

# Foods from the Other World

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Considering the States and Empires of the Moon and the Sun as a utopia cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, many of the scenes and societies visited by Dyrcona on the Moon and the Sun look like dystopias at first sight. In any case, the adventure regularly turns out badly for the hero, who is forced to escape or go elsewhere to see if other places might be more favourable to him. In addition, one can often get the impression that expeditions serve more to criticise Cyrano de Bergerac's society than to describe an ideal society. Moreover, the role played by the science of his time and the author's fanciful inventions could suggest, rather, that we are perhaps looking at one of the first science fiction novels. So, the first question is to ask ourselves what kind of novel this strange unfinished novel is, which shares with other novelistic genres the description of different societies. To this end, it is necessary, first of all, to clarify these concepts.

Let us leave aside the common sense of the "utopian" adjective, to focus on the genre inaugurated by More. Usually, utopias are defined by their characteristics: communism or community life, prevalence of equality over freedom, rejection of money, time spent on leisure and education, obligation to work for all, simplicity of lifestyles, etc. This way of defining, in addition to being tautological (utopia is defined by the characteristics of a few utopias that we know a priori to be utopias) has the disadvantage of limiting utopia to the ideal of an era or, more precisely, to the critiques of an era. This is one of the reasons why it has been possible to claim that utopias were totalitarian; the other reason being the literal reading that transforms a novel into a treatise on the best form of government, leaving aside the ironic aspects. However, if utopias are based on criticism of the author's society to propose a society in which, through a particular organisation of social relations, these defects are absent, the ideal of life found there is not an absolute ideal, but is relative to the author's society. It is therefore necessary to define utopia by its functions: the criticism of society and the description of a society whose organization makes it possible to avoid these criticized failings.

As for counter-utopias, anti-utopias or dystopias - novels that share with the utopian genre the description of different societies - they differ from them because it quickly appears that the organisation described is not enviable. Their function is to warn against possible excesses of

society. And they do so by caricaturing certain aspects of their societies and projecting them into a future society, called utopian or ideal, but similar to a nightmare. They therefore mainly play on the fears of the abuses of certain characteristics of our societies. To make the constraining and nightmarish character clear, one or more heroes refuse this way of life and try to escape it, which leads to major repressive measures against them and increases, for the readers, the bad sides of this imagined society.

Science fiction works can be optimistic or pessimistic, although the latter probably predominate. However, they cannot be confused with utopias or anti-utopias. The main difference with utopias is the social organization. As we see it, in utopias, if society is happy, or at least if we no longer find the targeted defects in ours, it is exclusively due to a diverse social organisation. All changes are based on this organisation. This is why science and technology are often reduced to it, so that one cannot imagine that they would be the basis for the transformation of Utopians and their society. Likewise, if people are happy and live in harmony, it can never be because these beings would initially be different: either morally or in their intellectual or physical capacities. However, these two important limits of utopias are happily crossed in science fiction novels: not only are science and technology highly developed, but also the beings of these other worlds are themselves often of a profoundly different nature. This last element distinguishes them from anti-utopias, where they are generally men with whom we are dealing; in fact, the characters must resemble us sufficiently for us to understand that it could be us and one of the futures of our societies. These characters can certainly be transformed by science, but it is then to denounce the dangers of technology on human nature.

And it is of course the form that distinguishes utopias from treaties on ideal governments. Utopias are not limited to the theoretical point of view, but embody societies. Movement is the opposite of treaties, where principles are started and the type of society it would give is sometimes - rarely - described, but never by embodying them in characters. Moreover, the fictional nature of utopias means that the comments are not necessarily those of the author such as More, who can distance himself and who can have society described by a “professor of nonsense” and end his text by affirming: “... I cannot perfectly agree to everything he has related. However, there are many things in the commonwealth of Utopia that I rather wish, than hope, to see followed in our governments.”<sup>1</sup> The fictional aspects of utopias are therefore an essential element.

Once these criteria have been established, let us now look at how *The Other World* can be characterised and classified. Above all, it should be noted that, unlike most novels, whether utopian, dystopic or science fiction - not to mention political treatises - we are dealing here with several different societies. There is not only one society on the Moon or the Sun, but many, inhabited by very different beings whose social organisations, if they are described, have nothing to do with each other. In this sense too Cyrano's text is special.

Dyrcona's first trip did not take him to the Moon but to New France. It is almost immediately an opportunity to criticise the mentality of the time and not only or mainly that of Canada. The author explains his arrival in the New World by the fact that he only moved horizontally both during his ascent and descent and that he did not fall back near Paris, but far from it: “[...] the

Earth had to have turned during my elevation” (p. 49).<sup>2</sup> However, this adherence to Copernican theory is no more accepted in Canada than it is on the old continent:

Mais vous ne savez pas, ajouta-t-il [M. de Montmagny, vice-roi], la plaisante querelle que je viens d'avoir pour vous avec nos pères jésuites? Ils veulent absolument que vous soyez magiciens; et la plus grande grâce que vous puissiez obtenir d'eux, c'est de ne passer que pour imposteur. (49-50)<sup>3</sup>

The idea that the Moon was just another world, equivalent to the Earth, had made his friends laugh. On the other hand, the idea of the Earth movement immediately provokes a threat from the religious. And even though the viceroy seems to be convinced by the arguments put forward by Dyrcona, he is not in a position to oppose the religious. Dyrcona's travels therefore look good from the outset as an opportunity to criticise, not a future society, but that of the author. From this point of view at least, we are in a utopia and not really in a dystopia. This same idea will not be accepted on the Moon either, where the hero will be attacked by the great local pontiff:

Les prêtres, cependant, furent avertis que j'avais osé dire que la Lune était un monde dont je venais, et que leur monde n'était qu'une lune. Ils crurent que cela leur fournissait un prétexte assez juste pour me faire condamner à l'eau (c'était la façon d'exterminer les athées). Ils vont en corps à cette fin faire leur plainte au roi qui leur promet justice; on ordonne que je serais remis sur la sellette. (109)<sup>4</sup>

Dogmas are powerful wherever we are, and claiming something against them is not without its danger. This time, Dyrcona will only be condemned to withdraw publicly. Any reference to a scientist who has existed is obviously not fortuitous.

