Irony, rhetoric, and the portrayal of "no place": Construing the elaborate discourse of Thomas More's Utopia

Davina Sun Padgett
IRONY, RHETORIC, AND THE PORTRAYAL OF "NO PLACE":
CONSTRUING THE ELABORATE DISCOURSE
OF THOMAS MORE'S UTOPIA

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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in
English Composition

by
Davina Sun Padgett
June 2006
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ABSTRACT

Since its publication in 1516, Thomas More’s Utopia has provoked considerable discussion and debate. Readers have long grappled with the implications of this text in order to determine the extent to which More’s imaginary island-nation is intended to be seen as a description of the ideal commonwealth. While traditional readings have largely relied upon literal interpretations, and accordingly have emphasized the significance of Utopia as a model of the ideal society, this thesis endeavors to explore beyond the conventional or literal appearance of More’s language to consider the possible meanings, intentions, and strategies underlying Utopia’s elaborate discourse. While acknowledging its affiliation with classical philosophy, this investigation will specifically examine the context of Utopia’s production and consider More’s work as an example of humanist, rhetorical discourse; thus the concentration will be specifically on the significance of More’s use of humor and irony and his familiarity with the conventions of satiric fiction. By means of this perspective, we will discover what Utopia has to reveal about the limitations of idealistic philosophy, the multifaceted construction of identities, the skillful,
yet subtle, use of wit and irony, the technique of effective social commentary, and the appreciation and application of a lively joke and learned jest. Utopia still retains its status as an extraordinarily enigmatic text, but we can now recognize its remarkable ability to compel our contemplation of profoundly serious issues relative to the intricacies of society and the nature of human action and behavior, at the very same time that it provokes our earnest laughter and amusement.
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This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Scott Warden, whose support, understanding, and encouragement throughout my graduate study thus far and in the course of my research for this project have been absolutely phenomenal; my appreciation is sincerely beyond words.

This thesis is also dedicated to my sister, Rachel LeBrun, who believed that I had the strength to begin this journey in the first place.
To

Scott and Rachel
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CHAPTER ONE

"BUT ONLY TO MAKE THAT NEW LAND KNOWN HERE":

THE INVENTION OF UTOPIA

Utopia is a work as complex and multi-faceted as the man who composed it - Thomas More: lawyer, humanist, family man, orthodox Catholic, and later councilor to King Henry VIII. It is difficult to say which of these personae was the most influential in the production of Utopia; and it is still more difficult to decide which facets of More’s temperament provide the reader a clear way into the text in order to determine its fundamental strategies and purposes. More’s vision of an imaginary island-state located at the far end of the earth qualifies Utopia as a work of fantastic fiction; its classical rhetorical structure and philosophical themes associate Utopia with Plato’s treatise concerning the ideal state in The Republic; and More’s skillfully executed use of humor and irony place Utopia alongside a contemporary landmark work of Christian humanism: Erasmus’ witty social commentary Encomium Moriae (In Praise of Folly). The result is an elaborately paradoxical and ambiguous work wherein the author’s intent appears to be deliberately mystified. Thomas More
effectively composed a work in which the narrative structure and rhetorical strategies appear to reflect his own uncertainty or ambivalence about a number of topics, including politics, society, philosophy, and religion.

In terms of the narrative, *Utopia* is by no means complicated. While it includes a combination of elements from the imaginative fiction and the travel narrative genres, *Utopia* is principally a dialogue among three interlocutors: Raphael Hythloday, whose description of a remote communalist island-nation provides the subject upon which More's work is founded; Peter Giles, a friend of More's, fellow humanist, and native of Antwerp; and "More," the narrator who takes it upon himself to record the afternoon discourse and Hythloday's subsequent description of Utopia for the ostensible purpose of publishing it.¹

