

Early Modern utopian islands: restoring a damaged Garden.

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Abstract: Interest in islands grew rapidly during the Early Modern period as many explorers, merchants, monarchs and political commentators perceived islands as earthly paradises or magical loci of extreme riches. This paper presents an alternative strand of the period's 'islomania', where the newly discovered islands were imagined as loci of wilderness: empty lands that human ingenuity and hard work could be 'improved' into a utopia. Triumphal narratives of conquering nature were based on the newfound optimism inspired by fifteenth century humanism and the tenets of Early Modern natural philosophy. However, processes of 'improvement' cannot be thought of as apolitical or dislocated as they are often embedded in the colonialist narratives of the time. By examining a series of imaginary 'utopian' islands of the Early Modern period, including *Utopia*, *New Atlantis*, *The Isle of Pines* and the island of *Robinson Crusoe*, this paper dismantles binary conceptions of Early Modern mythical islands as paradise/hell, utopia/dystopia to a more nuanced understanding of how these writers utilised and depicted 'utopia' to reflect political, religious and social mores of the time.

Keywords: utopia, island, Robinsonade, Eden, Crusoe, Thomas More

Throughout history utopianism has been expressed as the desire for an ideal world in various forms and visions (Sargent, 1993: 3). In the European utopian tradition one privileged spatiality served as locus, that of the island. The ancient Egyptians left one of the oldest surviving descriptions of a paradisiacal island in *The tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* (Ratter, 2018: 63; Carey, 1999: 1-8). Dating from Egypt's Middle Kingdom (2000-1700 BCE), the story tells of a sailor who, while travelling from the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt was shipwrecked on a Red Sea island filled with food and drink and inhabited by a talking serpent (Parkinson, 1997: 89-101). This short text establishes the basic features of early utopian narratives: an island as locus and a miraculous natural environment of plenty with accompanying mystical elements. Such elements were found repeatedly in Classical and Roman descriptions of paradise islands such as the Fortunate Islands or Circe's island in *The Odyssey* (800-700 BCE) (Hulme and Youngs, 2002: 2). But it was the Judeo-Christian belief in the Garden of Eden that established the idea of an earthly paradise that survived the Fall and could be still found as part of this world. It became customary during the Middle Ages for Eden to be perceived as an island or an inaccessible landlocked garden located in the eastern extremities of the world and as such, it

was depicted in the *mappae mundi* of the period (Gillis, 2003: 22-5). Hence, this association of the islands with paradise was enriched during the Middle Ages due to the influence of Christianity and the incorporation of a series of biblical traditions and hagiographic folk tales.

A representative example of this island paradise trope is eighth-century hagiographic text, *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*. This work narrates the travels of St Brendan in the Irish sea and the North Atlantic. Its plot revolves around a monastic quest to find an island paradise in the Atlantic Ocean. Following the centuries-old conventions about paradisiacal island representation, the anonymous author describes it as adorned with rich flora, tamed fauna and trees that bore strange, delicious fruits. Moreover, faithful to the medieval milieu of mixing fantasy and reality the *Voyage of St Brendan* echoes real locations filtered through religious imagery and the early Christian anchoritic tradition, like the island of Hell, whose volcanic environment is reminiscent of Iceland (Italiano, 2012: 8-14). Nevertheless, geographical realism in the *Voyage* is inconsequential; what is really important for the monastic environment that produced it was to incorporate the Northwest Atlantic archipelago in the medieval Christianised geos and topos of the ecumene (Mackley, 2008: 142-4; Berque, 2004: 385-7). Similarly, the medieval legend of Cockaigne depicts a place of eternal carnal satisfaction and idleness defined by its comestible physical environment and architecture (Pleji, 2001: 245-7). This form of utopia proved extremely popular among the lower classes and was retold through drinking songs and folk tales for those who sought to escape from the harsh reality of their everyday existence to a blissful dream world (Beauchamp, 1981: 345-62).

