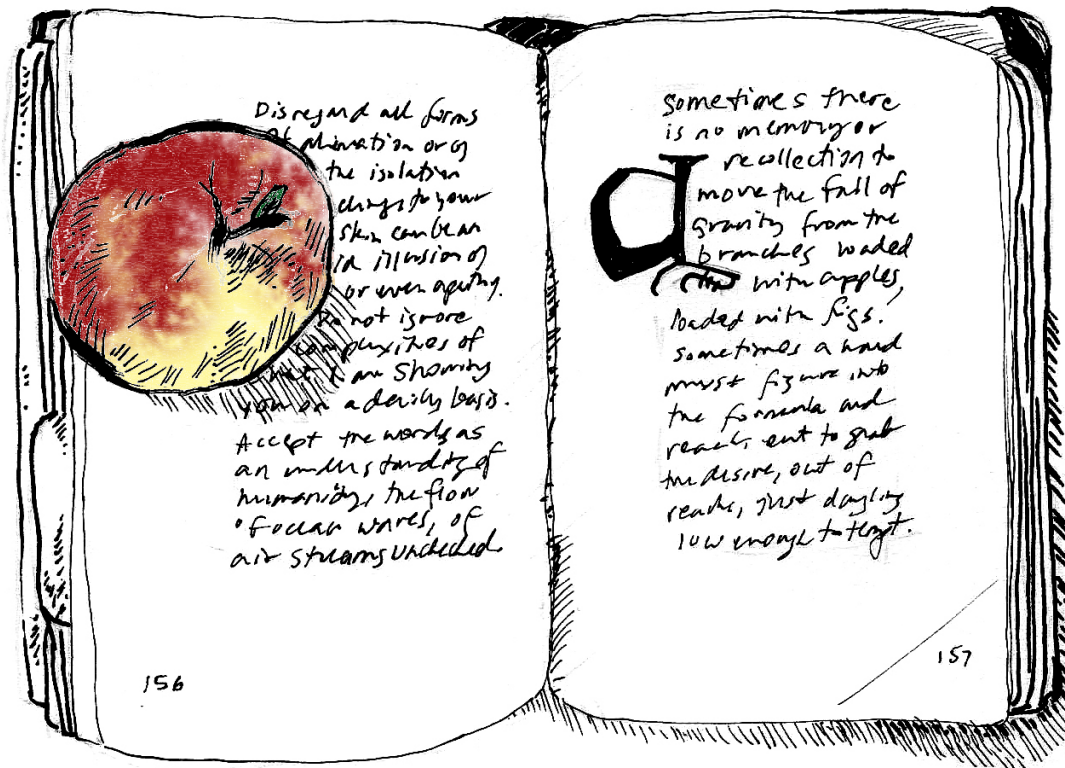


Sir Thomas More and *Utopia*



Utopia-Book 2

Review Book 1 and Book 2.

Both sections are shown through first person accounts of events.

Book 1:

Primarily concerned with
English social order

the character “More” narrates story
and establishes political/social themes
in the full text

establishes England and Europe’s
social / class problems

Book2:

Primarily concerned with
Utopian views of society

the character Raphael Hythlodæus
narrates his adventures in Utopia,
discussing their views of society

offers a solution to class struggles
through example of island Utopia

Utopia-Book 2

Soon More, through Hythlodæus, continues his secondary theme of the evils of idle behavior.

By strategies of the Utopian society, “no one sit[s] idle” (746).

- Hythlodæus outlines the typical idlers in Europe on page 747 as a contrast. Part of the vice of idleness includes: gambling, drinking, brothels, and “useless occupations” (748).
- The remainder of Book 2 shows through example how a society can reject idle lifestyles and attitudes.
- One primary precautionary measure which the Utopians have in place is the fact everyone, men and women, is trained immediately in the pursuit of farming. The society is based primarily as an agricultural culture.

Utopia-Book 2

Aside from this type of political commentary, the majority of this section of *Utopia* leans closer to fantasy.

More creates elaborate details of the daily life of the average Utopian, discussing education, marriage and courtship, family relations, and housing.

- his concern at this stage is creating an elaborate background of this fictional society in order to show its function and mechanism through plot devices—and less about the contrasting politics between England and Utopia
- this soon changes once Hythlodæus acknowledges the existence of slaves
- one of the first times they are mentioned is in the section “Social Relations” where Hythlodæus displays how the food markets are maintained:
“Outside the city are designated places where all gore and offal may be washed away in running water. From these places they transport the carcasses of the animals slaughtered and cleaned by the hands of slaves. They do not allow their citizens to accustom themselves to the butchering of animals” (750).

Utopia-Book 2

Notice just after first establishing the “perfect” classless society, he *then* discloses a major flaw in their community.

The existence of slaves in the plot causes the primary **fantasy** structure to shift to an overt **political/social commentary**.

- Be sure to note that More is not an advocate of slavery. He is mentioning this practice as a common-place evil in the world.
- During the early 1500s slavery as an institution had not yet reached a peak of inhumanity as the American slave trade industry during the early formation of the United States industry. Spanish conquistadors were only just beginning to import populations of African slaves rather than use Native Americans as a resource.
- In addition, England would not begin participating in the Transatlantic Slave Trade until the mid 1500s.
- At this stage in history, the common accepted belief was if a country conquered another country, the first country had “legal” right to do what they wished to the conquered. “To the victor goes the spoils.”

Utopia-Book 2

In a later section of Book 2, “Slavery, [Etc],” Hythlodæus discusses the issues of enslavement.

The opening paragraph goes into elaborate detail of the condition of these people.

- “Prisoners of war are not enslaved unless captured in wars fought by the Utopians themselves [...] Their slaves are either such or such as have been condemned to death elsewhere for some offense. The greater number are of this latter kind. They carry away many of them; *sometimes they buy them cheaply*; but often they ask for them and get them for nothing. *These classes of slaves* they keep not only continually at work but also in chains” (my emphasis, 764).
- What was presented earlier in the text is now changed: this utopian society is based on a (although limited) class system: Freeman and Slaves.
- As well, among the Slave category itself, an additional hierarchy is created: Acquired Foreign Slaves, Willing Slaves, Criminal Slaves. (See pages 764-765.)

Utopia-Book 2

Utopia is then shown as a flawed and hypocritical country.

The notion of slaves or serfs defines an aspect of possession, even if the ownership is restricted to the government itself.

- From More's perspective, although he found a "moral" alternative for the slave trade by placing limits to its functions within a "classless" society—yet, he does this all in order to create an **elaborate fantasy** to show how an utopia actually cannot function without someone being taken advantage of.
- Once you see this intended flaw in the story's logic, then, the story cannot function as a *formal* social political commentary. Once the "perfect" classless society encourages slavery, then the political discourse falls apart in an obvious fashion due to the structure of the plot.
- He furthers this by creating an elaborate allegory showing the slaves placed in shackles and chains of gold.