Book I is comprised of what has become known as the humanist debate, or "the dialogue of council," regarding the question of whether it is better to devote one's life to civic duty or secluded philosophical contemplation. This debate then segues into Book II wherein Hythloday proceeds to offer a discourse concerning "the best state of the

¹ I will use "More" to distinguish typographically between More the historical author and the participant in the dialogue.
commonwealth" - using the isle of Utopia as an illustration. The narrative frame of Utopia opens in Antwerp where the narrator "More" and his colleague Peter Giles, after attending mass at the cathedral of Notre Dame, encounter a stranger. There "More" presents us with his description of the unfamiliar person: "... a man well stricken in age, with a black sunburned face, a long beard, and a cloak cast homely about his shoulders, whom, by his favor and apparel, forthwith I judged to be a mariner" (90). The stranger is Raphael Hythloday, a Portuguese native just returned from a voyage to strange and unknown places with the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci. And yet the apparent simplicity of Utopia's structure notwithstanding, the vast amount of commentary and criticism produced since its publication in 1516 indicates that readers have long grappled with the implications of More's text. Is Utopia meant to be interpreted as a witty jeu d'esprit that is primarily satiric in its intentions? Or, is it something more along the lines of a philosophical or political treatise in which the themes and topics of discussion are intended to be taken seriously?

The ability of More's text to provoke continuous debate is based on the consideration of a fundamental
question: to what extent is *Utopia* truly intended to be seen as a model of the ideal commonwealth? Anyone who attempts to answer this question solely by way of literal analysis or interpretation of the text is confronted by the challenging intricacies of More's work: his incredible poise as a writer, his vast knowledge of classical rhetorical forms and narrative structure, and his skillful execution of language. More's introduction to *Utopia* associates his text with such classical works of political theory as Plato's *Republic* and *The Laws*. According to George Logan, the humanistic interpretations of *Utopia* that have relied upon these classical associations have:

... served to establish fundamental guidelines for the interpretation of the work as a whole, by proving beyond any reasonable doubt that *Utopia* is a careful and essentially serious work, and that its primary disciplinary affiliation is with the tradition of political theory. (*Meaning* 9)

David Sacks acknowledges a similar view in his introduction of *Utopia*: "More explicitly identified his book as a study of 'the best state of a commonwealth,' placing it in a long tradition of debate regarding the strengths and shortcomings of various ideal and real polities" (8). In
addition to *Utopia*'s subject matter, the dialogic structure of the text and Hythloday's explicit references to Plato serve to uphold the assessment of *Utopia* as a work concerned primarily with philosophy and political theory.²

Yet we are prevented from viewing *Utopia* strictly in these terms due to the ubiquitous contradictions evident throughout the text, which are the result of More's consistent and subtle use of irony. The most obvious example of More's irony, as well as his terrific wit, is found in the very title of his work. For More coined the term "utopia" from the Greek ou ("no") and topos ("place"). If we take this meaning seriously, then "More's" presentation of Hythloday's discourse concerning "the best state of a commonwealth" contains the description of a "no place" - a nation that can be found to exist "nowhere."

Further instances of irony and contradiction can be recognized in the names of characters or places:

"Hythloday" is Greek for "speaker/peddler of nonsense."

The name of the main tributary that runs through "Amaurote" (dark city), Utopia's principal city, is called the "Anyder," another Greekism which, when translated, means

"without water." Utopia not only enjoys ownership of a river without water, but the Utopians can also be proud of their poet laureate whose name, Anemolius, means "windbag" and who is credited with writing a 12-line verse stanza that accompanies the first Latin editions of Utopia. While examples of verse were composed by several of More's colleagues to accompany various editions of Utopia, it is suggested that More himself composed the stanza attributed to Anemolius. This stanza is notable in that it demonstrates another level on which More's subtle irony is working. For in the final two lines of the last quatrain, Anemolius writes: "Wherefore not Utopie, but rather rightly / My name is Eutopie: A place of felicity." More cleverly plays on the aural pun of "utopia" by emphasizing its association with "eutopia." Thus More's "no place" can also be translated as "good" or "happy place" by the combination of the Greek eu with topos. Indeed More likely intended his coinage and use of ironic names to be an amusing feature of Utopia. These names not only reveal the hoax of Hythloday's "travel narrative," but they may also indicate that at the same time More was formulating his model commonwealth, he

