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# Counterfeit Letters and Fictional Trials: Thomas More's Utopia as Cultural Brand

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Thomas More's Utopia (1516) remains a text that defies straight-forward interpretations. Is it a political tract, a philosophical reflection, a Humanist satire, or some unique combination of these styles? As More himself disdainfully acknowledges in his prefatory letter to Peter Giles, the failure or success of Utopia relies on "the natures of men [which] be so divers" that, at best, they are sour and unpleasant and, at worst, "so narrow in the shoulders that he can bear no tests nor taunts" (A Fruteful, and Pleasaunt Worke of the Beste State of a Publyque Weale, 1551, A3r). Alongside the overwhelming number of paratextual materials which accompany each edition of Utopia, this letter points to the work's tantalizing instability. More is at once overzealous about shaping the reception of his text and self-aware about the impossibility of authorial control. Regardless of what genre we choose to assign to it, Utopia may be primarily a work about mediation.

While there is still controversy about what properly qualifies "utopia" as a genre, modern critics acknowledge that the term typically refers to a style that blends travel narrative, political ideology, and prose fiction.  Due to its innovative techniques, scholars suggest that the Utopian genre can only be understood from a modern perspective, and early modern readers would have seen it "not so much as a particular kind of prose fiction as a particular kind of concept … [as opposed to] a genre" (Saltzman 29). This article intervenes in this body of literature by arguing that marketing and design practices developed by printers, publishers, and editors (henceforth "print agents") contributed to making Utopia not only a recognizable genre but a brand name in its own right.

Utopia's early publication history attests to the fact that the Utopian genre was only partially invented by More, since English readers did not encounter the text until after More's execution. Print agents faced the challenge of not only marketing a text by a controversial author (and potential traitor

to the crown), but also of instructing their readers on the peculiarities of new style. Utopia was published in English seven times and translated twice between 1551–1639 (Ralph Robinson's translation, which was printed in 1551, 1553, 1597, 1624, and 1639; and Gilbert Burnet's anonymous translation printed in 1684 and 1685). As it moves across the seventeenth century, Utopia becomes a recognizable brand name that embodies conflicts between past, present, and future England; engages with social injustice and the potential for resolution; and theorizes on the nature of place and nationhood. As a product of the work of print agents and, later, an iconic signifier for cheap-print pamphlets about the Civil War, the word "utopia" grew to become an iconic cultural brand for the early modern reader—one which could represent (and also disrupt) the status quo and challenge readers to re-interpret not only literary texts but the very makeup of English politics.

To understand how print agents' specific strategies functioned to give Utopia its market and cultural value, we may turn to marketing theory on iconic brands, as outlined by Douglas B. Holt in How Brands Becomes Icons (2004). Modern marketing theory provides us with a unique vocabulary with which to identify the deliberate strategies print agents used to define their markets. Holt's concept of "cultural branding" is particularly helpful in explaining how and why print agents managed to make Utopia such a pervasive and long-lasting influence in early modern culture and politics. A brief overview of what defines a product as a brand (rather than simply a useful material object) is thus necessary.

Market theorist F. J. Levy argues that marketing offers foremost a symbolic value, through which products are made to both reflect and impact their culture. So, for example, a print agent advertising Utopia cannot simply take advantage of the popularity of travel narratives; in order to "sell" he must also offer consumers a unique, new value to distinguish More's work from other publications. Building on this, Holt suggests that what elevates a product to a brand is in part its capacity to engage in social change, offering idealized solutions for the most current social anxieties. Holt conceptualizes "iconic brands" as those that are able to transcend fleeting popularity and become part of the

consumer's everyday cultural experiences. His case-studies include Coke, Budweiser, and Harley Davidson—American brands that have established themselves as a memorable part of mass culture across different generations and historical contexts. These iconic brands have, following Holt, reached a status of cultural branding that has made their product and social message instantly recognizable even to non-consumers (e.g. Coke's message of cross-cultural diversity as exemplified by ads like Mean Joe Green's "Hey Kid, Catch!"). Successful cultural branding therefore goes beyond simply selling a product; instead, it must present a unique story or identity that adapts to the consumer's social, ideological, and historical needs.

>   According to Holt, cultural icons typically feature:

1.  a reliable story, or "identity myth," that addresses current social anxieties (39 ff.)

2.  versatile historical awareness, wherein the brand becomes "a historical entity whose desirability comes from myths that address the most important social tensions of the nation" (38)

3.  "cultural and political authority," that is the credibility to participate in social and political conversations (95 ff.)

When these elements combine, the brand becomes an active, recognizable part of the culture. Consumers become trusted investors, responsible for sustaining the brand's reliability and longevity. Identity myths combine the brand's material elements and its identity values: while each product will have specific qualities that distinguish it from other competitors, these elements, or "markers" only mean something to an audience when they can be used to tell a specific story.   This is a key factor for understanding how print agents marketed Utopia and the ways the text lent itself to new kinds of packaging and interpretations.

>   According to Holt, the ability to open up spaces for dialogue and dissent is the mark of a cultural icon. Iconic brands stand out by their populist appeal; they do not represent the ruling class or prevailing ideologies but instead "are usually set in populist worlds: places separated not only from

everyday life but from the realms of commerce and elite control" (9). As Holt suggests, brands become

cultural icons because of their ability to fabricate an ideal: a story that is believable enough to attract

the consumer, but unlikely enough to provoke the spark for concrete social change. Within this

perspective, Utopia's fiction can be said to invite readers to "address cultural anxieties from afar, from

imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that [they] regularly encounter in their everyday lives"

(8). If Utopia accomplishes this successfully across multiple and distinct moments in English history,

much credit goes to the enterprising labor of each print agent.

