia* was not read too eagerly. The same, for the rest, is true of similar works by Bacon and Campanella.

Pondering over the reasons for the absence in old-Polish literature of descriptions of ideal societies, living in isolation on an island invented by the author or in some exotic land, Aleksander Świętochowski wrote that old-Polish society had been unable to create a utopia because it was "a gentry society, most unreceptive to democratic ideas that are the soul of utopism."³⁹ This explanation cannot satisfy us today. It is true that the utopians' ideal was a city-state, virtually devoid of history, living in far-reaching isolation from foreign influence, characterized by demographic sta-

³⁷ E. Lipiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 207 ff.: the chapter called "Alexandre Olizarowski, disciple de Thomas More;" and A. A. Olizarowski, *De politica hominum societate libri tres*, Dantisci 1651, pp. 106-107.

³⁸ Referring, among others, to More, was the Calvinist nobleman studying in Leiden, Władysław Drohojowski, in his treatise *De foederibus* (1655) — cf. S. Kot, *Polen in Breda in de 17e eeuw*, in: "De Oranjeboom," deel VII, 1954, p. 99. Drohojowski's treatise is now kept in the British Museum.

³⁹ A. Świętochowski, *Utopie w rozwoju historycznym [Utopias in Their Historical Evolution]*, Kraków 1910, p. 341.

bility and based on complete social equilibrium that excludes the existence of any class privileges resulting from the very fact of being born in a given class. At the same time, however, nearly all the pictures of an ideal society, from Plato's *Politeia*, to the visions of More or Campanella, envisaged the existence of strict principles of social discipline, of constant control over citizens exercised by censors appointed for this specific purpose, of far-reaching interference in the private life of citizens — briefly speaking, the functioning of the State at flagrant variance with the democratic ideas Świętochowski mentions.

All this must have undoubtedly alienated the gentry from any type of utopia. Even more important, however, was the fact that all utopias were a latent but very sharp form of criticism of the social and political order prevailing in Europe at the time. The demands for a radical change of the system, contained in those works, was unacceptable to Poland's ruling class and the most enlightened representatives of that class, quoted by us, gave expression to this. There was no need in Poland for wise advice from the inhabitants of Utopia or Civitas Solis as to what ought to be changed in the existing system; if one reached at all for foreign works, it was to find in them advice on how to avoid dangers threatening the Republic.

Thus the conservatism of the gentry, which already in the 16th century considered itself unique in its kind and did not wish to learn from anyone, constituted an effective barrier both against the appearance of Polish varieties of utopias and against the reception of foreign works of this type. It seems, all the same, that the non-reception of utopias in Poland in the Renaissance period should be explained in a different way than the dead silence on this matter in the later period. Claude Backvis seems right in remarking that utopia is usually born under circumstances that render its implementation absolutely impossible. It demands everything because it can attain nothing; its maximalism results from disbelief in the real possibility of any change. This is why, in the conditions of Poland's political and social life in the 16th century, full of unlimited possibilities, transformations and actually carried-out changes, in the period when the boldest reform plans were

advanced, one still believed in the possibility of their implementation and did not look for compensation in visions of an ideal world being created somewhere.⁴⁰

The next century brought, on the one hand, a stabilization of the system of government, on the other hand — the appearance of the Sarmatian type of culture, with interest directed towards internal matters. The absorption in Poland's own current problems resulted in the fact that even the Polish intellectual elite showed hardly any interest in "far-away islands," whether those discovered by Columbus and other explorers, or those which Morus, Bacon or Campanella had marked on the map of man's intellectual explorations and dreams. The attitude of the citizens of the Commonwealth of the gentry towards those "far-away islands" was probably to some extent determined by the fact that in a certain degree they felt themselves inhabitants of one of such islands. Instead of the sea, it was surrounded by a ring of enemies; when Jan Ostroróg said at the Sejm of 1605 that "the Polish Crown has more enemies than all other kingdoms [...] it is encircled by them all around,"⁴¹ he was expressing the opinion of the majority of the gentry. The inhabitants of the Polish island in the 17th century differed from their neighbours in three basic aspects which largely accounted for the specific character of Poland's culture; those were: the religious difference (since the neighbours were Lutheran, Orthodox or Islamic), the difference in customs (which found expression in Sarmatism), and finally the difference of system, since in most neighbouring countries absolutism was then beginning to prevail. In theory, Poland attained a system of government as perfect as those utopian models propagated by More or Bacon, and territorial acquisitions that could compare with the colonial possessions of other countries. In practice, however, both her system of government and the necessity of maintaining her vast acquisitions, caused to Poland so much trouble that her citizens had little time for, and did not feel much like, interesting

⁴⁰ C. Backvis, *Le courant utopique dans la Pologne de la Renaissance*, in: *Les utopies de la Renaissance*, Bruxelles 1963, p. 165.

⁴¹ A. Strzelecki, *Sejm z r. 1605 [The Sejm of 1605]*, Kraków 1921, p. 110.

themselves in what was happening in other, far-away, exotic and semi-mythical islands.

Theoretically speaking, the situation should have changed in the Age of Enlightenment when one proceeded to a thorough reform of the Polish State. The models of new and radical solutions had all the chance of at least arousing interest. In fact, utopian literature gained at that time in Poland well-disposed readers. There also appeared Polish attempts at creating this kind of literature, to cite *Entretien d'un Européen avec un Insulaire du Royaume de Dumocala* by Stanisław Leszczyński (1755) or the description of the island Nipu contained in Ignacy Krasicki's novel *Mikołaja Doświadczyńskiego przypadki* [*The Adventures of Mikołaj Doświadczyński*, 1776]. Wojciech Gutkowski wrote at that time his *Podróż do Kalopei* [*Voyage to Kalopea*] a story on a model State existing somewhere in Australia, and Michał Krajewski on an ideal people living on the moon (1785).⁴² At that time, too, informing the Polish readers on the activities of More, one began to recall that he had also been the author of *Utopia* "in which he creates the plan of a new republic in accordance with his ideas,"⁴³ consequently, he was even being compared to Plato.⁴⁴

This, however, was not tantamount to increased interest in that work. While in the preceding centuries one saw in More above all a saint martyr for the faith (just as in Frycz-Modrzewski one saw a heretic), now the bias of the Enlightenment against the Catholic Church and the saints — an attitude of which Voltaire, so popular in Poland, was the patron — accounted for the fact that *Utopia* continued to be little popular in our country. According to Tadeusz Mikulski, this was the basic reason why the 18th century, "although relishing the literary kind of Utopia and scattering generously 'happy islands' over all the waters of our globe, failed to discover St. More's work for Poland."⁴⁵ The first Polish

⁴² J. Tazbir, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁴³ T. Czacki, *O litewskich i polskich prawach* [*On Lithuanian and Polish Laws*], vol. II, Warszawa 1801, p. 273.

⁴⁴ I. Krasicki, *Zbiór potrzebniejszych wiadomości* [*Collected Useful Information*], vol. II, Warszawa 1781, pp. 203–204.

⁴⁵ T. Mikulski, *Rzeczy staropolskie* [*Old-Polish Essays*], Wrocław 1964, pp. 172–173.

translation of *Utopia* (by Kazimierz Abgarowicz) did not appear until 1947, i.e. four hundred years after the French, English or Italian editions. Until then, original editions (in Latin) were used. This is not an evidence of Polish civilization being younger but of its interests having a different direction.

(Translated by Jan Aleksandrowicz)