And the situation is not always more enviable on the Sun where, after a trial rich in teaching, Dyrcona is condemned by the bird court to supreme torture, the sad death, just because he is a man and because of everything that men do to animals:

Je pense, messieurs, qu'on n'a jamais révoqué en doute que toutes les créatures sont produites par notre mère pour vivre en société. Or, si je prouve que l'homme semble n'être né que pour la rompre, ne prouverai-je pas qu'allant contre la fin de sa création, il mérite que la Nature se repente de son ouvrage? (244-245)<sup>5</sup>

However, he will escape the sentence, following the testimony of his cousin's parrot, because he had given him freedom and had affirmed that he was endowed with reason, since in this world, unlike what we know on Earth, “a good deed is never lost” (p. 253). Wherever it is, it is therefore the author's company that is targeted. This is also confirmed by the fact that when he returns to Earth after his journey on the Moon, Dyrcona is imprisoned as a wizard. The lack of tolerance is constantly highlighted in the hero's various adventures. The critical function found

in both utopias and dystopias or in some science fiction novels or even in political treatises is therefore undeniably present.

However, Dyrcona begins his lunar journey to “Paradise Terrestrial”, which could be reminiscent of utopias. Indeed, utopia could at first sight be confused with paradise, since its inhabitants live happily there. But this would neglect an essential element of utopias: in them, happiness is achieved by the organisation of society, not an external benefit. It is therefore people who build a beautiful life for themselves, not an idyllic and prosperous nature or a god who gives it to them. The prosperity of the Utopians comes from their wisdom, the fruit of their education, their good organisation and their work: it is the work of reason, not a gift from heaven. This could therefore be seen as an essential difference with utopias. But such a conclusion would probably be hasty. Indeed, Dyrcona’s arrival in this place is not accomplished by the grace of God, but by the machine he invented combined with the fact that he coated his body with marrow. The same applies to other people who have succeeded in doing so. Thus, the ascension of Elijah, which in the Bible is of a miraculous nature, is explained in Cyrano’s novel by the laws of nature and by the ingenuity of the characters. Since the fumes of sacrifices rise to God, he had filled two large vases with them and tied them under his armpits. On the Moon, he discovered by chance the fruit of knowledge, which enabled him to know where Paradise was, so that he could easily get there. The same is true of Elijah’s chariot: it becomes an iron chariot attracted by a magnet thrown towards the Moon. It is therefore by their industry that men reach paradise, and the ascension itself is due to man’s cunning and in no way to a divine will. In this sense, Cyrano’s text is also utopian or, and perhaps even more so, science fiction. Indeed, whereas science has a very important place in utopias, techniques are generally undervalued; but it is through techniques that were rather elaborate for the time that the characters in Cyrano’s novel reach the Moon and the Sun. However, whereas in science fiction books techniques are a pure instrument, without it being important to describe the laws which they obey, Cyrano’s constant concern is to explain how these machines work: they are systematically ingenious applications of the laws of nature.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to claim that all the techniques present are explained. The author refers to talking books, which provide an opportunity to learn by talking to great men (pp. 142-143) and to a hunting technique that lets the larks fall all plucked, roasted and seasoned. But this is probably less a real technique than a literary fantasy or a play on words. But even in the latter case, the author must give an explanation: “That, I imagined at once, is what is said in our world about a country where larks all fall roasted! Probably someone had come back from here.” (p. 89) And once again the expression is of a material nature.

On the other hand, it is not uncommon for the beings encountered not to be truly human: animals, spirits or beings with other meanings. This element would tend to classify the work in the area of science fiction novels. However, this remark must be qualified. Most of the animals encountered have purely and simply human capacities, including overturned prejudices. There is therefore no reason to show that good organisation is due to capacities that people would not understand, but rather to criticise the conceptions of the time by transposing them into animals or different societies. However, there is one notable exception: on the Moon, while he is obliged

to go to fairs to entertain onlookers, he meets a resident of the Sun, who explains to him that he has other senses and that these are the source of his knowledge:

*Il y a trop peu de rapport, dit-il, entre vos sens et l’explication de ces mystères. Vous vous imaginez, vous autres, que ce que vous ne sauriez comprendre est spirituel, ou qu’il n’est point; la conséquence est très fausse, mais c’est un témoignage qu’il y a dans l’Univers un million peut-être de choses qui, pour être connues, demanderaient en nous un million d’organes tous différents. Moi, par exemple, je conçois par mes sens la cause de la sympathie de l’aimant avec le pôle, celle du reflux de la mer, ce que l’animal devient après la mort ; vous autres ne sauriez donner jusqu’à ces hautes conceptions à cause que les proportions à ces miracles vous manquent, non plus qu’un aveugle-né ne saurait s’imaginer ce que c’est que la beauté d’un paysage, le coloris d’un tableau, les nuances de l’iris ; ou bien il se les figurera tantôt comme quelque chose de palpable, tantôt comme un manger, tantôt comme un son, tantôt comme une odeur. Tout de même, si je voulais vous expliquer ce que je perçois par les sens qui vous manquent, vous vous le représenteriez comme quelque chose qui peut être ouï, touché, fleuré, ou savouré ; et ce n’est rien cependant de tout cela. (82)<sup>6</sup>*

We are dealing here (without context) with a being who is profoundly different from men and this difference in nature allows him to access much more knowledge than men. However, it is not possible to know if these superior abilities allow them to live happily and in a wisely organised society, since, during his journey on the Sun, Dyrcona does not discover the social organisation of this people. It would therefore seem that the purpose of this long tirade on the senses and their capacities is above all an opportunity to present Cyrano’s materialism, and not the visit to a truly happy and well-ordered society: it is the senses that allow access to knowledge and everything that is considered miraculous is in fact explained by purely natural laws.