**Creating a National Brand**

The first Latin edition of *Utopia* was printed in 1516 by Dirk Martens and, as indicated by the

numerous prefatory letters, emerged from the collaboration between Thomas More, Peter Giles, and

Erasmus. Three more editions appeared in 1517 and 1518 (in that year Johannes Froben printed two

consecutive editions) overseen by More and Erasmus. No Latin edition contains the same paratextual

materials in quite the same order, and many editions add or omit paratexts with no apparent organizing

logic. In addition to the two books that compose the body of the text, the first edition includes letters

from More to Giles, from Giles to Jerome Busleiden, from Busleiden to More, and from Johannes

Paludanus to Giles.[1] This first edition additionally contains a meter in the "original" Utopian tongue;

verses by the supposed poet laureate of Utopia; a verse from humanist Cornelius Grapheus to the

reader; a Utopian alphabet (presented by Peter Giles); and a map depicting the island. In the second

edition, printed in 1517 in Paris, More adds two more letters: one from Jerome Budé to Thomas Lupset

and a second letter to Peter Giles. He also removes the Utopian poem and alphabet. One more letter is

added to the 1518 edition, where Erasmus addresses their new printer, Froben. The abundance and

variety of prefatory letters in More's *Utopia* provided an open invitation for future print agents to act as

editors, compilers, and critics. Although scholars have discussed at length the significance of the

original paratexts in particular, and *Utopia*'s literary contributions in general, a closer analysis reveals

that print agents had a unique role in marketing the text to middle-class buyers and readers.[2]

The first two English editions of *Utopia,* printed by Abraham Vele, highlight the work's appeal to the middle-class book buyer while simultaneously downplaying More's own controversial status. As David Weil Baker rightly claims, the wording of the title-pages of the 1551 and 1556 editions respectively undermines and re-establishes translator Ralph Robinson's social position by presenting him first as a "citizen and goldsmith of London" and then as "sometime fellowe of Corpus Christi college in Oxford." While Baker ascribes this editorial choice to Robinson, Abraham Vele likely played a significant role in composing these title-pages. As a profitable and savvy printer, Vele knew to re-package the work to make it appeal to a broader variety of tastes, presuming perhaps that most of his potential buyers might be more interested in *Utopia* as a New World travel narrative, and not for its Humanist values.

As his allusions to Diogenes and frequent references to More's broader Humanist connections indicate, Robinson's prefatory letter reveals a desire to reach a Humanist audience. Vele, however, sets the full title of the *Utopia* to function with and against Robinson's dedication, disrupting and reframing his high-literature persona. The title maintains a linguistic semblance to the original Latin title, and was likely submitted by the translator: *A fruteful, and pleasaunt worke of the beste state of a publyque weale, and of the newe yle called Vtopia*. The attribution that follows advertises Thomas More as a "knyght," while Robinson is a "citizen and goldsmyth of London," and his friend Tadlowe is a "citizen haberdasher of the same cittie." Since the Latin title refers to More as "the distinguished and eloquent author Thomas More citizen and sheriff of the Famous City of London" (Kinney 34), the choice of appellatives does not seem to stem from Robinson's translation. Instead, Vele's choice draws a direct connection between the author and translator's social status and his potential readers own middle-class background. His title-page at once targets the ambitious readers who would want the association to trendy, popular literature and those who want to feel that this access is within their reach, produced by citizens who, like them, aspire to aristocratic connections.

The popularity of the first printed edition, coupled with the ascension of a Catholic ruler in

1553, must have encouraged Vele to produce a new edition of *Utopia.* The title-page for the 1556 edition more explicitly advertises *Utopia* as a literary, cultural product. Under Queen Mary, now-Catholic-martyr More could be praised as "*the right worthy and famous* Sir Thomas More knight" (emphasis mine), while Robinson earns the distinction of a "fellow of Corpus Christi College in Oxford." Besides being "newly perused and corrected," the second edition further boasts of "divers notes in the margins," most of which are translated from the Latin and some which were added by Robinson himself. Beyond including translations of the original paratextual materials (including some letters and poems), this edition includes an epistle from Vele himself, labeled "the printer to the reader."

In this closing address, Vele apologizes to his readers for not including the Utopian alphabet to which Peter Giles refers in his letter to Jerome Busledein (in this edition the letter immediately precedes Vele's addendum). Vele claims that "I have not as yet the true characters or fourmes of the Utopiane letters … seyng it is a tongue to us muche straunger then the Indian, the Persian, the Syrian, the Arabicke, the Egyptian, the Macedonian … etc" (ns). By adding this note, Vele chooses to actively participate in More's satire, promising the appearance of something he certainly knew to be fake. Even if Vele had seen a Latin or continental edition containing the printed alphabet, his note deliberately compares the Utopian tongue with other real languages and joins in the dialogue of the letters by referring specifically to Giles's letter appended before the poems.

Finally, Vele's epistle also functions as a playful marketing move towards a possible third edition, presenting Vele as a print agent engaged in using his personal resources to improve and enhance his publications. Vele's participation in the ruse, and not simply his note promising more paratexts, helps reinforce *Utopia*'s market value as satire. In order to solidify the unique story this text presents and give it an identity myth, Vele lends his own credibility to the fiction. Savvy readers would eventually learn to recognize through paratextual materials what distinguished *Utopia* from other available travel narratives: depending on its framing devices, the work opened itself up to new contexts, new social circles, and even new social critiques.

*Utopia*'s popularity for both printers and readers appears to die out for over forty years, but interest in More and his ideal commonwealth must have remained strong, particularly as the political threat associated with More's name began to dissipate. Hence, the work's identity myth accordingly began to lose its more explicit allusions to the humanist project in general, and More's politics in particular. In the three editions discussed below, we may see *Utopia* working across a new set of historical contexts.