Ancient cultures had myths about nature and humanity's gradual deterioration through humankind's corruption, for example the Hesiodic myth of the lost Golden Age (Burton, 2016: 1-16). Yet, the most influential tale of this kind is again found in Genesis 3: 1-24, which narrates the Fall and the resulting expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Among their punishments for sinning against God was the loss of their immortality and innocence but also the end of their dominion over the Garden. Humanity had 'to labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life' (Genesis 3:17). Biblical explanation of humanity's loss of dominion over nature influenced medieval perception of nature as a menacing and chaotic wilderness. A view that was summarised in Dante's description of nature as an *immensa sylva*, a 'vast wilderness' (Freccero, 2003: 71; Perfetti, 2000: 187). Humanity stood helpless in front of this wilderness, which was replete with raw power. Dante and his contemporaries voiced an 'adversarial attitude towards nature' (Herlihy, 1980: 116). Nevertheless, despite being deeply ingrained in medieval Christian doctrine and the period's cultural milieu, these negative attitudes towards nature could be revised, as happened during the High Medieval period (1000-1300 CE). This was a period where large forest clearings and trade expansion led to more optimistic views of humanity's potential to shape nature. Nonetheless, this optimism was shaken by the ecological and demographic collapse of the fourteenth century that led to a revival of eschatological thinking and the negative view of nature as a menacing and irreparable wilderness (LaFreniere, 2008: 98).

It was not until the Early Modern (EM) period that attitudes towards nature started to shift again and an optimistic outlook began to re-emerge (Thomas, 1984: 15). Influenced by the Christian humanist desire to combine the Christian call to tame the wilderness with genuine care for the benefit of the public weal together with the natural philosophers' intent to understand nature (ibid: 16-20); this new attitude was summarised by Francis Bacon's call in his *Sylva Sylvarum* to understand and tame nature (Bacon, 1627). The effort to understand nature did not mean that views of far-away lands as full of miracles and with strange properties were eclipsed. In the age of exploration when European expansion and colonialism generated an unprecedented interest in the newly discovered lands and their people, images of Edenic lands with sweet fruits and fertile soil became extremely popular.

Nevertheless, promoting the paradisiacal qualities of a far-away land to make it an attractive location for colonisation was not new. Archaic Greek myths concerning the fertility of Magna Grecia or Greenland's naming by Eric the Red are similar acts of promotion designed to attract settlers (Morakis, 2011: 460-492; Baldacchino, 2012: 55).

Hence, it is no surprise that the 'island' remained the dominant literary topos for any vision of a better world during the EM period. Moreover, this was a rational choice considering the island was a much more easily regulated space compared to any mainland one. As a spatial symbol and a dream, the 'empty' island could offer a fresh start to the European settlers, similar to the one that Gonzalo dreams of establishing in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). A society where 'all things in common nature should produce without sweat or endeavour' and where 'treason, felony, Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need for any engine' had no place (Shakespeare, 2008, 2.1: 22). The reality was quite different. Unlike Gonzalo's unpopulated island the 'new lands' that the EM explorers added to the atlases of the period were populated by cultures that the European colonisers were quick to destroy, enslave or dismiss, closer to Prospero's island and the fate of its true owner Caliban. Nevertheless, EM utopia searched for an island that had not to be Edenic but empty. An island on which a completely new society based on different values and ideals could be built at a distance from the old, corrupted world.

From Paradise to Utopia: re-articulating the island

As previously discussed, European utopian tradition had a typified space, the island. Before the EM period these were miraculous places that were untouched by the Fall; lands that due to their perfection could not be improved further by humankind (Freitag, 2013: 121). This changes during the EM period due to the growing interest in the idea of 'improvement'. This term entered general discourse from the early sixteenth century (Slack, 2015: 1-8, 253), when European society began to believe that humanity possessed the ability to influence its environment and therefore its destiny. This new outlook also re-energised the locus of the island, transforming it from the static setting of paradise to a dynamic and malleable space suitable for experimentation. Gonzalo's utopia in the second act of *The Tempest* encapsulates perfectly the EM view of the island, as a suitable space for the most extreme type of experimentation in the pursuit of alleviating society's ills.

It was the same 'emptiness' and seemingly endless possibilities that More chose to utilise in order to articulate his vision of the best possible society in *Utopia* (1516). The influence of European explorations on the creation of *Utopia* is evident in the premise of the work itself which narrates an expedition starting in America under the leadership of Raphael Hythloday. Hythloday serves as the narrator of the story where after a long, difficult journey the crew discover the island of Utopia and its society. Utopus, the founder of this state is described as a foreign general who destroyed the previous corrupt civilisation to build a better society upon its ruins. In addition, More accompanied the publication of his work with an alphabet of the utopian language and a map of the island, just as travellers and cosmographers did in their accounts of the New World in an effort to reinforce its plausibility and appearance as a real travel narrative (More, 2016: 9-11, 127). He went to great lengths to ensure that the ideal society he described would be perceived as a real topos, built by humans, visited by humans and inhabited by humans, and not as a spiritual, symbolic vision of a perfect world like St. Augustine's *City of God* or Bartolomeo Del Bene's later *City of Truth* (1609) (see Stimac, 2020).

