



Thomas More

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Objectives

- Thomas More – as Politician and Catholic Martyr
- Literary genre of “Utopian Literature”
- *Utopia*
 - Book 1 *Dialogue of Counsel*
 - Book 2 *Discourse on Utopia*
- Possible Meanings/Motives

Sir Thomas More

- English lawyer – One of the most thorough and consistent thinkers in the 16th Century. Argued everything like a lawyer
- Social philosopher
- Author
- Statesman
- Noted Renaissance humanist
- Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII

St. Thomas More

- Commemorated by the Church of England as a “Reformation martyr”
 - Opponent of the Protestant Reformation
 - Opposed the king’s separation from the Catholic Church
 - Refused to accept the king as Supreme Head of the Church of England
 - Imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1534 for his refusal to take the oath required by the First Succession Act
- 1535 tried for treason and beheaded

Utopia

- *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)
- Heavy with Irony
 - 1509 Erasmus wrote *The Praise of Folly* a catalogue of ironies while staying with More

Utopia

- Frame narrative primarily depicting a fictional island society and its religious, social and political Customs
- Two parts
 - Book 1 *Dialogue of Counsel*
 - Book 2 *Discourse on Utopia*
- Main Characters
 - Thomas More
 - Raphael Hythloday (Messenger of Nonsense)

Literary Devices

- Links in 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

Book 1 *Dialogue of Counsel*

- Introduces the traveler Raphael Hythloday
- Explores the subject of how best to council a prince
 - Allows for discussion of the modern ills affecting Europe
- More tries to convince Raphael that he could find a good job in a royal court, advising monarchs, but Raphael says his view are too radical

Plato doubtless did well foresee, unless kings themselves would apply their minds to the study of philosophy, that else they would never thoroughly allow the council of philosophers being themselves before, even from their tender age, infected and corrupt with perverse and evil opinions”

Book 2 *Discourse on Utopia*



Illustration for 1516 Edition

Utopia

- King Utopos separated it from the mainland
- 54 towns w/approx 6000 households
- Amaurot is its capital



Map of Utopia by Ortelius ca. 1595

Utopian Government

- *Syphogranus* (“Styward”) – 30 households
- *Traniborus* (Bencheater”) – oversees 10 Stywards
- Each town had a mayor elected from among the ranks of the Bencheaters
- Restriction on political discussion
“It is a capital crime to discuss such questions anywhere except in the council or Assembly”

Utopian Households

- Headed by the eldest male
- Every house hold has between 10 an 16 adults and people are re-distributed around the households to keep things even
- Colonization used to keep overpopulation down and they return if the population drops

In Utopia

- Communal ownership of land
 - People change houses by lot every then years so they won't get too attached
 - 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
 - Must also learn at least one other essential trade
- Everyone wears the same simple clothes
- Everyone works only 6 hours a day
- Communal dining

In Utopia

- Slavery – Every household has two
 - From other countries or criminals
 - Weighed down with chains made out of gold
- Travel only permitted with an internal passport – punished if found without one
 - First occasion returned in disgrace
 - Second offence they are placed into slavery

Religion In Utopia

- Several religions on the island: moon-worshippers, sun-worshippers, planet-worshippers, ancestor worshippers and monotheists
- Each is tolerant of the others
- Only atheists are despised (but allowed) – considered a danger to the state
- They are reasonable and willing to accept Christianity when it is announced to them

Prayer

“...but, if they are mistaken, and if there is either a better government, or a religion more acceptable to God, they implore His goodness to let them know it.”

Other Utopian Innovations

- A welfare state with free hospitals
- Euthanasia is permissible by the state
- Priest are allowed to marry
- Divorce permitted
- Premarital sex punished by a lifetime of enforced celibacy and adultery punished by enslavement

Possible Meanings / Reading of
Utopia

Utopianism

- More's *Utopia* is a forerunner of the utopian literary genre
- Utopianism is typically a Renaissance movement
- Combined the classical concepts of perfect societies of Plato and Aristotle with Roman rhetorical finesse
- Continued into the Enlightenment

Utopia

- Used the novel as a means of freely discussing contemporary controversial matters speculatively
- Based *Utopia* on:
 - Monastic communalism
 - Biblical communalism in the Acts of the Apostles

As a Reflection of More?

- Communistic life style of a utopia may show 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

Humanist vs. Servant of the King?

- Some see the principal message to be the social need for order and discipline rather than liberty
- *Utopia* points out through Raphael, More's ultimate conflict between his beliefs as a humanist and a servant of the King at court

Satire?

- *Utopia* contains points of conflict with his personal beliefs
 - Ease of divorce
 - Male and female priests who could marry
 - Euthanasia
 - Religious freedom – he was an opponent to the protestants
- *Utopia* contains many jokes as satirical asides
- Could be seen in same vein as *the Prince* by Machiavelli (1513)

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