3 See Sacks, Utopia, 205-07 for examples of verse composed for the early Latin editions of Utopia.
The depiction of Amaurote as a heavily fortified city is markedly absurd and out of place when Hythloday has already characterized Utopia as a land that is virtually inaccessible to foreigners and experiences no internal civil strife by virtue of its communalist social philosophy. Furthermore, the Utopians are described as a people who detest war, hold jewels and gold in great disdain, and never bother to lock their doors so that whosoever wishes to enter the home of another may do so whenever they please. Why then should the city be equipped with such impenetrable defenses? Such paradoxes are woven into the discourse itself, and they are presented in a most innocuous and unsuspected manner, yet when recognized, they lead one to rightly question Hythloday's advocacy of Utopian institutions and practices as examples of a literal ideal.

Perhaps more problematic than the instances of ironic paradox in *Utopia* are the implications that these various incongruities are the result of Hythloday's unreliability. In the case where a spokesperson is clearly unreliable, a

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4 See Sacks, *Utopia*, 133-34 for discussion concerning the living situation of the Utopians in Amaurote; and 149-53 for their philosophy regarding wealth; and 177-86 for the discussion concerning warfare.
perceptive reader would likely respond by considering the assertions made by that character with a justifiable degree of doubt and skepticism. However, in the case of Utopia’s primary spokesperson, this approach is of no avail. In *Utopia*, we are presented with a multivalent text that contains a primary speaker who contradicts himself. And in spite of the hidden meaning of Hythloday as a “speaker of nonsense,” we cannot simply disregard his statements altogether, as it is his discourse that provides the subject and content of *Utopia*. The problematic nature of Hythloday’s character makes the task of determining where or with whom our opinions should be aligned exceedingly difficult. Thus, throughout the debate in Book I and the discourse in praise of Utopia in Book II, we are never quite certain when we will have to reconsider, disregard, or reverse what Hythloday is saying; we are only left with the sense that at some point we will have to.

An example of this level of ambiguity emerges through the course of Hythloday’s argument in Book I in favor of withdrawal from civic duty. When “More” and Giles suggest to Hythloday that he apply his vast learning and judicious insight in the service of some king or prince in order to benefit the public good, Hythloday objects claiming that no
sovereign would heed his honest and forthright council. Interestingly, "More" agrees, answering that such brazen directness would be completely ineffective at court, no matter how rational the counsel offered may actually be. Thus "More" advocates the application of a more decorous civil philosophy in the advising of kings and princes as opposed to the direct approach of Hythloday's academic philosophy. He argues that a civil approach would not only be more effective, but its use would bring about less conflict and contention.\(^5\) Hythloday, commenting upon the alleged inefficacy of his direct approach, counters with obvious punning on the title of More's work: "That is what I meant ... when I said philosophy had no place among kings" \((121)\) (emphasis added).

Yet in Book II, in his description of Utopian society, Hythloday appears to contradict some of the key assertions he presented in the debate on counsel. As David Weil Baker points out, Hythloday's argument against the subtle use of civic philosophy conflicts with his later narrative in Book II, which treats the subject of the Utopians' policy of religious toleration.\(^6\) According to Baker, Hythloday's


account of the punishment of an overzealous Utopian convert to Christianity who begins fanatically to endorse Christian principles "serves as something of a corrective" to Hythloday's previous assertion that a frank and direct approach is always appropriate as well as preferable (52). The contradiction is made obvious when it is considered that Utopus, the original founder of the Utopian commonwealth, declared the law of religious toleration expressly for the purpose of maintaining the peace:

For this is one of the ancientest laws among them, that no man shall be blamed for reasoning in the maintenance of his own religion. For King Utopus ... hearing that the inhabitants of the land were before his coming thither at a continual dissension and strife among themselves for their religions ... made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favor and follow what religion he would, and that he might do the best he could to bring others to his opinion, so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly, and

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7 Baker's example (see 51-53) is presented in association with Raphael's reference to Christian homiletics; however, I find it offers equally effective support for the perception of Raphael's reliability and the degree of difficulty one encounters when reading *Utopia.*
soberly, without hasty and contentious rebuking and inveighing against others. (188)

Utopus’ law, which Hythloday here praises, is concerned less with what the Utopians accept as their religious or spiritual beliefs than it is with preventing behavior that could lead to rioting and civil discord. Thus Utopus himself, like “More,” prefers discretion as opposed to outright declarations of personal conviction. These instances where Hythloday’s fervent praise of Utopian institutions and practices in Book II seem to directly challenge those statements he forcefully expresses during the debate on counsel in Book I invariably lead one to consider the question of his reliability; as a result, the reader of Utopía is teased and bewildered as to More’s ultimate vision of an ideal commonwealth.

The problematic character of Hythloday and the ironic discourse of Book II result in a veil of ambiguity that effectively obscures Utopia’s overall purpose as well as any indication of More’s own position with respect to the issues presented within it. The reader’s grasp of which arguments are to be taken as authoritative is precarious. The author’s seeming ambivalence or “lack of voice” is disconcerting because Utopía, although it is by definition
a work of fiction, still presents itself as an extremely personal work. For \textit{Utopia}'s narrator is the author's namesake, and the other interlocutor besides Hythloday is named after Peter Giles, More's friend and fellow humanist. Furthermore, the geographical setting of the discourse between the three interlocutors encourages us to view it as a historical record as it is said to take place in Antwerp, where More, in the summer of 1515, actually spent a great deal of time with Giles and began work composing \textit{Utopia}. More also demonstrates his admiration for Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England, by including references to him in Hythloday's recounting of his previous visit to England. More's personal association with Cardinal Morton dated back to the years between 1490-1492 when young More served as the Archbishop's page. And it was Cardinal Morton who shortly thereafter arranged for More to attend school at Oxford. These personal references indicate the extent to which the certain aspects of More's life are reflected in \textit{Utopia}.

And yet the life of Sir Thomas More is one that provides an abundance of fascinating material, the result of which has been the numerous biographies and historical-biographical writings that have emerged alongside the
multiple editions of his published works. J.H. Hexter points out that many biographical accounts written after More’s death tend to focus on his later life. In these accounts, More is commonly viewed primarily in terms of his affiliation with the Catholic counter-reformation – as a “martyr-hero” and candidate for canonization – a perspective that emphasizes his efforts to counteract the progress of the Protestant reformation, his falling out with Henry VIII over England’s break with the Roman Catholic Church, his imprisonment in the Tower of London, and his subsequent execution in 1535. Hence, such biographical accounts downplay More’s humanist affiliations, as well as his abiding friendship with Desiderius Erasmus, Europe’s leading humanist scholar. At the time of Utopia’s publication in 1516, More was nearly 40 years old, a family man, a successful lawyer, and an Undersheriff of London. Hexter places the historical significance on these years (1515-1516) leading up to and immediately surrounding the writing of the text (“Milieu” xxv-xxvi). These years would seemingly provide the context for More’s ideas as expressed in Utopia.