More was equally cautious to not present his island of Utopia as a piece of paradise that had survived the Fall. He aimed to present a society that could serve as a tangible paradigm for imitation by his contemporaries and such an edenic space had no value for his vision. More's understanding of nature was filtered through the lens of Christianity; it was something corrupted and hostile. More was adamant about his island's condition, it was neither fertile nor welcoming to human habitation. More named the main river of the island with the Greek name Anydros, which meant without water, and had Hythloday commenting on the need to protect the houses in Utopia from the strong winds (More, 2016: 47-9). A land with a dried-up river and sweeping winds is hardly edenic. Still, this infertile and volatile land was appropriate for More's aim, namely to present a society that solely by humankind's effort could repair the Garden of Eden. Hence, the core belief of *Utopia* was that humanity had the power to improve itself and its surroundings. A belief that was among the basic tenets of Christian humanism being espoused not only by More but also by other important humanists such as Erasmus and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Parrish, 2010: 589-605). *Homo Sapiens* was a wonderful creature, second only to God according to Pico, who had not just the ability and intellect to work this garden, restore and nourish it back to its prelapsarian state but the obligation to do it (Pellegrini, 2002: 801-828). More, who had translated Pico's biography from Latin into English, shared this belief (Lehmberg, 1956: 61-74).

More was less interested in the location of his island than in its topography, which can be seen in the distraction caused by a servant's entrance when Hythloday describes the exact location of the island of Utopia, resulting in the directions being unheard (More, 2016: 27). Hythloday proceeds to explain that Utopia used to be known as Abraxa until a foreign army led by Utopus conquered it (ibid: 44). Yet, contrary to every previous historical exemplar Utopus, instead of ruling his subjects as a tyrant, decides to unify conquerors and conquered into a new people. This goal was destined to shape every aspect of Utopia from its political and social system to its religion. In particular, Utopus in wishing to avoid a similar fate to the one he had brought upon the Abraxians, decided to separate his state's lands from the rest of the continent by digging a fifteen mile-long channel. Hence, More's Utopia was not simply an island but an artificial one. Utopia's shape resembled a crescent with an opening of eleven miles between its two horns creating a large, safe, sheltered bay. A series of forts and the small size of the entrance to the bay that was full of treacherous shallows and rocks meant the inland sea remained protected from any external incursion (More, 2016: 44-6). Utopia's artificial insularity had multiple purposes. Aside from defence, the separation of Utopia from its neighbours was essential for the implementation of the social and political reforms that Utopus wished to enact. By separating his society, Utopus reinforced its sense of uniqueness and allowed a new cultural paradigm to be developed free of external corrupting influences. Although Utopia's geography was based on enclosure this does not necessarily equate to isolation; gaining entry to Utopia was difficult but not impossible. Merchants, travellers and explorers like Hythloday could reach it and Utopia itself maintained relationships with its neighbouring countries. In this way Utopia reflects our understanding of islands as physically isolated but socially connected places (Hay, 2006).

Furthermore, Hythloday recounts how, by making all the people work equally on the project, Utopus succeeded not only to open a channel that transformed Abraxa into an island but also to construct a new civic identity for its citizens. Hythloday underlines the fact that the conquered Abraxians worked next to the soldiers of Utopus as equals and this shared experience forged them into a new, unified people free from past identities and ready to follow a new path (More, 2016: 42)¹. Utopia's human-made geography, therefore, was a collective undertaking aimed at serving the community. It embodied and exemplified the principles of an equal society even in its topography, as a result, all the 54 cities of the island followed the same plan, had the same population, offered the same facilities and amenities and all were supplied equally by their surrounding countryside (Pohl, 2006).