Thomas Creede's edition at the end of the sixteenth century is modest yet powerful evidence that *Utopia*'s popularity continued to justify new publications. Creede, who often financed his own publications, published his reprint in 1597 without modifying much from Vele's 1556 edition—choosing to leave out only Vele's and Robinson's envoys to the reader.[3] Creede's edition is still an important turning point. As the House of Stuart rose to the throne, English citizens began to experience increasing political instabilities. The constant clashes between the Privy Council and the king would eventually lead to Civil War. Amidst this political mine field, print agents' marketing strategies expanded the context of *Utopia* beyond a topical, popular critique of Henrician politics, making it more appropriate to their current political climate. The Utopia brand begins to solidify in the popular imagination by becoming a constant amongst political and social changes in England. As a new generation of readers became invested in such changes, print agents adjusted the text's identity myth to meet the needs of their growing market.

Bernard Alsop, Creede's former apprentice, is responsible for the next edition of *Utopia*, in 1624. He makes the crucial decision to change the title of his edition, effectively using the text's most iconic marker to create a simple, recognizable brand name: "Sir Thomas More's Utopia" appears atop the title-page, highlighting the word "utopia" in capital letters. Alsop reframes the text to call attention to its recognizable literary inheritance—an important element for the brand's value—by including a frontispiece with a large engraving of More and, below it, an inscription in Latin. This title-page describes More as "right honorable and worthy of all fame" and "lord Chancellor of England," in line

with Alsop's clear interest in rescuing the author's historical importance and political authority. The Latin inscription further helps readers associate More with the classical tradition. Even for a reader unable to understand that the inscription praises More's sacrifice as a Catholic martyr, Alsop's choice of Latin immediately inscribes the work as a valuable literary commodity.

Although Alsop, like Vele and Creede before him, begins with the commonplace announcement that this new edition is "newly corrected and purged of all errors happened in the former editions," this print agent is much more invested in reinventing *Utopia* as a recognizable brand name. As Holt explains, "brands that author a successful myth earn the right to come back later with new myths that touch on the same cultural concerns" (125). Alsop realizes that *Utopia* is by now a marketable name, and that it therefore merits a new history. The repackaging extends beyond the branding title "Utopia" and the engraving of More on the title-page: it is further reinforced by Alsop's dedicatory epistle to Cresacre More, Thomas More's great-grandson, who was then working on a biography of More.[4]

Inheritance is an important theme for Alsop, and his dedication highlights both lineage and literary status as essential qualities of the More family. The print agent defines his motives as "noble," and purely in the interest of preserving the text as Cresacre's birth right. Alsop attaches the "honorable pedigree" carried by the More family to the book's own virtues, which as a genre is "yet unparalleled in that nature" and thus deserves to be shared with a new generation of readers (A2). To fuel interest for a book whose popularity was already established, Alsop builds up its historical value as an English landmark. In a surprisingly elitist move, Alsop claims that failing to dedicate the work to Cresacre would be "a theft of the worst nature … and I might as well take from you the Lands of the Honorable and auncient Family of Cresacre (with which God and your right hath endowed you) as bestow upon a stranger this glorious Commonwealth" (A2v).

By elevating the book to the value of an inheritable commodity, the print agent highlights *Utopia*'s material and social attributes. The reader who owns this copy can feel like he is part of this cultural inheritance (even if he does not own lands and cannot claim any rights to the work itself). This

in turn makes the book at once old and new: reclaiming More's lineage and history is an innovative strategy that only works because *Utopia* is by now far removed from More's reputation as traitor and his problematic Catholic identity. Whereas Abraham Vele had to devise specific marketing strategies to frame the work as accessible to the middle-class buyer, Alsop moves somewhat in the opposite direction, building an established, aristocratic lineage for the book and its author. At the same time, however, Alsop also makes the work highly attractive to readers who might see books as status symbols. While each print agent highlighted the social capital of *Utopia*, their unique contexts expand the amount and variety of readers, always inviting new groups to identify with the brand's identity myth.

By purchasing the book, the reader also buys into More's rebranded status as literary, cultural, and English inheritance. In many ways, this is the edition that truly brands *Utopia* (and, in turn, More) as the text (and author) we know and edit today. As Holt has argued, the power of the brand resides not simply in the product, but in its ability to renew itself according to new consumers, new identities, and new contexts. It is not until 1624 that *Utopia* can emerge as a canonical text, with a praised author and a long, venerable history. Once *Utopia* becomes established as genre representative of satirical criticisms of government,[5] the association with More fades into the background, leaving only a brand reference or genre that authors and print agents can apply to various literary and marketing contexts.

Political and social discontent had grown exponentially during the time between 1624, when Alsop first reprinted and rebranded *Utopia*, and 1639, when he decided to put out his second edition of *Utopia*. England was facing increasing poverty, loss in international trades, and out-of-control population growths.[6] The growing conflicts between Parliament and Charles I brought on popular dissatisfaction and domestic unrest, whereas the Bishops' War of 1639 ominously foretold an imminent Civil War. If Thomas More's controversial status sometimes clouded *Utopia*'s the true message, Alsop's rebranding in 1624 allowed the author's history to fade away from the book's new packaging. By his second edition, new social conflicts encouraged Alsop to foreground the ideological

connotations of the work.

Evidence of the print agent's constant renegotiation of his brand, Alsop's 1639 edition changes the title once more, this time highlighting the island's political structure: *The Commonwealth of Utopia* (fig. 5). By re-focusing the new edition on its central narrative, and not so much on patronage or authorship, Alsop is able to remind English readers that the story (or identity myth) told by *Utopia* provides a space in which to rehearse their political and social anxieties. The island of Utopia, after all, held a government that outwardly appeared to work perfectly, but that hid under its "ideal commonwealth" a harsh control of its citizens, closed borders, and non-existent property laws. Although he addresses the same patron, Alsop's new dedication to Cresacre More is much more subdued and appears less invested in reinforcing the text's aristocratic values. This edition is trimmed of its paratext as well, omitting More's letter to Giles and all the poems that close the work after Book II. Alsop likely felt that a government-themed *Utopia* would better cater to his reader's interests, and reworked the edition to step away from the text's more ironic and playful aspects to focus instead on its political relevance.