The course by which Utopia evolved from an amorphous concept in the humanist-trained, civically-invested mind of
Thomas More into one of the most significant works of the Renaissance literary tradition was this: in May of 1515, More was appointed by Henry VIII to travel to Bruges as part of a diplomatic council in order to renegotiate terms of commercial interaction in the trade of wool between England and the Netherlands. Having reached an impasse in the trade negotiations, More traveled to Antwerp and spent several weeks lodging with Peter Giles, a close friend of Erasmus. It is widely held that More conceived the idea of his island commonwealth here in the summer of 1515. It is likely that the two intellectuals, More and Giles, discussed a variety of matters relating to statecraft and the order of commonwealths. According to Hexter, such topics were "a staple item of speculation among scholars and academics, having got off to a good start in the literary world with Plato and Aristotle" ("Milieu" xxxi). By the time More returned to England in the fall of 1515, he had completed what is now known as Book II of Utopia.

Yet once in London, More would be faced with a complicated decision, and it was then that he began work on the dialogue of council that would later become Book I. For in the early part of 1516, More was offered a position in the king's service, which also included a salary and thus a
means to support his sizeable family. Though More was already a successful lawyer and an Undersheriff of London, the question of whether he should devote his life to the service of King Henry VIII was especially difficult for him. As E.E. Reynolds explains:

An invitation to enter the King's service in those times was only short of a command, though a refusal would not have led to consequences more serious than the loss of the King's goodwill; even that, however, was not to be lightly risked by one with a strong sense of public duty. (117)

If More decided to continue his independent law practice, he would be able to preserve, to some extent, his position as a humanist "man of letters." However, if he accepted the position as royal councilor to Henry VIII, More would no longer be able to write independently about any topic he wished. Now he would have to carefully consider the potential ramifications of any subject or idea he might choose to explore in his scholarly or political writings (Sacks 29). More's struggle to come to a decision regarding the offer is supposedly reflected in the humanist debate that takes place between Hythloday, "More," and Giles. His treatment of Book I further demonstrates the extent to
which *Utopia* appears to be a personal work fraught with his own conflicted feelings about whether it is better to live a life of private philosophical contemplation or one dedicated to public service and political activity.

What was the intellectual movement called humanism that was sweeping across Europe in the early Renaissance, and to which More, Giles, and Erasmus, among others, were connected? As Quentin Skinner explains, humanism came to northern Europe, first to Paris, then to England, by way of Italy: “The culture of the Renaissance was further disseminated in England by a number of Italian scholars who came to teach at Oxford and Cambridge in the later years of the fifteenth century” (195). Having come from this intellectual milieu, More and his colleagues were learned men, having studied grammar, rhetoric, and history. They were widely known as “men of letters,” and the bond between them is evidenced in their vast correspondence. Hexter describes these “men of letters,” commonly referred to as humanists, as follows:

The indispensable marks of a man of letters in More’s day were wide familiarity with the literature of Roman antiquity; increasingly, some acquaintance with the literature of Greek
antiquity in its original tongue; and, finally, command of a Latin style modeled with more or less precision on classical Roman prose. ("Milieu" lviii)

More’s engagement with Aristotle and Plato, as well as the coded Greek names in Utopia, clearly identify the work as a product of this movement. Yet the humanists were not merely exclusive intellectuals who thrived as a result of the revived interest in classical literature and culture, they were also profoundly concerned with political, educational, and religious reform. And these interests resulted in books and writings relevant to social and political theory, educational curricula, religious discourse, and scriptural translation and interpretation.

That More’s Utopia is a product of this intellectual tradition is relatively easy to establish. Its subject matter and classical narrative structure are not the only indications of the work’s humanist origins. The nature of its publication also reflected the spirit of the humanist project, as evidenced by the considerable collaborative effort put forth by those individuals who participated in More’s scholarly circle. As was customary of sixteenth-century literature, More desired to have letters of
endorsement and support composed for the introduction of his work. The efforts of More’s colleagues, combined with the technology of the printing press, added to the popularity of More’s work. In regard to the “first age of the printed book,” Skinner states: “No group was quicker to perceive the vast potentialities of the new medium than the humanists” (195). The early Latin editions of *Utopia* underwent five printings in More’s own lifetime. Furthermore, the first editions were accompanied by Erasmus’ and Giles’ marginal annotations as well as by laudatory letters and verses contributed by various members of More’s close association of humanist colleagues. A Holbein engraving of the map of the island of Utopia and the Utopian alphabet were later added for the 1518 edition. Hence, *Utopia*’s printed manifestation bore all the respectable marks of having been vetted by a group of internationally renowned scholars and illustrated by the king’s painter.