Elsewhere on the Moon, he is mistaken for an animal, because in this society people walk on all fours and animals on two. He is shown as a fairy beast, just as men do with animals: “But know that you are only treated the same way, and that if someone from this earth had gone up into yours with the boldness to call himself a man, your doctors would have him suffocated like a monster or like a monkey possessed by the devil.” (p. 77) Even for him it is the opportunity to meet the demon of Socrates, the adventure is not pleasant. But it is clear that this is not a question of criticising a future or different society, but rather the mores of his time. This process is repeated several times. This will again be the case on the Sun, where the birds mock the fact that he thinks he is superior: “Hey, what, they whispered to each other, he has no beak, no feathers, no claws, and his soul would be spiritual! O gods! How impertinent!” (p. 235) Even when the adventures of history bring Dyrcona into painful situations, it is never only the morals of his time that are targeted. The discovery of other societies is therefore not so much to actually propose new ways of living as to show the ridiculousness of human conceptions, which is immediately apparent as soon as the same ideas and ways come from the mouths of other beings or animals, and this is then no longer claimed for the supremacy of men but for that of other species. It is therefore the

critical function that dominates, whether it is that of utopia or works of science fiction, but not that of anti-utopia. And from this point of view there is no real difference between the worlds of the Moon, the Sun or the Earth.

Even if, as in utopias, there is no complete description of a new organisation of society, it would be abusive to conclude that no different organisation is proposed and that Cyrano's text is limited to the purely critical function. Indeed, here and there, there is a description of other organisations. This is particularly the case with regard to how to wage war on the Moon. It is equality that reigns on the Moon, in this domain where superiority would strongly benefit one side. There, equality is required both for the time available for the arming phase and for the number of combatants and their capabilities (an able-bodied soldier will fight against another able-bodied soldier, a cripple against a cripple, a strong person against a strong person, a weak person against a weak person, someone sick against someone sick, etc.). But even a victory by these equitable means is not enough to win the war, because other battles between scientists and men of spirit are planned and the victory between them is worth three of the others. At the end, the winning people will choose their king, their own or that of their opponents. Other reversals of morals on Earth are also proposed, such as honouring and obeying young people not old people and their parents, or that virginity is a crime and that, consequently, men and women can complain in court about another person who refused their advances.<sup>7</sup> This idea, which can be found in *Philosophy in the bedroom* by Sade, is undoubtedly surprising for the time and is undoubtedly more a result of a desire to take morals against the grain than of a genuine proposal. This is confirmed by the fact that the author does not hesitate to contradict himself by using the pleasure they had in making their children against the parents:

Comment ! parce que votre père fut si paillard qu'il ne put résister aux beaux yeux de je ne sais quelle créature, qu'il en fit le marché pour assouvir sa passion et que de leurs patrouillis vous fûtes le maçonage, vous révérez ce voluptueux comme un des sept sages de Grèce ! (116)<sup>8</sup>

We can clearly see here the fictional distance and the deliberately unrealistic and ironic character that we have found in More's utopia. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to see it as nothing more than an irrelevant fantasy. The libertine mores of this Moon society perhaps serve, above all, to criticise the prudishness of the time:

Mais ce sont des visions trop ridicules. Par votre foi, y a-t-il quelque place sur votre corps plus sacrée ou plus maudite l'une que l'autre? Pourquoi commets-je un péché quand je me touche par la pièce du milieu et non pas quand je touche mon oreille ou mon talon? Et-ce à cause qu'il y a du chatouillement? Je ne dois donc pas me purger du bassin, car cela ne se fait point sans quelque sorte de volupté; ni les dévots ne doivent pas non plus s'élever à la contemplation de Dieu, car ils y goûtent un grand plaisir d'imagination. (129)<sup>9</sup>

However, the criticism does not prevent the proposal of another way of doing things, which could be of real interest. On the Sun, the bird people elect their king for a limited period of six months. Moreover, he is chosen not from the strongest and most powerful beings, but, on the contrary, from the weakest, most gentle and most pacific, so that, if he harms anyone during his reign he is always able to take revenge. In addition, it is enough for three birds to be dissatisfied with his government for him to lose his title and new elections to be held immediately. The criticism of the power of the time is obvious. However, we cannot reduce the idea to this element, because we do find another way of working which could be interesting and, on average, some developments could be applied on Earth. Just the idea of electing the Head of State for a limited idea will obviously be widely taken up later on.

The Other World, therefore, does not belong unequivocally to a particular genre. However, at the end of this investigation, it can be concluded that it is not covered by the treatise on the best form of government or by dystopias. Regarding the first point, it can be argued that the proposals do not focus on the political question and that they are a minority and very concrete, too, in the form of the work, which is of a romantic and often fanciful nature. The second distinction, meanwhile, is essentially based on the fact that the criticisms are not aimed at a possible deployment of the author's society, but at his world as he knows it; in other words, it is not a question of warning against a possible evolution of his society, but of showing the failings of the one in which he lives through distorting sets of mirrors.