Holt argues that the most iconic brands help its consumers imagine resolutions for the anxieties brought on by "tensions between ideology and individual experience" (57); in this case, tensions between what the national, English ideal was supposed to represent (lawfulness, monarchy, economic superiority) and what citizens were experiencing (injustice, poverty, an overbearing government). *Utopia*, even as it fails to resolve any of these conflicts, provides room for conversation and hope for reform.[7] By removing the additional paratexts and changing the title once more, Alsop shifts *Utopia*'s themes to attend to the interests of his market. The new title signals a different marketing approach that helps potential readers recognize the political capital of Alsop's new edition.[8]

*Utopia* thus became an iconic brand as a result of its unique textual production history, the ever-changing status of its polarizing author, and a malleable yet attractive identity myth. Taking on anxieties about More as historical and political figure; the expansion of the new world; and English

politics, the print agents responsible for circulating More's *Utopia* created a unique identity myth that could be immediately recognizable and yet could just as easily lend itself to new interpretations. A thorough look at the history of *Utopia*'s English editions demonstrates this brand-making process. Vele and Robinson at first attempted to legitimize the work while still making it appeal to a middle-class public; Alsop repackaged More and his text as English literary landmarks. By the end of the seventeenth century, the word "utopia" could be used to label anything that referred to a remote location, an ideal society, or a political complaint.

**Generic Cultural Branding**

If we are to fully understand the staying power of utopia as a name-brand, we must broaden our definitions of the kinds of popular texts *Utopia* eventually influenced. Gary Saul Morson acknowledges that "nonliterary (tractarian) utopias have been important in establishing the conventions according to which utopian literary works have been interpreted, and so have helped constitute the generic tradition" (78). Yet, Morson qualifies this point by claiming that a distinction must be made between ideology and fiction, since the latter need not provide supporting evidence or historical groundwork for its claims. This distinction between fiction and nonfiction, however, is blurred in the case of ephemeral pamphlets, which were produced to address specific historical moments and yet often did so under the guise of a fantastical story. The pamphlets discussed below take on pre-established reading protocols from *Utopia*, building on readers' previous knowledge to construct new stories. In doing so, they manage to extract *Utopia*'s most abstract markers and apply them generically to vague (often ironic) concepts of justice, religion, and lawfulness. This generic marketing approach, which relies on the "reduction of the brand to a handful of abstract concepts" (Holt 20) is designed to attract book-buyers with protocols that guide them toward books that can increase their social capital. Even if they have no direct link with More's original work, these generics help connect readers with the growing genre and advance the English identity myth created by its previous print agents.

Arguably, one of the features that distinguish More's work from other fictional ideal worlds

(and makes it a cultural icon) is its political exigency. The narrative depends on the constant production and denial of expectations: More is the voice of the preface, but he is not Morus, the narrator; Giles and his fellow humanist collaborators testify to the fictional island's existence only to make it absurdly unreal; Morus describes the ideal commonwealth only to reject it at the end, and so on. This assertion and denial process forces the reader to question not just where or what Utopia is, but what is "ideal" (and whether that ideal is even desirable). This quality separates More's narrative from other contemporary English works that represent more straight-forward ideologies or imaginary voyages. It is precisely this feature that benefits these brand generics and in the seventeenth century gives print agents, writers, and readers a place to confront the political instabilities of the Civil War. The anonymous *The King of Utopia his letter to the Citizens of Cosmopolis, the Metropolitan City of Utopia* (1647) is perhaps the best illustration of such a trend. *The King of Utopia* may be the first appearance anywhere of a work marketing itself as a "*Utopia* generic": it takes up the brand created by *Utopia*'s print agents and uses it to advertise a different text altogether.

*The King of Utopia* utilizes the word "utopia" both in its paratext and as part of its narrative, introducing a fictionalized political context (and imitating the utopian genre) without any interest in recreating More's narrative or furthering the fictional island of Utopia. If indeed the first reference to *Utopia* as a form of branding does not appear before the mid-sixteenth century, Bernard Alsop's 1624 edition was clearly the one most responsible for branding the work with its single, most recognizable marker. The name "utopia," at first a direct reference to the island of Utopia, becomes a generic reference that could be used to market and describe texts that tackled political ideology by creating fictional worlds. That this text is written after the beginning of the Civil War is also an important marker, since the island Utopia will serve as an imaginary location for resolutions on both sides.[9]

*The King of Utopia*'s anonymous author and fictional translator claims to have found two letters, both written originally in the Utopian tongue: in the first, Cosmopolis's King justifies his absence to his citizens, revealing the circumstances (and individuals) that have kept him from returning

to the city. The Citizens' response follows suit, urging the king to return and promising him that a loyal and supportive people await him in Cosmopolis. Most of the pamphlet is overtaken by obscure references and metaphors. The King never directly explains who or what has "so puzzled my pentarquie" (A1) or what events could actually bring him back to the throne. The King's mention of his pentarquy should clue in the reader that this is an "every man" monarch, intended as a universal figure representative of all Christian kingdoms. The King proclaims his own fictional yet particularly English identity, citing a maxim of state "observed ever since that beautifull English *Moore* made *Utopia* a Monarchy" (A1v). The Utopia named in this pamphlet is simultaneously a fictional and a real place—the king and his citizens recognize themselves as Utopian in the same sentence where they point to the pamphlet's parent text and author.[10] The generic-branding reference to More functions to indicate that Utopia is not simply an ideal "no place;" instead, it is an in-between space where the reader can confront his anxieties about the return of monarchy.

