

Gentrain Unit 8 Thomas More's *Utopia*, September 12, 2013, Dr. Cindy Ausec

Sir Thomas More – Also known by Catholics as Saint Thomas More

- Renaissance Man
 - English lawyer, social philosopher, author, statesman, noted Renaissance humanist
 - Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII - 1535 tried for treason and beheaded
 - Commemorated by the Church of England as a “Reformation martyr”
- Forerunner of the “utopian” literary genre, wherein ideal societies and perfect cities are detailed
 - More coined the word “utopia”
 - Typically a Renaissance movement
 - Patterned after the Classical concepts of perfect societies – Plato & Aristotle
 - Continued into the Enlightenment

Utopia – a Novel in Latin was published in 1516

- *A Fruitful and Pleasant Work of the Best State of a Public Weal, and of the New Isle Called Utopia* (Traditional English Title)
- Literary Devices
 - Uses real life correspondence to further the plausibility of his fictional land
 - Utopia is placed in the New World and More links his main character Raphael with the travels of Amerigo Vespucci's real life voyages to the Americas

Book 1 *Dialogue of Counsel*

- Introduces the traveler Raphael Hythloday (name and surname allude to the archangel Raphael, purveyor of truth, and Hythlodæus means “speaker of nonsense”)
- Explores the subject of how best to counsel a prince - Allows for discussion of the modern ills affecting Europe

Book 2 *Discourse on Utopia*

- Island of Utopia
 - King Utopos separated it from the mainland
 - Island has 54 towns, each with approx 6000 households
 - City of Amaurote is its capital.
- In Utopia
 - Communal ownership of land – private property does not exist
 - Doors are not locked and anyone may enter a house
 - Men and women are educated alike
 - Agriculture is the most important job on the island – everyone taught it
 - Must also learn at least one other essential trade
 - Everyone works only 6 hours a day
 - Communal dining – no one goes hungry

- Slavery is a feature of Utopian life and every household has two slaves
 - From other countries or criminals
 - Weighed down with chains made out of gold
- Travel on the island only permitted with an internal passport
- Religion
 - Several religions on the island: moon-worshippers, sun-worshippers, planet-worshippers, ancestor worshippers and monotheists
 - Only atheists are despised (but allowed) – considered a danger to the state
- Other significant innovations of Utopia include
 - A welfare state with free hospitals
 - Euthanasia is permissible by the state
 - Male and female priest who are allowed to marry
 - Divorce permitted (only in extreme circumstances)
 - Premarital sex punished by a lifetime of enforced celibacy and adultery punished by enslavement

Possible meaning of *Utopia*

- Contrasts the contentious social life of European state with the orderly, reasonable social arrangements of Utopia
- Used a novel describing an imaginary nation as a means of freely discussing contemporary controversial matters speculatively, he based *Utopia* on:
 - Monastic communalism
 - Biblical communalism in the Acts of the Apostles
- *Utopia* ironically points out through Raphael, More's ultimate conflict between his beliefs as a humanist and a servant of the King at court
- Also contains points of conflict with his personal religious beliefs
 - Concepts such as ease of divorce, euthanasia and both married priests and female priests seem to be polar opposites of his beliefs and those expected of the devout Catholic that he was
 - Religious freedom – he was an opponent to the protestants
 - Communistic life style of a Utopian shows the value that More place on a simpler communal life, reflecting his longing for monastic duties
 - May also reflect his pride in public service and working for a common cause
- In *Utopia* we see how life might develop in a state that tried to balance human depravity and a communist system aimed at checking the destructive individualism of corrupt nature
- Could be a satire in the vein of Machiavelli's *The Prince*