On the other hand, it is as much utopian as it is science fiction. If criticism is central and almost systematic, which perhaps pulls it more towards the side of utopias, the presentation of the organisation of different societies is more partial and not systematic because this fact would make us think more of works of anticipation. The importance of science and technology also refers to this genre, but the way they are very often explained and the role of explanation through natural laws is more reminiscent of utopias. In addition, there are beings here and there of a different nature from men, which also brings the work closer to science fiction. So, we're in a mixture of these two genres. The States and Empires of the Moon and the Sun can thus be read either from one angle only, or maybe as a strange mixture of the two.

Travels to the Moon and the Sun are also an opportunity for Cyrano de Bergerac to conceive a parody of different episodes of the Bible, whether by telling them in a truncated way, seeking rational explanations for them, or by isolating certain aspects to immerse them in a completely different context. In this section, we will show how food is often the trigger for these distorted rewritings and how this leads to a more sensory and organic reading of the Bible, given that the emphasis is placed on gustatory or olfactory perceptions, which were in fact considered as inferior senses.

The whole story is based on a truncated symmetry: the inhabitants of the Moon consider our Earth as their Moon, while we on Earth consider their Earth as our Moon. This world that is not Dyrcona's is therefore a copy of ours, but one in which Cyrano allows himself to introduce new elements, distortions, which in reality question the foundations of our earthly habits and customs.

This game of distorting mirrors in which Cyrano becomes engaged is set up as soon as his narrator lands on the Moon, at the very beginning of the story. The narrator crashes to the

ground, at the foot of a tree, and finds himself covered by the juice of a burst fruit against his face. He then confides his amazement at not having been killed by the fall and, not knowing yet where he is, imagines that it was the fruit that saved him:

[...] et j'ai conclu de mon aventure qu'il en avait menti, ou bien qu'il fallait que le jus énergétique de ce fruit qui m'avait coulé dans la bouche eût rappelé mon âme, qui n'était pas loin, dans mon cadavre encore tout tiède et encore disposé aux fonctions de la vie. (59)<sup>10</sup>

This fruit is that of the Tree of Life and Dyrcona will learn later in his journey, even if he leaves the reader in no doubt by announcing it from the beginning, that he is in the Earthly Paradise. This explains the effect the apple had on him. It can already be noted that the process described by the narrator is by no means metaphorical: it is indeed the juice of an apple that flows into his mouth, and we will see in what follows that food is always considered from the perspective of its assimilation by the body and that it is the organic aspect that is always put forward.

In this scene we find the usual symmetry between the worlds: the Earthly Paradise is on the Moon; yet, as the inhabitants of this other world see their world as being earthly and ours lunar, we may wonder to what extent this Paradise is destined for us. If the term Earthly Paradise is used to describe a place on the Moon, it is because it had to be invented by an inhabitant of the Moon to describe his own world. Through this simple set of symmetrical mirrors, we see that Cyrano is moving the biblical purpose to the other world, and somehow dispossessing the earthlings of their own mythology: the Earthly Paradise is not for us, and only a handful of people have been able to access it.

The distortion of the biblical account continues with the appearance of Elijah, the first character Dyrcona met on the Moon, who is described as a young teenager and who tells him that only six people, now including Dyrcona, have entered this Paradise. But unlike Adam, whose original sin is parodied in the rest of the text, his thirst for knowledge and curiosity to explore the worlds were not the cause of his fall from Paradise, it was, rather, his accession. There is therefore a double reversal of the usual history: first, eating the apple is not a source of rejection of Paradise, and second, knowledge is not regarded as a sin — quite the contrary, since it leads to Paradise.

The second biblical character Dyrcona hears about is Enoch, who rose to heaven because of the smell of the sacrifices (63) that God liked. But this elevation to God is not metaphorical in the story, it is indeed physical. Enoch rises by using the volatility of the fragrances, of the “steam that exhaled” (63) trapped in vases, a system similar to the one that Dyrcona will use with dew drops. These are properties of matter that are used and put forward by Cyrano, who therefore proposes not only a reversal of religious elements (decentralization of the Earth through the existence of other worlds, parody, etc.), but also a materialistic reading of the biblical content; Paradise is a geographical place reachable by the curious philosopher with physical and mechanical means.

It is also through purely mechanical means that Eve, it is said in Dyrcona, left Paradise after Adam, dragged behind him by a kind of magnetic effect:

[...] mais parce qu'il y avait très peu qu'elle avait été tirée du corps de son mari, la sympathie dont cette moitié était encore liée à son tout, la porta vers lui à mesure qu'il montait, comme l'ambre se fait suivre par la paille, comme l'aimant se tourne au septentrion d'où il a été arraché. (63)<sup>11</sup>

Later in his story, the narrator is again confronted with the effects of eating an apple, this time from the Tree of Science. Indeed, it is said that Enoch “knew where the Earthly Paradise was” (66) after eating an apple from the Tree of Science that he had recovered from his fishing nets. Elijah himself confesses that he has found the way to Paradise by a similar process; by eating the fruit of this Tree, his “soul would be enlightened by all the truths of which a creature is capable” (67).

Once again, the consumption of apples is not metaphorical, as the following text clearly shows: knowledge is truly acquired through food, in the same way that eternal life is gained by eating an apple from the Tree of Life.

But although the parallel between food and eternal life or knowledge is very clearly established, the digestion process is perceived as something negative. In fact, it is even because of it that eternal life is impossible, and later in the text we find a description of what happens when the fruit of the Tree of Life is eaten: “He soon consumed and exhaled the serpent in smoke” (69). This snake is the intestines, which devour all the food we eat every day. His venom is bile, and he's the one who eats our corpse in the grave and makes it disappear. By consuming apples, we get rid of what devours us from within and nothing stands in the way of eternal life.