The King's letter urges his citizens to hope for his return, but also to understand the extreme strain under which he finds himself both physically and mentally: "I am retarded, anticipated and restrain'd from my intentions … my thoughts are as Civil War within my breast, like evil members in a good commonwealth" (f2). The absent monarch stands in for the land itself, under a domestic conflict that he cannot resolve without his citizens. Reality and fiction coexist in this generic Utopia: the author, masked as translator, uses a fictional location to give voice to English struggles. In this imagined scenario, the nostalgic reader can share with the King a longing for his return, and read his own feelings reproduced in the citizens' letter. Of course, part of *Utopia*'s identity myth is that it challenges a straight reading. Its contradictions force the reader to question the government being portrayed and to look for a solution to the problem of interpreting the text. The author of *The King of Utopia* attempts a similar double-move, obscuring the King's true meaning behind metaphors as well as a faux-translator's deliberately poor interpretations. The two letters appear to be intentionally convoluted, often absurd and overly symbolic, making it almost impossible to extract anything beyond the fact that

the King wants back in and that the citizens are ready to receive him.[11]

The citizens' answer reinforces this circular language by expressing their loss in a series of paradoxes:

> we mourne without sorrow, starve with satiety, weep and laugh, move yet sit still, fast and feast…be not then (as our most pious physitian) negligent, but speedily yield thy royall remedy to our unstable (and infirme) condition… regulate our libertie, and captivate our senses in the service of thy vertues: let the memory of our learned Licurgus, that unparalel'd mirror of his time, the glory of his nation, make us more Lovers of Moor for this institute of our Utopian commonwealth … briefly he in our monarchy drew the picture of al happy governments, and our ingrateful hands have disfigured the figure… (f 5-6)

The repetitive references to More and his work insist on reminding the reader that More's island in *Utopia* was an ideal monarchy and not a commonwealth: the citizens long for a return to its original "picture of al happy governments." *The King of Utopia* works precisely because it is so vague; by hindering a straight-forward interpretation, the paradoxes force the reader to add his own personal experience so as to create any meaning. The brand Utopia is only a promise of resolution, a hope for addressing anxieties; it does not need to offer an actual fix. As Richard Halpern observes, the function of the genre is to create tension: "the island itself is constructed as the representation of desires it cannot locate and of which it cannot take account" (149). This in turn leads the reader to harbor dangerous revolutionary desires. As such, "Utopian negation is not … always neutralizing [but] can function as a barrier or a dam" that contains potentially disruptive impulses (ibid).

Although *The King of Utopia* pretends to discuss political ideals in a fictional context, it concludes by forcing the reader back into reality. The text switches from paradoxical metaphors to sharp irony as the reader is led away from the fictional world of Utopia and reminded about the actual author of the text. The "Postscript from the Translator to the Reader" offers a sarcastic apology for the

bad translation, claiming the translator "is not wel vers'd in the Utopian tongue" but is nonetheless

supposed to be the best reader of Utopian in England (f5). Yet, "these letters being of such

consequence, [they are] well worthy to be read by English-men" (ibid.). Once more, the issue of

language and communication is a key element for the genre, as it gives the narrative a national, English

identity. The translator goes as far as suggesting that Utopia has now been colonized by both the reader

and the translator, as it "learn'd to speake English (by an English quill)." The pamphlet never pretends

to offer an answer to the reader's frustrations, focusing instead on highlighting the ways in which

England is "broken" and only England's king and its citizens can fix it. Because the reader is invited to

identify with the citizens in the letter, he is encouraged to act like them and demand real change.

Manuel and Manuel argue that the Utopian thought became popular during the Civil War

because writers could use it to demand action from others: "Utopians, often people without political

weight or authority, cling to the hope that men of great power will put into practice and make real the

'idea' that they, the superior creators, have invented" (332). This notion applies to the generic brand as

well. The Utopia in *The King of Utopia* serves as a point of reference for "symbolic resolutions" (Holt

58). This is one of the important ways in which, according to Holt, a brand can be recognized as a

cultural icon: it serves to tell a story that gives voice to, and thus helps placate, social anxiety. The

author of this pamphlet makes use of More's identity myth of irony, paradox, and political reform to

expose the incoherencies caused by the Civil War.[12]

The author additionally mimics More by supporting the narrative with his own satirical

paratext.[13] A false errata list, which "the translator and printers amends [sic] for mistaking," offers

made-up page numbers and critical corrections for a number of controversial terms:

> page 103. Line 50. For a good thing read *a true subject.* Page 883. Line 75. For Tyranny,
>
> read *Taxations.* Page 68. Line 15 for Burglary read *Plunder*, Page 94. Line 101. For
>
> Common-wealth read *Committee.* Page 115 for Service read *Sacriledge.* Page 40. line
>
> 100. For Bishop read *Presbyter.* Page 56 line 80 for Pulpit read *Tub.* Page 37. Line 64

for Preaching read *Prating* (f5v)

These corrections allow the text to speak more explicitly about the print agent's complaints against Parliament by singling out specific groups ("committees" like the Committee of Examinations, and "Presbyterians," who sought to overthrow the Episcopalian bishops and, with them, the king) and social abuses (like excessive "Taxations" and the "Plundering" of lands from those who did not support Parliament). While the language of the fictional letters is cloudy and twisted with metaphors, the printer and the author/translator (who might well be the same person) stand out as the true, real authors of the text.

