

Occupy the Moon

by Tony White

'Fifthly,' I said, 'BEARING in mind that by large PAY and much free-quarter with the resources of the Moon they bought the right to be Justices and Rulers by a bloody and subtle thievery. We object to the rescue of very rich men over the enslaved...'

'And so on. Um,' I found another fragment: 'Sixthly, RECALLING the free use of outer space...' but before I could continue she reached over, and took the tablet out of my hand.

'What was that bit about manure?' she asked, waving back up through the text to read it aloud:

RECOGNISING, secondly, the importance of wit and play in exploration, the achievements of subtle imagination and ingenious wit, we began by dealing briefly with the argument through observation, though our difficulties were great. One not inconsiderable inconvenience being distance, though the Earth is our next door neighbour. The digging up and appliance of manure, the sowing of corn, is the solution of our mystery: our Sea of Fertility or *Mare Fecunditatis*. We desire the Moon to be a common treasury of relief for all. Yet that Moon which should be a common store house was bought and sold and kept in the hands of the few.

Demonstrations arose, for none should dare to seek a dominion over others, neither shall any dare to kill another, none desire more of the Moon than another, for he that will rule over, imprison, oppress and kill his fellow creatures walks contrary to the rule of righteousness: Do as you would have others do to you and love your enemies not in words but in deeds.

Likewise, thirdly, we are DETERMINED to oppose Kings, Lords, Justices, Bailiffs and the violent Colonels, Captains, Constables and security personnel who imprison, rob and kill the enslaved...

'I don't know about you,' she said, without needing to point out the obvious, 'but I'm not going to *step outside and dig* anything!'

'No,' I said. 'You may have a point!'

'I mean, manure, sure!' she laughed. 'We've got a load of *that* out the back!'

'Telling me,' I said.

'Is it all like this?' she asked. 'Your presentation?'

'Yes. I'm calling it, "Cutting Up for Moon Society,"' I said. 'Noting that for this purpose at least, references to the Moon will include orbits around and/or other trajectories to or around it.'

'Of course,' she nodded. 'Taken as read.' Then, more playfully: 'You know, it is a bit of a cliché, but that never stopped you before!'

She was a real doer, this one.

I loved the way that she always cut to the chase.

Pointing in the vague direction of the beginning she got straight to the point. 'Why not open by reflecting that in ages past men used to wonder if this place was inhabited!'

'The Man in the Moon!' I chuckled, 'A question that was easier for them to ask than it was to answer!'

I took the tablet back from her and quickly tweaked the opening sentences, then held it up as I fancied a poet might, to declaim:

'Is the moon inhabited?' they used to ask. It is now! FIRST by our oppressors, whose so-called 'achievements' in selling land on celestial bodies be damned. They shall not steal or kill as if the Moon were made peculiarly for them. It cannot be imagined that science's 'obstinate quest' would have completely diminished poverty, but no one with the least knowledge in philosophy should be ignorant of oppression, nor that nothing can be perceived by human understanding without enquiry...

'Literally cutting up!' she interrupted. 'Oh, I get it.'

'Yup. [Godwin](#), [the UN](#), the [Rev. Timothy Harley](#). All those old moon dudes, into the mixer!' [Winstanley](#), too, I fancy,' she said. 'I love his stuff. Is it all in this vein, then?'

I nodded. That was about the size of it. I wasn't going to get a free ride, though. She didn't approve. I could tell.

'But we're not in Surrey now, you know,' she said.

Ouch, I thought, but of course she was right. That was true, too. Here I was, cutting up the canon with some old radical texts to try and, what? To retrospectively justify that which was its own justification? Our very existence? The Maria Movement – maria as plural of *mare* – that had put a protest colony on each of the seas of the Moon!

'I love,' she conceded, 'that old language. "Seventhly for Murther" and all that.'

'I know,' I said. 'Great isn't it?'

'What is "murther" though?' she asked. 'Do you know? Does it mean murder?'

'I'm not sure,' I shrugged.

'It's all well and good,' she said. 'It needs a bit of an edit, obviously, but I worry that it doesn't really reflect the, I don't know, subtlety? of what we're doing here? The livestock habitats? The experiments? The smell of this place? The positive energy?'