Here again, we see how Cyrano shifts the discourse about life and death on the organic terrain. What acts as salvation is not our soul saved from eternal torment, it is the body freed from decay by the consumption of sacred fruit, whose taste resembles that of the “spirit of wine” (70). The digestion of food and the subsequent decomposition of the corpse find their only alternative in the fruit of the Tree of Life; there is therefore no promise of redemption after death and no mention is made of a soul that would survive the body. The inhabitants of Paradise are therefore many living beings, possessing a body capable of feeding itself (we will see how, below), although free from digestion and death, and this is what we call eternal life.

The fruit of the Tree of Science, on the other hand, makes it possible to attain knowledge, but it is surrounded by a bark of ignorance capable of making anyone who tastes it forget any trace of Paradise: “I had barely tasted it when a thick night fell on my soul” (75).

Knowledge of universal philosophy is therefore something that requires caution. It is not enough to immediately crunch the fruit, it is necessary to peel it, to go to the heart. Whoever has not taken this trouble “will descend below man” (72) rather than “ascend as high as the angel” (72). The elevation of the prudent philosopher to the rank of angel is achieved through the consumption of an apple, to be precise, at the exact moment his teeth or saliva make contact with the fruit. It therefore seems that it is necessary to have a body and appetite to reach the level of angels. Moreover, even in paradise knowledge is not simply given, it is necessary to peel the fruit, in other words, to work and strip things of their appearance to achieve it.

In addition to the obviously humorous character of this distortion of biblical history, there are many materialistic aspects of Cyrano de Bergerac's thought. The body, human or vegetable (we will see it later on with the example of the cabbage), is at the centre of sensations; it is essential for the realisation of all these experiences which finally lead to eternal life and Paradise. Knowledge is acquired by a very organic process and the term "intellectual foods" is to be understood here in a strict sense: there is no barrier between bodily and spiritual sensations, they all contribute to the same goal. Moreover, it is no coincidence that one is the currency of the other. In the Moon, in fact, it is through verses that we pay for our food. The benefit of this practice is made explicit: "In this way, when someone dies of hunger, it is never more than a buffalo, and people of spirit are always very expensive" (90). Beyond social criticism, this process once again makes it possible to combine terrestrial (or more precisely here, lunar) and spiritual foods; they are in no way opposed but constitute a continuum.

So, it might seem surprising to see the disjunction between food and digestion. The rejection of this inner serpent gives access to eternal life, but we do not stop feeding on the fruit of the Tree of Science, as if the search for universal philosophy required a more constant and complex work, requiring time, prudence and reflection. And apart from the sacred fruits, the inhabitants of the Moon continue to eat other foods, but the way of doing so in the Other World is different from that found on Earth. Indeed, the narrator, expecting to receive a solid meal, is told that in this World, "we only live by smoke" (86), so food only passes through the respiratory tract, as if the smell of food contained everything that was necessary to satisfy hunger: "Unless you have already lived in this way, you will never believe that the nose, without teeth and without gullet, makes the office of its mouth to feed the man" (87). Food is therefore not superfluous, nor is eating, it is digestion, an obstacle to eternal life, that is. This is confirmed in the following paragraph: "because food produces almost no excrement, which is the cause of almost all diseases" (87). Later in the story, during the journey on the Sun, we learn that digestion is also a cause of fatigue: "[...] sleep is only produced by the gentle exhalation of meat that evaporates from the stomach to the brain" (210).

We can therefore draw a parallel between the consumption of the fruits of sacred trees, which bring universal philosophy or eternal life, and that of meat, whose smoke satisfies while avoiding the problems associated with digestion, but which nevertheless really nourishes, making those who abuse it fatter, and can cause indigestion. Whether you consume the apple or the smoke, there is an acquisition of something - knowledge, eternal life, stopping the feeling of hunger. However, the consumption of apples is completely optional and reserved for the philosopher who has been cautious in his approach. The acquisition of knowledge is presented as something more concrete, which requires a greater investment: as much as the inhalation of smoke can be done passively, so much as the consumption of apples requires action so that assimilation can take place, a direct contact between the body and the fruit.

Despite the apparent simplicity of this way of eating, the inhabitants of the Moon do not renounce the meal ceremony: they meet to smell the aroma of meat together, just as we do on Earth. If eating is not essential in their world, the meal, as a convivial opportunity to meet each other, is preserved. But in addition to breathing in the pleasant smell of meat, those who participate in meals have made it a habit to undress in order to facilitate the absorption of smoke:

Vous avez possible été surpris lorsque avant le repas on vous a déshabillé, parce que cette coutume n'est pas usitée en votre pays ; mais c'est la mode de celui-ci et l'on s'en sert afin que l'animal soit plus transpirable à la fumée. (87)<sup>12</sup>

It is not only the nose that is involved in the diet, it is the whole body that is permeable to fumes once released from the clothes that surround it. If the body is "transpirable", it is because the contact between the smoke and the skin allows the nourishing substance to be assimilated, once again thanks to a purely organic process. Let us note in passing Cyrano's fierce irony: while on Earth we dress to eat, it appears Paradise as a place where people gather naked to share an abundant meal.

Paradise is not without solid food, but it seems to be reserved for animals. When, not quite satisfied by the smoke, Dyrcona asks for a more consistent meal, he is offered cooked larks because that is what monkeys eat (throughout his journey, outside the kingdom of birds where he is forced to pose as a monkey to save his life, Dyrcona is not considered a man). The larks hunted with a rifle fell at his feet, already cooked and ready to be eaten. Getting food - solid or not - is therefore not a problem. In addition to digestion and the diseases - and then death - that follow, the difficulty of obtaining enough to survive disappears completely: Paradise is a place where food is only considered in order to obtain pleasure. It is also in this sense that we can understand payment through poetry, a source of pleasure as much as a good meal can be.