By calling attention to the errata, the print agents grant textual production a central role: the peripheral details (the colophon, note from the translator, errata lists) in fact contain the pamphlet's true message. Further, by virtue of being paratextual, these additions can escape the fictional world and speak directly to the reader. Despite the satirical tone, the pamphlet delivers its message on the title-page ("England is by th' English broken") and in the closing errata. Citing a number of texts that use errata lists and admissions of errors as symbolic metaphors for the reading process, Michael Saenger points out that error "is usually used as a means of asking the reader to see beyond the printed page, and to search for the original that the page strives to represent" (205). Using the errata to contrast specific, political terms with their "corrections," the print agents describe the Civil War and Parliament as a poorly written text in dire need of correction. The press must call on its "true subjects," the middle-class readers by the bookstalls, to correct and amend the country's mistakes. The author enacts real-world reform through the notion of textual reform, using the Utopia brand to emphasize the status of the text as political intervention.

Reinforcing the world-upside-down metaphor, the imprint claims the pamphlet was first printed in Cosmopolis in "the year 7461" and then "reprinted at London an. Dom. 1647." Utopia is not, then, simply a literary reference to More's description of the ideal government, but the memory of a time when England could still count on a king and his citizens to keep their land and their religion intact. As

a brand generic, *The King of Utopia* utilizes the iconic name to attract potential readers and create an immediate thematic connection (or protocol) for understanding the author's political criticism.

Although other authors are much less explicit about making use of their generic Utopia brand, it is possible to see a growing trend among texts: locating in Utopia the place not for the ideal government, but for idealized, fair trials. Political critique becomes more specific, tackling issues of religious persecution and social injustice. In *The examination of Tilenus before the Triers; in order to* [sic] *his intended settlement in the office of a publick preacher in the commonwealth of Utopia* (1658), for instance, Bishop Laurence Womock takes on the pseudonym Tylenus to narrate a fictional dialogue. In it, Tylenus is vetted by Triers (such as Dr. Absolute and Dr. Dam-Man) for a preaching position in Utopia. Womock's pamphlet aims to criticize a commission of Triers created during the commonwealth to examine whether appointed preachers were following sanctioned Calvinist doctrines.[14] By placing a specific, contemporary event within the island of Utopia and assigning caricatures to represent the Triers, Womock argues that the questioning process is absurd and nonsensical. Satire is already an embedded marker of the Utopian brand, so Womock can use its central narrative to present his arguments against the Triers and refute the Tenets of the Remonstrants through a traditional dialogue. In other words, the mention of Utopia automatically brands the text, so that readers understand the absurdity and irony of the situation, allowing the rest of Womock's pamphlet to argue his ideological assertions with straight-forward rhetoric.

Branding a text with the word "utopia" creates the opportunity for authors to discuss controversial topics in a now-commonplace fictional safe space, while still questioning what is "ideal" (and therefore righteous) and investigating how to recuperate this ideal in the real world. The brand might function as part of the narrative, as is the case of Womock's pamphlet, or it might serve as advertisement to attract more readers. In *A Letter Found in Utopia* (1675), for example, an anonymous author praises Peter Sterry's *Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* (1675), arguing for religious acceptance. Although the work has no mention of Utopia or More in the narrative, the print agent

clearly used the title to make the work attractive and draw in readers interested in any work with the brand utopia on its title-page. Here, the brand-name alone is a sufficient marketing strategy.

Through and after the Civil War, authors continued to brand their works by using *Utopia* to create a new kind of identity myth. The use of the generic brand could serve to represent a "no place," or "any place," as in: *Passes Granted, by the Free-born People of England to severall of the most eminent perjur'd rebels assembled in Junto at Webminster. Who are now desirous to transport themselves into New England, to Amsterdam, or Utopia* (1648), which cites parliamentary traitors and condemns them to exile. Similarly, *A Copie of the Quaeries, or, A Comment upon the Life, and Actions of the Great Tyrant and his Complices; OLIVER the first and last of that name, not unfit, not unworthy of thy perusal* (1659) advertises having been "printed in Utopia," referencing other queries and petitions printed against Parliament.[15] The queries vary from more serious questions like "whether (like that of most weddings) the first joyfull day of this present Parliament, will not be the fore-runner of a great many years of sorrowes" (A2), to derisive ones like "whether Cromwell and Henry [the VIII] when they have compared their notes in the other world, will not be good company in hell together" (A3v). The print agent uses the label "printed in Utopia" to brand the petition as political criticism and remind readers of the real queries and petitions that should be made against the Commonwealth.

While the Utopia brand can represent stories of righteous judgment, its most important marker is that it allows citizens to participate actively in public debates. The authors of *The Loyal City of Bristol, vindicated from Amsterdamnism, or Devil's Borough* (1681, printed for J. Davies) argue at the start that their pamphlet has a valuable social purpose, stating in the epistle to the reader that "the description was design'd only to turn the fanatick zeal here into ridicule" (A2). The only reference to *Utopia* appears at the heading of the text, "A Letter from the Bishop of Utopia," and seems to be a device for defending the city of Bristol as a just and law-abiding place. Bristol coffee houses were at the time considered "meeting places of factitious persons, and centers of false, scandalous news, libels and pamphlets" (Tapsell 109). The bishop's letter denies reports that the city is harboring Presbyterians

and supporting religious dissent. In the pamphlet, the anonymous author relates the persecution and apprehension of dissenters and guarantees that the city itself is still loyal to the king. Here, the brand-name "utopia" is designed to attract the reader to purchase a politico-religious tract, placing Utopia as the location for righteous monarchical support. Like Womock, the authors of this tract use the brand to avoid having to set up an intricate or misleading satire. Because the Utopia brand already represents the ironies and paradoxes of political structures, the author can deliver his message from under the protection of claiming to speak from Utopia, and not from or against England.