Still, More's main concern was to describe a land without any miraculous or extraordinary quality. This meant that his ideal society had to deal with a series of logistical issues, the most important of which was how to feed its population. There lies the heart of More's vision and the reason for calling the EM utopia's project 'recreating the Garden' in this article. The finitude of resources is the greatest issue that any small island society has to deal with, and this usually shapes its landscape, settlement pattern and economy (Baldacchino, 2006). In Utopia citizens rotate between the cities and countryside where they learn agricultural skills. As well as helping to feed the citizens More's plan aimed for something broader, namely, to instil in Utopia's citizen a new habitus, a new set of habits, skills and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977) that could be utilised in cultivating and thus taming all of Utopia's nature (Rebhorn, 1976: 140-155). The Utopians were constantly reminded of this mission to transform the wilderness again into a Garden and were honing their skills even when they dwelt in their cities by tending household and district gardens. Utopians were encouraged to compete with each other for their garden's beauty and yield (More, 2016: 46). Therefore, More's ideal society was neither a dream of constant gratification nor a piece of the Lost Eden. It was a society located on an island where everyone worked side by side and shared the land's produce equally. Every resource that Utopia had available should be utilised, and the Biblical mission to tame nature and restore the prelapsarian Garden of Eden was the only way to do that. Hence, despite the symbolism that was invested with by Christianity, the restoration of the Garden was also a practical endeavour and an attempt to instil a degree of realism.

'Improvement' and New Atlantis

New Atlantis (written around 1623, published posthumously in 1627), was Frances Bacon's version of utopia; conceived as a demonstration of the positive results that his method of philosophical inquiry would have for humanity. Following the conventions of the genre, Bacon introduces us to the island of Bensalem, vaguely located in the Pacific Ocean and discovered when a Spanish merchant ship was led there by a storm. To help us understand this society, Bacon uses an anonymous Spanish crewman as the narrator and audience surrogate in our journey to this strange land. His inquiries about the history and institutions of Bensalem are answered initially by the Governor of the House of Strangers, the head of Bensalem's lazaretto. The Governor informs us about the island's origins and its seclusion from the rest of the world. In particular, we learn that the isle of Bensalem is the last living repository of pre-cataclysmic knowledge. Soon, another character Joabin, a Jewish merchant, takes the mantle of the newcomers' guide by giving them a tour around Renfusa, the island's capital, while explaining the mores and rituals of its people. Finally, we get to meet the last and most important of our guides to *New Atlantis*, one of the Fathers of the House of Salomon. The Governor characterises Salomon's House as the noblest foundation in the whole world (Bacon and Campanella, 2003: 18). The Governor of the House of Strangers describes its mission as being 'dedicated to the study of the works and creatures of God'. But, the Father of the House of Salomon described its mission differently: to unlock 'the secret motions of things; and enlarging the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible' (ibid: 54).

We learn that Salomon's House includes artificial mines, hills, caves, pools and wells, all designed specifically for conducting experiments. Salomon's House also erected facilities to house their mathematical instruments, high towers for the study and recreation of meteorological phenomena, and chambers suitable for experiments on new cures for diseases. In addition, the institution had two galleries, one of them housing statues of famous inventors and the other containing designs,

miniatures and examples of inventions. These buildings were accompanied by a park and some orchards. The Father underlines that even these had practical purposes. The galleries were dedicated to inventors and inventions sought to inspire the members of the college to emulate the individuals honoured by them; while even the park and the enclosures were loci of experimentation where the rare flora and fauna of the island was dissected and studied (More, 2016: 38-46; Wallace, 2003; Cowan, 2011; Peltonen, 1992). Similar to More, Bacon understood this world as corrupted and imperfect by the Fall of nature, but while More advocated hard work, frugality and monastic inspired common ownership (Séguy, 2014: 284-319), Bacon was more concerned with using 'applied natural philosophy' to reconquer nature and then restore humankind's dominion upon it (Whitney, 1989: 371-390). Bacon's ideas are seen as a major inspiration for the EM scientific revolution; in his *Novum Organon*, he appealed to humanity to regain its divinely bequeathed right over nature (Bacon, 1855: 111). Bacon's choice to direct his works to the faithful was not a rhetorical device or an EM convention, but an exemplification of his project's deeply religious character.