We have seen so far how it is always the organic and bodily aspects that are put forward, both for food and nourishment and for salvation, in the biblical sense of the term. The idea of considering the transmission of a beneficial substance to the body in an a priori spiritual context (as is the case when it comes to enjoying eternal life on Paradise) is pushed to its climax in the second part of the story, during Dyrcona's journey on the Sun.

During a discussion about the resurrection, he is exposed to the following reasoning: if a Christian were to eat a Mohammedan, he would then assimilate his body into his own, in a mixture of two foreign materials homogenized by a process of digestion and they would even be transmitted by his semen to his descendants. Should God therefore dedicate this hybrid body to bliss or damnation? It seems that this leads to a paradox that even God cannot solve. Everything happens as if faith could be transmitted in this way through these mechanisms of feeding, digestion, assimilation of the characteristics of foreign bodies, as if it were the body alone, and not something immaterial, that could be worthy of gaining Paradise or being damned. If a Christian eats a Muslim, their bodily substances mix so well that they seem to be one in the eyes of God. The difference between the Muslim and the Christian therefore lies more in a different disposition of the body (bodies that remain compatible, however, from the point of view of the possibility of assimilation) than in a difference of the soul. This is so much so that it is possible, by this purely organic and ingestion-related process, to fool God or put him in an impossible situation: "What would still be very ridiculous is that this body would have deserved Hell and Paradise all together" (156).

However, if the human bodies are indistinguishable, one can ask oneself about the limits of this compatibility, in other words, is it reserved for men? Indeed, from a materialistic perspective, nothing fundamentally distinguishes the Muslim from the Christian or the atheist, but can

a difference be introduced between the human being and a living being? Cyrano de Bergerac clearly proposes a negative answer to this question in two passages of the text. In the one where it is said that if eaten by flies, which will be eaten by a bird, it will “pass in their substance” (250) as was the case for the substance of the Mohammedan eaten by the Christian and in the one where a cabbage is presented as a creature of God on the same basis as any animal or human: “[...] is not this cabbage of which you speak as much of God as you?” Worse still, it would be more serious to kill a cabbage than a man, because if man is promised a resurrection, this is not the case with cabbage: killing it therefore amounts to taking his life forever and without hope of salvation. The life of the cabbage is therefore more precious than that of a human and it is its privileged status that gives man more responsibility towards other creatures of God. But this reversal of the food chain, where the predator finds himself responsible for the misfortune of the food, goes so far as to erase the supposed privileged status of man in creation:

Dira-t-on que nous sommes faits à l'image du Souverain Être, et non pas les choux? [...] Si donc notre âme n'est plus son portrait, nous ne lui ressemblons pas davantage par les mains, par les pieds, par la bouche, par le front et par les oreilles, que le chou par ses feuilles, par ses fleurs, par sa tige, par son trognon, et par sa tête. (122-123)<sup>13</sup>

The blurring of the distinction between human and cabbage, or any other being of creation, finds a perfect place in Cyrano's materialistic system, whose discourse on food was only one illustration of many; a man eating a cabbage and assimilating it makes it indistinguishable in the eyes of God, as it was with the Muslim. There is therefore no longer any reason to maintain a clear difference between these entities.

It therefore appears that the theme of food is first of all used by Cyrano to construct a reading of the biblical episode of genesis based on the body and organic matter. All the usual concepts - salvation, eternal life, faith, soul - are interpreted from bodily mechanisms such as the ingestion of products, their assimilation and digestion. Philosophy and knowledge are also considered as very concrete things that need to be assimilated, again according to procedures similar to food and digestion. The body substance replaces the mind or soul entirely, to such an extent that the human loses its central place and is put on an equal footing, indistinguishable from any other animal (bird) or even from a plant (cabbage).

Many aspects of Cyrano's philosophy are found in the Other World. The structure of the novel, the various journeys and societies discovered, as well as the many characters, often philosophers, who instruct Dyrcona, facilitate the presentation of a philosophy that is not systematic. However, we must be careful not to attribute all the philosophical speeches to Sieur de Bergerac. We are without context in a novel, which is also burlesque in tendency, and the contradictions themselves would not be free if all the ideas were gathered together. Nevertheless, some ideas are recurrent. Our aim here is not to present a synthesis of Cyrano's philosophy, but to highlight the elements of his thinking in which food plays a role. Three aspects of his philosophy give particular importance to food: equality or continuity between living beings, materialism and naturalism.

In these novels, man loses his dominant place. He is only one of many beings left. First, he is composed of the same elements as other living beings: “In this way, in a man, there is everything you need to compose a tree; in this way, there is everything you need to compose a man” (100). The wording at this stage is still ambiguous. In Aristotle's work, too, the universe is composed of the same elements, including living beings. It is therefore the different souls - vegetative, sensitive and intellectual - that distinguish living beings: man possessing the three souls, animals the first two and plants only the first.<sup>14</sup> The difference in nature disappears entirely in Cyrano and it is the process of feeding that makes it possible to explain it. Since beings are what they eat, the difference is at most degrees and the passages between beings are very common:

Vous savez, ô mon fils, que de la terre, il se fait un arbre, d'un arbre un pourceau, d'un pourceau un homme. Ne pouvons-nous donc pas croire, puisque tous les êtres en la Nature tendent au plus parfait, qu'ils aspirent à devenir hommes, cette essence étant l'achèvement du plus beau mixte, et le mieux imaginé qu'il soit au monde, étant le seul qui fasse le lien de la vie brutale avec l'angélique? Que ces métamorphoses arrivent, il faut être pédant pour le nier. Ne voyons-nous pas qu'un pommier, par la chaleur de son germe, comme par sa bouche, suce et digère le gazon qui l'environne; qu'un pourceau dévore ce fruit et le fait devenir une partie de soi-même; et qu'un homme, mangeant le pourceau, réchauffe cette chair morte, la joint à soi, et fait enfin revivre cet animal sous une plus noble espèce? (150)<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, the story here evokes only the evolution towards man. But man is no more than being at the top of the food chain. In addition, you don't have to think very hard to see that the process is two-way, since excreta and putrefaction also feed the plants. This is the secret that a bird will tell Dyrcona on the Sun, to console him for his punishment of being eaten by flies.