The final, and latest, example of seventeenth-century Utopia generics to be discussed here deals with this literary paradox by using the playfulness of the genre to address social flaws inherent to the middle-class marketplace. This text is worth a closer look because it uses a variety of strategies discussed above to create an elaborate new narrative. While it seems to draw the furthest away from More's original text, this pamphlet attempts to use the brand's political and social significance as the starting point for complaints against middle-class workers. Whether taken seriously or as a playful reflection on the English marketplace, John Dunton's reference to *Utopia* demonstrates that the brand continued to influence printed texts even before the appearance of Bishop Gilbert Burnet's translation in 1684. Thus, what at first glance appears to be a long, forty-five year gap between Alsop's second edition and Burnet's translation is merely a matter of perspective. *The King of Utopia* was published less than ten years after Alsop's second printing and, broadly speaking, Utopia as cultural brand remained alive in the print marketplace through political, social, and religious pamphlets (and even ballads) throughout the length of the seventeenth century.

John Dunton's *The Informer's Doom*: *or, an Amazing Seasonable Letter from Utopia, Directed at the Man in the Moon* (1683) depicts a mock-trial of English characters and tradesmen. Dunton uses references to two utopian texts to advertise his pamphlet: More's *Utopia* and Domingo Gonzalez's faux-narrative *The Man in the Moon*. Although the narrative is supposed to take place on the Utopian island, Dunton does not disguise the fact that his characters represent English values: e.g. Conscience

the Judge, Mr. Sincerity, and Mr. Protestant. The Utopian judge indicts a list of personages that Dunton believes to be "grand and bitter enemies that disturb and molest all kingdoms and states" (as stated in the title-page), including Pope Innocent XI, Justice Implacable, Mr. Violence, A Witch, and Sir John Fraud. Because this is Utopia, all the trials are expected to automatically dispense rightful justice (as Dunton sees it). Similarly, each character can only earn his final punishment after hearing the testimony of good citizens, good Christians, and honorable tradesmen. However, the pamphlet's accusations expose (perhaps unwittingly) a social paradox: the "cheats" attributed to each profession are the inevitable results of the capitalist system.[16] The problem of reading Dunton's text is much like that of reading More's *Utopia*: how seriously is the reader expected to take this? In pointing out largely irresolvable problems and an impossible resolution to dishonest behaviors in the trading and selling of goods, Dunton (un)intentionally satirizes his own narrative: if one were to judge every act of dishonesty done in the city, there would be no one left to serve in the jury.

The most interesting section of the dialogue is the trial of Sir John Fraud, whose request for a jury demands the appearance and subsequent vetting of a variety of London workers. Sir Fraud is described as "an upstart, come out of Italy, begot of Pride … a raiser of rents, and enemy to the kingdom, and hast insinuated [himself] into all trades, estates, and professions" (f.81-2) and his judgment gives Dunton an excuse to complain about the dishonesty of London tradesmen, most of whom are not qualified to join the jury due to their own misdeeds. Most of the "cheats" result from workers attempting to improve their social standing or their financial profits. The tanner, for instance, is accused of unbecoming class ambition ("hoping to make the proud Princox your son the upstart gentleman …[and] marry your daughter at the least to an esquire, that she may, if possible, be a gentlewoman," f110); the merchant is said to undercut the "poor gentlemen" who cannot resell products bought from the merchant at equal or higher prices; the weavers are accused of cheating "poor countrey huswives" with poorly constructed knits (f141) in order to sell more products. Amongst the few who make it past the judge are higher born men (a knight, a gentleman, and an esquire), a priest, as

well as professions that Dunton considers to be non-speculative and therefore cannot lead to excessive profits or class leverage (the waterman, the grocer, a husbandman, and even a poet).

Not surprisingly, the printer and the bookseller also get the judge's seal of approval, even though the printer scrapes by on a technicality, since "he cheats the bookseller sometimes in working on half an impression for himself, when the bookseller hath had his number he is to pay for; but because the printer only doth thus to those booksellers that he thinks will never pay him, he shall pass on the jury as an indifferent honest man" (f125). The bookseller, on the other hand, is a utopian model "of a gentile profession," with "a good report in Utopia" (f152), who gets accepted as quickly as he is dismissed from the narrative. Dunton's praise of the bookseller is surely meant to reflect on his own character, but it is worth recalling that print is the only trade in the island Utopia that had been imported from the continent. Further, in vetting the printer and the bookseller as honest men, Dunton authorizes the two professionals as honorable citizens and the best sources for truthful, politically important news, therefore reinforcing printed books as one of the few marketplace commodities worth the consumer's trust.

Dunton's generic Utopia gathers a few of *Utopia*'s more abstract markers and turns them into exaggerated caricatures. Taking advantage of other generic brands' own reading of Utopia as a place for fair judgments, he portrays a court where everyone is punished and every tradesman is a knave for having capitalist instincts. Although Gregory Claeys sees this kind of adaptation as showing a "concern to bound human desires and ambitions by institutional restraints aiming at regularity and orderliness rather than a desire for moral perfection" (xii), there is no question that *The Informers Doom* is evidence of the trickle-down effect of the Utopia brand, which by now has been dissociated from any specific political context and shows no attempts on the part of the print agents in challenging the reader to face real-life social conflicts. Yet, the absurdity of the text calls into question the social complaint genre. Without a certain degree of capitalist enterprise, no professional (especially not printers or booksellers) would be able to survive, nor would they be able to compete in an increasingly speculative

society. Dunton, in particular, could not have lived by the model he describes in this pamphlet and still have managed to print over 200 books (Parks).