Nothing was or should be wasteful in Bacon's society. All these experiments had one purpose: to make life easier for the citizens of Bensalem, to satisfy their needs and to prolong their lives. The Father's haste to emphasise how every experiment and every scientific enquiry performed in the House's premises has practical applications demonstrates how Bensalemites – and, by inference, Bacon – were not supporters of pursuing science for its own sake. Similarly, More's Utopians shunned everything that had no practical application, including gold which, given its malleability, was deemed suitable only for chamber pots (More, 2016: 61-2). Hence, even if *New Atlantis's* vision of a different socio-political paradigm was less radical than the communitarian one of *Utopia*, it was still one of a society that had reached a level of unprecedented knowledge and understanding of nature that utilised it with the sole purpose of reinstating humankind's mastery over it. The mission to 'improve' nature is at the heart of the EM geographical utopia, a mission that was seen as essential in a wider effort to 'improve' humanity itself. However, 'improvement' is not a neutral term. Colonialist and imperialist agendas have used processes of 'improvement' to erase indigenous and minority cultures through acts of violence in order to assert the desired hegemony, usually with a Christian morality and a European language, often with long-lasting detrimental effects (see Berquist Soule, 2014). In More's *Utopia*, the concerns of surplus population meant the establishment of colonies on areas where plenty of fallow land could be found. Utopians invited the indigenous population to join them; but if these people rejected this invitation by choosing to resist their assimilation, then the Utopians waged war against them. For Utopia, leaving land uncultivated was enough of a justification to wage war. This view aligns with their mission of restoring nature but also an indication of the influence on *Utopia* by the era's colonial ambitions that often regarded newly discovered lands, at least initially, as being *tabulae rasae* with vast natural resources, exotic inhabitants and fertile virgin lands waiting to be occupied and improved (Evans, 2009: 35-7).

The ruinous influence of the Garden

By the seventeenth century there was a different, more nuanced perception of newly discovered lands' natural environment and potentialities. Contesting the view that nature was simply a raw material waiting to be improved and utilised by a reformed humanity, these instead emphasised the corrupting influence that a paradisiacal environment could have on its inhabitants. One such example is Henry Neville's *Island of Pines* (1668) that represents a unique critique of both the EM utopian and colonial projects, while Hammond's (c1640) *A Paradox: Proving the inhabitants of the Island, called Madagascar or St Lawrence to be the happiest People in the World* cast serious doubts on humanity's

ability to improve nature. St Lawrence dates this work to approximately 1640 when this name was used for Madagascar. The author is thought to be Hammond Walter, a surgeon who spent four months on the island of Madagascar working for the East India Company (Wilbur, 1945: 200). These two works unfold their critique by focusing on the primitivism of the people that inhabited their respective islands. In particular, they simultaneously replicated and subverted the attitude of Utopians with the view that the introduction of advanced European techniques could transform them into actual utopias while at the same time they questioned the European's ability to resist the corrupting influence that these lands could have on their inhabitants (Stewart-Harawira, 2005: 63; Ashcroft, 2016: 33).

This doubt, in both texts, is caused by the difference between the edenic environment of the islands and the primitivistic, and sometimes unruly, existence of their societies. On Neville's *Isle of the Pines*, a society is established by the survivors of a shipwreck. The five castaways are one man and four women (three of whom are European and one who is described as a 'black slave'), who soon produce offspring that diverge into different tribes. This society is based upon an agricultural economy, which exploits the island's untouched natural resources via the tools and techniques that the Europeans possess. Alternatively, in Madagascar, the described society is an indigenous one. According to Hammond, the indigenous people are slothful and sluggish, neither ploughing nor cultivating their land but rather living in a state of indolence, basking in the extreme fertility of their island, which happily provides everything they need, from nutritious exotic fruits to pasture for their herds (Hammond, 1643: 2-8). Hammond's work is based on the view that skills and science, what collectively was called 'art' until the seventeenth century, cannot act as a substitute for nature. Hence, every technological advance, such as geonics, planting and transplanting, is inadequate when faced with the power of nature. This was a view that clearly denies the idea of remaking the garden through art, which was embodied by More's and Bacon's utopias, and as a consequence questions the European colonisers' ability to better utilise Madagascar's lands.

While Pines Island society initially has access to tools salvaged from the shipwreck, and knowledge of European science and techniques, its society eventually fails. When the island is re-discovered by a Dutch ship, its society has regressed. Politically, it is in turmoil, with the descendants from the union of the man and the 'black slave' having rebelled against the other three tribes, which considered themselves superior. Economically, it is in a similar dire position having failed to improve or maintain its agricultural implements. To the visiting Dutch crewmen, the descendants of Pines Island seem closer to a primitive indigenous tribe than to advanced European settlers. As a result, the utopian character of *Isle of Pines* can be easily disputed: the initial picture of an edenic island soon transforms into an exercise and political critique on the perils of colonialism.