Cyrano pushes this process to its extreme consequences. While most corpses are burned, the same cannot be said of philosophers, who are invited to a philosophical banquet of a completely different kind. When a philosopher “feels his mind softening” (144), he brings together his friends who have previously fasted. He then stabs himself a dagger and, one after the other, each of his friends “swallows his blood and always sucks until he can't drink more” (145). They will then devote themselves to the pleasures of love with fertile young girls, “so that if anything can be born from these embraces, they can be assured that it is their friend who lives again” (145). Since we are what we eat and there is no discontinuity between species, it is indeed logical that cannibalism is not taboo, but a transformation process like any other.

Under these conditions, it is difficult to imagine an immortal soul characterising man, to the detriment of beasts... Moreover, Dyrcona, who here, as in many passages, takes up the prejudices of his time, is immediately challenged:

Quoi! Me répliqua-t-il en s'éclatant de rire, vous estimez votre âme immortelle privativement à celle des bêtes? Sans mentir, mon grand ami, votre orgueil est bien insolent! Et d'où argumentez-vous, je vous prie, cette immortalité au préjudice de celle des bêtes? En

premier lieu, je vous le nie, et je vous prouverai, quand il vous plaira, qu'elles raisonnent comme nous. (148)<sup>16</sup>

The instructor's argument is made here by means of ad hominem theological reasoning: If God is just, the fact that he has given reason to single men would imply that it is to other beings that he grants immortality. There is no longer any distinction of nature to distinguish the living.

Continuity between species is closely correlated to a radical form of materialism: everything we are of the order of matter. This leads to a process in which the thoughts themselves are linked to the arrangement of the organs and are no longer anything other than a particular disposition of matter:

Sachez donc qu'afin de connaître votre intérieur, j'arrangeai toutes les parties de mon corps dans un ordre semblable au vôtre ; car étant de toute part situé comme vous, j'excite en moi par cette disposition de matière, la même pensée que produit en vous cette même disposition de matière. (274)<sup>17 18</sup>

In this conception where everything is material, it is logical that all phenomena can be explained by natural laws. We can thus speak of a profound naturalism in Cyrano.

We have already noted how all religious myths find another explanation in the States and Empires of the Moon and the Sun. This is particularly the case with the prophet Elijah's chariot of fire, which becomes a sparkling iron chariot and, through the ingenuity of the character and the properties of iron and magnet, it helps to explain the character's ascent to the Moon and Paradise. As for the property of the magnet, it is not explained then. It will be necessary to wait for Dyrcona's visit to the Sun to find an explanation, but this time, it is an explanation of a mythical nature that will be given: the friendship of Pylades and Orestes. However, it would be wrong to conclude that, for Cyrano, the natural or mythological explanations are of the same order, because this will give him the opportunity to explain the legend by bringing it back to physical phenomena. Watching his friend and cousin die, Orestes expires quickly in turn. The embracing bodies of the lovers will feed two young shoots - the diet once again plays a decisive role - which will become trees, producing fruit. The passion of the lovers was so intense that the one who ate the fruit of one will be irresistibly attracted to the one who ate the fruit of the other, either by an unfailing friendship, when it comes to people of the same sex, or by an eternal love when the victims are male and female.

Unfortunately, the principle poses some problems, which Cyrano enjoys exposing in their length and breadth: thus, when a father and a daughter eat both fruits; or a goddess and a bull; or when the juice of the two fruits is so sublimated that the two lovers cannot detach themselves from each other and end up forming a hermaphrodite; without counting the case of Narcissus who ate two fruits in abundance. As we can see, not only do many myths have different explanations, but they are always based on natural principles. No matter how fanciful the explanation is, the important thing is that the explanations are physical: the putrefaction of the bodies that will serve as soil for young plants and the ingestion of fruits. These will even

explain the properties of the iron and magnet. Parents desperate to see their children fall in love with an irrepressible passion for their friends or lovers will burn all these plants. The ashes containing only the principles will scatter over the whole earth and form the iron and magnet.

Cyrano's naturalism does not require the explanations to be purely scientific or necessarily in accordance with the scientific knowledge of the time. What characterises his thinking is to give all phenomena - human as well as physical - an explanation through the principles of nature. Of these principles, the principle of food has a privileged place, because it is at the origin of transformation and equality between beings.