Utopia came to represent, for modern readers and consumers, something between the ideal and the possible; a viable way to discuss ideology and to think of "the possibility of a world upside down and at the same time to cast a shadow over the legitimacy of an upright world" (Heilbrunn 104). It is impossible to know now if satire, political argument, or humanist criticism was More's primary goal in creating his Utopia. If we are to judge by the moving parts of the first Latin editions, More and his circle of friends appreciated the text for its playful structure: add a letter, and you support the fantasy, remove a map and you highlight the unlikely "no place" that is Utopia. Similarly, as Utopia moved across print agents, translators, and markets, the iconic brand emerged as "a magical device of transformation" (113) in which repetition, familiarity and interpretative dissonance helped shape a recognizable commodity. The narrative and the framing of Utopia work together to shape the text as a marketable cultural product, teaching the reader to identify features that make it at once unique and yet reproducible.

Understanding the printing history of More's Utopia as part of a cultural branding process allows us to consider the ways in which More's narrative (and More himself) became such a cultural icon in England. Print agents read and interpreted the work to make it appeal to their unique markets and to respond to timely historical contexts. However, while doing that, each agent helped define recognizable aspects of the text that could be repeated, copied, and reproduced in generic form. Considering Utopia as an iconic brand, one which survives precisely for its ability to tell different stories and create new identity myths with each historical change, offers readers and scholars of Thomas More a new way to understand the multiplicity of narratives contained within this single book. While it is not likely that the average reader encountered or even read more than one or two versions of the text, this analysis of brand generics proves that Utopia was a culturally pervasive text across social and class divisions. The variety of pamphlets and tracts making use of the word Utopia to brand their

product is evidence of this text's unusual history, filling in the gaps between each edition of More's text and the bigger picture of *Utopia* in the English imagination.

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[1] Routh argues that these letters indicate the limited audience of the original printing: those who would know the aforementioned authors and take their name as a commendation for the work.

[2] See Terrance Cave, *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts* (2008).

[3] It is possible that Creede inherited the rights to the edition and did not have to spend much money to publish it. Nonetheless, his decision to publish a reprint suggests there was still a market for *Utopia* even forty years after Vele.

[4] *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas Moore* was published in 1631. Given Alsop's choice of Cresacre More for the dedication, he must have known of his involvement in the biography. It is possible that this dedication was also a play for Cresacre's business or future associations with the More family.

[5] Of course, *Utopia*'s narrative is much more complex and paradoxical, as Manuel and Manuel, Cave, Boesky, et. al have demonstrated. However, for the purposes of this analysis, I mean to argue that *Utopia* as an iconic brand entered the popular imagination as a signifier for political critique, satire, and irony—especially as it applied to Cromwell's commonwealth.

[6] See Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (1993); Peter Lawson, "Property Crime and Hard Times in England 1559-1624" in *Law and History Review* 4.1 (1986); and Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Trade 1550-1653* (2003).

[7] By suggesting that the island of Utopia represents the ideal commonwealth, the title indicates that the conflicts presented in Book I will be resolved in Book II. Yet, the organization and behavior of the Utopians proves to be less than ideal. For a discussion of the ways in which More sets up this failure both rhetorically and thematically, see Arthur F. Kinney, "*Encomium Sapientiae*: Thomas More and *Utopia*," in *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (1986).

[8] Not discussed here are Richard Chiswell's 1684 and 1685 editions, which feature a new translation of the Latin text by bishop Gilbert Burnet. Although they omit the original paratexts, these editions include a preface from a religiously-reformed Burnet in hopes to regain favor with the king. Chiswell's unadorned, bare-bones reproduction of the popular text suggests that the brand had by then become a guaranteed sell.

[9] Manuel and Manuel and Robert Appelbaum have argued that Utopias were mostly used by Parliamentarians hoping to defend the idea of a commonwealth. Yet, most of the pamphlets I located and discuss here focus on the royalist appeal of the work and More's own reservations against the suggestion that a republic could in fact work.

[10] For more on the rhetoric of parenting in early modern literature, see Brooks, *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* (2005).

[11] The author hints at the pamphlet's deliberately bad language in the extended title of the work, stating the King's letter is bound with "the citizen's answer thereunto, translated out of the Utopian tongue, into broken English." He asks his reader and book-buyer rhetorically: "but why Broken English? O Sir! What here's spoken, imports that England is by the English broken." He later returns to this problem in "The Postscript from the Translator to the Reader."

[12] Boesky observes that "by the 1640s in England the term *utopia* was increasingly associated with real-life reform" (84). Her analysis focuses on Utopian texts that meant to produce ideal societies that should be mimicked in real life. Although these kinds of Utopias show "a clear shift from monarch to the republic as a model utopian government" (90), the pamphlets making use of the utopia brand-name nearly all focus on the preservation of monarchy and traditional values. For other analyses of Utopian texts written during the Civil War, see "Topsy-Turvy in the English Civil War," in *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (2009); Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1975); Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey Through Utopia* (1950); and George Claeys, *Restoration and Augustan British Utopias* (2000).

[13] It is difficult to know why the false paratexts, which only appear in the earlier versions of *Utopia* and become less frequent once the brand is established, would become a distinguishing feature for this generic version. The author could be more familiar with an edition that contained the paratexts and felt compelled to add one to his text. In this case, the self-aware aspect of these additions helped expose the true message of the text.

[14] For a commentary on how this text participates in Calvinist Oxthodoxy debates, see Peter Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (2009), 75-80.

[15] Bernard Alsop was among many print agents who were accused of printing seditious pamphlets that announced fake news from Parliament and fake royalist petitions, most famously the Hertfordshire petition (1641), which caused him to be sent for by the House of Commons. He and his partners were later imprisoned in 1643 for printing *His Majesty's Propositions to Sir John Hotham and the Inhabitants of Hell* (Plomer 4).

[16] Dunton was a wise capitalist himself, using popular stories or literary trends to boost his publishing career. Michael Mascuch calls him "the maven of (re)invention [who] catered to the public's growing hunger from the start" (146).