Satirical takes of utopia and the island topos like Neville's are not unique. Thomas Artus with his *L'Isle des Hermaphrodites* (1605) provided a much more jarring critique to the French monarchy and the corruption of the court camouflaged, not very successfully, by the utopian genre's conventions such as the isle setting and the narrator traveller that returns home to inform us about this different society (Arthus, 1996: 12-9; Crawford, 2003: 513-42). However, the *Isle of Pine's* pessimistic depiction of society has nudged various scholars to emphasise its dystopian quality, seeing it functioning solely as a critique of contemporary English society. Nonetheless, the scope of Neville's criticism extends beyond the shores of England. The regressed European-in-origin society amazement of the knowledge and technology of its Dutch visitors is a condemnation of notions of European racial superiority and dreams of a Golden Age revival, a devastating answer to the debate between nature versus nurture. Hence both these works seem to express doubts not just about the core project of EM utopianism, that of restoring the Garden, but also on humanity's ability to achieve that. Something validated by Hammond's call to colonise Madagascar that is free from any notion of improving the

island's nature or utilising science to build a new society. A century of failed colonial enterprises may have taught something to these writers. Hammond was an employee of the East India Company and Neville was a seasoned parliamentarian. Both men knew the promises and the dangers that the exotic islands embodied for the settlers and geographic remoteness could be extremely difficult to overcome with the techniques and political paradigms of their era. This was expressed by Neville through a condemnation of the folly of utopia and by Hammond with an embracing of colonialism that was abandoning the hopes of building a better society for pure conquest and exploitation.

Robinsonades and 'Restoring the Garden'

Yet, these experiences and types of criticism were not popular enough to discredit the belief in nature's improvement that had been established during the EM era. As a result, fifty years after the publication of *The Isle of Pines*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* appeared in April 1719, and the book's immediate success led the author to produce a sequel called *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, in August 1719. With this work, Defoe created the ultimate tale of humanity's heroic efforts to restore the Garden. Defoe's hero is a man unable to fit in his own society or to meet the expectations of his family for a career in law, having only one wish: to become a sailor and travel (Downie, 1983: 74-81; Blaim, 2016: 8-16). Thus, 'by nature inclined' to be a sailor and to create a fortune, Crusoe is led by these obsessions on numerous adventures (Defoe, 1798: 5-9). It should be noted that before Crusoe found himself as a castaway on an island in the mouth of *Oronoque*, he had established himself successfully in Brazil as a plantation owner until, driven by his desire for (more) profit, he participates in a slave-trade expedition (ibid: 75, 146-173).

However, the expedition ends in disaster with the ship being sunk by a storm and Crusoe finding himself stranded on a desert island. The empty island is the perfect utopian/colonial void, but the spectacle of its untamed exotic nature is enough to make Crusoe despair. With no supplies or weapons for hunting, Crusoe is convinced that he will starve to death. After finding shelter in a bushy tree for the night, he resolves to decide how to die the next day. Luckily, Crusoe wakes the next day to find the hull of his former ship and its precious cargo washed ashore by the storm. His will to live is restored and with that his desire to appropriate all the island has to offer. Crusoe salvages everything useful for his survival and to affirm his authority on the island's nature, which is 'barren... inhabited only by wild beasts' (Defoe, 1798: 31). A characteristic demonstration of the power that his tools gave him over the island's nature is his decision to shoot a large bird. The bird proves inedible, but the terrified screams of the island's fauna on hearing the 'first gun... since the creation of the world' are a symbolic indication of Nature's subjugation and even the end of this paradise's innocence (Defoe, 1798: 73).

Crusoe is alone. His loneliness, however, soon becomes a secondary aspect of his life, instead he focuses on conquering and transforming the island through disciplined and ritualised labour, to provide the amenities and way of life he had previously known. The recreation of a familiar and comfortable space in a hostile (usually island) environment (Blaim, 2016: 84), has inspired such a volume of literary works that the genre has its own category: robinsonades. Nevertheless, Crusoe is a Promethean figure, his actions on the island are divided between colonial and utopian desire, and indeed, on some level, he embodies the collapse of the borders between these two paradigms. His recreation of all the stages of human civilisation from initial cave-dwelling to the present reflects his dismantling of this pristine garden of Eden and its substitution by a heavily altered settler utopia (Benhayoun, 2006: 58-64). The limits of this individualistic utopia are revealed early on when Crusoe

salvages all the coins that he can find from the ship but muses how they have no value on the deserted island.