## Works Cited

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- More, Thomas (1516), *Utopia*, trans. Literature Project, <<http://literatureproject.com/utopia/index.htm>> (last accessed at 21/10/2019)

## Notes

1. We cite the English translation of More's Utopia from Literature Project, which can be found here: <[http://literatureproject.com/utopia/Utopia\\_9.htm](http://literatureproject.com/utopia/Utopia_9.htm)>
2. The numbering refers to the French edition of *Voyages to the moon and the sun* edited by Jacques Prévot: *Les États et Empires de la Lune et Les États et Empires du Soleil*, collection Folio, 2004. We translated all the in-text citations.
3. "But you know not, added he, what a pleasant Quarrel I have just now had with our Fathers, upon your account? They'll have you absolutely to be a Magician; and the greatest favour you can expect from them, is to be reckoned only an Impostor". We cite the English translation by A. Lovell that can be found online: <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A35530.0001.001?view=toc>>
4. "But some more passionate Doctors, being informed, that I had the boldness to affirm, That the Moon, from whence I came, was a World; and that their World was no more but a Moon, thought it might give them a very just pretext, to have me condemned to the Water; for that's their way of rooting out Hereticks. For that end, they went in a Body, and complained to the King, who promised them Justice; and order'd me once more to be brought to the Bar."
5. "I think, Gentlemen, it never was yet doubted, but that all Creatures are produced by our common Mother, to live together in Society. Now if I prove, that Man seems to be Born only to break it; shall I not make it out, that he going contrary to the end of his Creation, deserves that Nature should repent her self of her work?"
6. "Your senses, replied he, bear but too little proportion to the Explication of these Mysteries: Ye Gentlemen imagine, that whatsoever you cannot comprehend is spiritual, or that it is not at all; but that



Consequence is absurd, and it is an argument, that there are a Million of things, perhaps, in the Universe, that would require a Million of different Organs in you, to understand them. For instance, I by my Senses know the cause of the Sympathy, that is betwixt the Loadstone and the Pole, of the ebbing and flowing of the Sea, and what becomes of the Animal after Death; you cannot reach these high Conceptions but by Faith, because they are Secrets above the power of your Intellects; no more than a Blind-man can judge of the beauties of a Land-skip, the Colours of a Picture, or the streaks of a Rain-bow; or at best he will fancy them to be somewhat palpable, to be like Eating, a Sound, or a pleasant Smell: Even so, should I attempt to explain to you, what I perceive by the Senses which you want, you would represent it to your self, as somewhat that may be Heard, Seen, Felt, Smelt or Tasted, and yet it is no such thing.”

7. Moreover, the mark of the gentlemen is not the sword, symbol of death and artifice of the executioner, but a medal with a manly limb, symbol of life. (pp. 143-144)
8. This part is absent from Lovell’s translation. Our translation: “How! because your father was so bawdy thahe could not resist the beautiful eyes of some creature, that he made a deal to satisfy his passion and that of their intercourse you were the fruit, you reverence this voluptuous as one of the seven sages of Greece!
9. Again, this part is absent from Lovell’s translation. Our translation: “But these are too ridiculous visions. By your faith, is there any place on your body more sacred or cursed than the other? Why do I commit a sin when I touch myself by the middle part and not when I touch my ear or my heel? Is it because there’s tickle? I must not purge myself, for this cannot be done without some kind of voluptuousness; nor must the devotees elevate themselves to the contemplation of God, for they enjoy a great pleasure of imagination.”
10. “[...] and from my adventure I conclude it to be false, or else that the efficacious Juyce of that Fruit, which squirted into my mouth, must needs have recalled my Soul, that was not far from my Carcass, which was still hot, and in a disposition of exerting the Functions of Life.”
11. “The Sympathy which still united that half to its whole, drew her towards him as he mounted up, as the Amber attracts the Straw; the Load-stone turns towards the North, from whence it hath been taken”.
12. “You were, perhaps, surprised, that before supper you were stript, since it is a Custom not practised in your Country; but it is the fashion of this, and for this end used, that the Animal may be the more transpirable to the Fumes.”
13. “If it be said, that we are made after the Image of the Supreme Being, and so is not the Cabbage; grant that to be true; yet by polluting our Soul, wherein we resembled Him, we have effaced that Likeness, seeing nothing is more contrary to God than Sin. If then our Soul be no longer his Image, we resemble him no more in our Feet, Hands, Mouth, Forehead and Ears, than a Cabbage in its Leaves, Flowers, Stalk, Pith, and Head”.
14. It should be noted that it is possible for a soul to be joined or lost, but these are exceptional cases and they do not allow us to consider that there is a true continuity in the living.
15. “You must know, that the Earth, converting it self into a Tree, from a Tree into a Hog, and from a Hog into a Man, is an Argument, that all things in Nature, aspire to be Men; since that is the most perfect Being, as being a Quintessence, and the best devised Mixture in the World; which alone unites the

Animal and Rational Life into one. None but a Pedant will deny me this, when we see that a Plumb-Tree, by the Heat of its Germ, as by a Mouth, sucks in and digests the Earth that’s about it; that a Hog devours the Fruit of this Tree, and converts it into the Substance of it self; and that a Man feeding on that Hog, reconcocts that dead Flesh, unites it to himself, and makes that Animal to revive under a more Noble Species.”

16. Once again, this part is absent from Lovell’s translation. Our translation: “What! He replied, bursting out laughing, You consider your soul immortal, unlike that of the beasts? Without a lie, my great friend, your pride is very insolent! And from where do you argue, please, this immortality to the detriment of that of the animals? First of all, I deny it to you, and I will prove to you, when it pleases you, that they reason as we do.”
17. “Know then, that to the end I might know your inside, I disposed all the parts of my Body, into the same Order I saw yours in; for being in all parts scituated like you, by that disposition of matter, I excite in my self the same thought, that the same disposition of matter raises in you.”
18. This is the same teaching that Socrates’ demon gave to Campanella : “[...] ce fut moi qui l’avisai, pendant qu’il était à l’Inquisition à Rome, de styler son visage et son corps aux grimaces et aux postures ordinaires de ceux dont il avait besoin de connaître l’intérieur afin d’exciter chez soi par une même assiette les pensées que cette même situation avait appelées dans ses adversaires” (p. 78) [“it was I that advised him, whilst he was in the Inquisition at Rome, to put his Face and Body into the usual Postures of those, whose inside he needed to know, that by the same frame of Body, he might excite in himself, the thoughts which the same scituation had raised in his Adversaries”].