Her charming inflections, those sing-song interrogatives, got me every time; gave me a pang even when she wasn't in the room. We had been comparing notes. She wanted to create a type of screen that would be large enough to send messages back to the people left on Earth, and what was I doing? Drafting yet another presentation to the First Moon Committee, that's what. Like Winstanley said: it was deeds versus words all over again, but around here words were generally my department and deeds had a habit of winning.

How these, her, acts of celestial signage, of interplanetary publication, might be achieved was unclear; as yet unspecified. It was her area not mine. Most likely it would take our own Vallerga-Lijn array. A vast field of giant [spectro-heliostats](#), self-sufficient, power units soaking up the rays and then all of them turning like sunflowers to focus their beams back toward the Earth. Synchronised hydraulics working in silent harmony, winking on and off and using prisms to disperse the solar reflection into a seven colour rainbow, to spell out one letter at a time across the field in a simultaneous dot-matrix flash that was – we knew – as beautiful as the sun glinting off distant car windscreens in those old films that none of us could bear, any longer, to watch.

Whether we had the resources to achieve such a feat of engineering, I didn't know. I imagined an analogue variant. What would it take? Some terrestrial *hook-up*, obviously, and maybe that wouldn't be so bad? A team of men on the ground as it were – no offence! – to create shadow-casting structures. Out of what, though? Clouds? Vast gossamer banners? I imagined these great kites tracking against the turning Earth so we could use what was left of the atmosphere to create a gravitational lens, to focus sunlight across the intervenient space. A celestial shadow theatre, stringing words along our creeping penumbra, our slow and perpetual evening.

Was it even theoretically possible? Probably not, although God knows, finding the necessary number of skilled hands would not be a problem, nor fertile brains. All that brawn was crying out, after all, for something to do. They were desperate enough to please, now.

Of course they were.

Crying over spilt milk as usual!

Leaving it too late!

But as to the amount of energy needed, let alone the perhaps more pressing question of what

we might have left to say to them that wasn't simply rubbing it in!

'Well, I haven't got time to rewrite it,' I said. 'The committee meets tomorrow and I've seen the agenda: I'm on first, ready or not. There's no getting around it.'

'Preaching to the converted,' she said.

'I know,' I conceded. 'I worry that all I'm doing is contributing to some awful, self-congratulatory bureaucratisation.'

'Digging over old ground,' she said, pointedly. 'I know. But the thing is, we *won* that battle. We're here, aren't we? And they're not. No harm in restating it, though, I suppose.'

I smiled: 'Thanks, hun. No, you're right. We have to say it over and over again, I think. Otherwise we might forget what we were fighting for.'

We both watched the monitor in silence as Africa appeared on the horizon, sunlight glinting on the westernmost spectro-heliostats.

I could imagine their great mirrors swivelling; almost hear the hiss of hydraulics, smell the grease and metal that was warmed anew each day by the Saharan sun. I admired her for wanting to reply. It meant something. I felt regret and desire tugging at me, too, like the tide. I wanted to feed it, to suckle it like a child in my arms, but what good would that do?

On the monitor I could see that vast Saharan grid flashing into life and running its test routine of noughts and crosses, targets and tunnels, vertical and horizontal wipes, before it began to spell out their own message, to us.

It was the same two things every day, automated and spelt out one letter or character at a time.

'ŽAO MI JE,' they said. 'DÉSOLÉ...BOCSÁNAT...ბოჯოში...' and on and on through the endless-seeming list of translations until they had said sorry in every language, which was when the second cycle would begin: 'NDIHMĚ!' they said. 'KÖMΘK...SUTE...მიშველეთ...HELP!'

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*'Occupy the Moon' was commissioned by The Arts Catalyst to accompany Republic of the Moon exhibition 2011-2012. Tony White is a writer and the author of novels including Foxy-T (Faber and Faber), and his short stories have appeared in numerous publications, exhibition catalogues and collections. Tony has been writer in residence at the Science Museum, London, Leverhulme Trust writer in residence at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies and a compere at the Free University of Glastonbury. In 2010 Tony collaborated with Blast Theory to write Ivy4evr, an interactive, SMS-based, mobile phone drama for young people commissioned by Channel 4, which was recently nominated for a BIMA award. Tony White is chair of London arts radio station *Resonance 104.4fm* and blogs at <http://pieceofpaperpress.wordpress.com>*