Even if the island proves to have served repeatedly as a safe haven for pirates and to be visited by members of neighbouring tribes, its lands are uncultivated and thus unclaimed. Hence, Defoe's hero re-energises a form of pre-political natural property when he explores the island and discovers a valley full of wild trees that, unattended, bear no fruit. He starts seeing himself as king and lord of the island, with 'right of possession' (Defoe, 1798: 221). Hence, after his rescue, when he establishes a colony there, becoming, in the end, a typical coloniser/founder, the island is recognised by all as his personal property. As such, robinsonades have been interpreted as being structured around a narrative of self-discovery and healing, and their protagonist's ordeal as a transformative experience (Castro & Muscat, 2020; 255-9). But, Crusoe's acts on the island and the justifications of his acts resists this interpretation. Instead of being transformed, Crusoe is supercharged. His thirst for accumulation becomes more insatiable than ever before, even if money loses its value due to the absence of society to barter with, everything must become useful and fruitful. It is easy to ignore this attitude as part of the survivalist plot of the robinsonades that highlight the ingenuity of their heroes, but recreating the lost amenities and comforts is the crux of his actions. His isolation leads him to withdraw to a different quixotic task, not to invent a new paradigm of social and political organisation but to plant there an already established one. Crusoe dreams to be a king not a lawgiver.

Crusoe is the archetypal figure of emerging bourgeois individualism. Despite suffering loneliness, he never wishes to found a new society, he just wishes to establish his authority upon his island and then to return to the world. This desire of his to appropriate everything without any communal objective underlines the main difference between EM utopianism and colonialism: their opposing views on the issue of possession. Of course, the subjugation of nature is at the core of EM utopianism. However, Crusoe's attitude is very different from that seen in More's or Bacon's works. With humanity regaining what it had lost as a result of the original sin, mastery over nature was the key to a restored Garden of Eden. More's Utopians could not stand the idea of barren and uncultivated land; they constantly toiled the fields, achieving self-sufficiency for their community. Bacon's Bensalemites, through other means, sought to accomplish the same goal. Crusoe probably worked harder than most, yet he never wished to satisfy anyone else's needs than his own (Blaim, 2016: 176). His only desires were to survive and possess. It is in this limited vision where EM utopianism and colonialism diverge. In Crusoe's actions, nature's appropriation reached its apotheosis (Hymer, 2011: 18-39). By shedding the concern for the public good, Crusoe was able to perfect his strategy of improving and appropriating nature; but, by doing so, he corrupted the re-built Garden once more.

Conclusion

The Early Modern utopian works examined in this paper are representations of an era dominated by an optimism of what humans could achieve through their toil over nature and given the ideal space, such as an island separated from the corrupting influence of the outside world. These works did not seek to discover a secret Garden of Eden that had survived, hidden from humanity since the Fall of humanity. Instead, the protagonists in each of these stories sought to restore or remake the Garden; either as a practical concern for humanity's material condition or as a more metaphysical quest to return to a prelapsarian state of perfection. Firstly, it was thought this could be achieved through straightforward cultivation then laterally through a process of 'improvement' based on the skills and scientific developments of humanity. Yet the harsh realities of establishing a settlement on a distant

island proved that tending the land and a sense of moral superiority was not enough to create a perfect society. In fact, time spent on these islands exposed European colonisers as equally fallible to the sins they ascribed to indigenous populations: idleness, immorality and cruelty. Furthermore, the process of 'improvement' itself is not self-evident but embedded in the politics and ambitions of colonialism. Therefore, Early Modern utopias sought non-edenic environments to plant the hope of restoring an uncorrupted nature but their desire to improve nature failed to materialise anything more than the greed of accumulation exemplified by the robinsonade.

Endnotes

1. More not only used Great Britain as his inspiration for Utopia's island setting but he was also an experienced London administrator who knew the intricacies of a closed ecosystem. More was aware of the differences between Britain and its continental neighbours. For example he worked on two versions of the unfinished *History of King Richard III* (1512-9), an English one aimed at domestic audiences and a Latin for European audiences. In the Latin version, More adds numerous explanations of the unique institutions and customs of England, such as the Parliament, to help his audience understand the peculiarities of the land (Logan, 2011: 172). This makes it apparent that he understood very well the uniqueness of a culture that had developed in an insular environment. As for London, the city where More was born and spent the majority of his life, its cultural distinctiveness from the rest of the country was not only well-known and understood but also frequently likened to that of an island (Jütte, 2014: 204-12).

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