Through this humanist “republic of letters” that surrounded *Utopia*’s early publication, its reputation as an enigmatic text begins to emerge. For the response from More’s own contemporaries who had not been directly involved in the format and printing of the final work was
ambivalent. They grappled with the question of whether *Utopia* was intended to be taken seriously or should rather be enjoyed primarily for its creativity and inventiveness. According to John Guy, Jerome de Busleyden, a prominent political official and councilor to Charles V, associated *Utopia* with works of classical philosophy and perceived its purpose to be similar to Plato’s: "He interpreted *Utopia* as a mimetic exercise in moral philosophy, designed to reinforce Plato’s *Republic* as a counterweight to Aristotle and Cicero." On the other hand, Guillaume Budé, the French humanist and councilor to Francis I, was "unsure whether More was writing allegorically or literally. His commendation finally interpreted *Utopia* as an exemplar of evangelical Christian humanism closer to Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* than Plato’s *Republic*" (91). Thus even from the beginning, More’s work was multivalent. Though *Utopia* was certainly innovative and fascinating, it was also utterly mystifying.

*Utopia’s* ambiguity has largely resulted in interpretations that propose a false dichotomy. Accordingly, traditional readings of More’s work have depended upon the privileging of its association with political discourse while overlooking or ignoring
completely the presence of its satiric features and ironic language. However, any effort to confine Utopia to a single authoritative reading would not be faithful to the spirit of More's text. Thus, in order to pursue a more thorough and comprehensive investigation of More's work, in the chapters to follow, I will examine how Utopia's irony, complexity, and ambiguity deliberately problematize any attempt at a literal or conventional reading of it. This method will then provide a means to explore the possible implications, strategies, and intentions of More's work that have been previously limited as a result of those perspectives that have opted to view Utopia primarily in terms of strict political theory.

By virtue of the humanist context of its production, the echoes and traces of Plato can be readily discerned - in its dialogic structure, in the presentation of its subject, and in the character of the primary spokesperson Hythloday. It is in acknowledgement of this clear association of More's work with classical political philosophy that I begin my investigation in Chapter Two by considering the interpretation of the work as a model for social reform - as a description of a theoretical ideal society. Yet my aim will be to expose the limitations of
those interpretations that attempt to emphasize this aspect of *Utopia*. Because literal readings are exceedingly dependent upon the reader’s perception of Hythloday and the acceptance of his assertions in the debate on counsel in Book I and his description of Utopia as “the best state of the commonwealth” in Book II, I will particularly focus on the questions surrounding Hythloday’s reliability. A closer examination of the rhetorical strategies employed in Book I enable a more complete and accurate assessment of ethos, and accordingly, reveals that we cannot routinely conclude that Hythloday is intended to be seen as the voice of the valid position in the debate. By means of rhetorical analysis, we discover that Hythloday’s intolerant demeanor and reductive argumentative techniques encourage our scrutiny and uncertainty in regard to his character and his assertions. Furthermore, “More’s” eloquent rhetorical method and gracious manner are seen to be in exact opposition to Hythloday.

Our awareness of Hythloday as an unreliable spokesperson is crucial as it prepares us to assess the validity of his discourse in praise of Utopia in Book II. A more thorough examination of Utopia’s institutions and practices reveals a variety of absurd and troubling
elements that would appear to contradict the status of Utopian society as "ideal," or the argument that More intended Utopia to be interpreted as a literal model or blueprint for social reform. Our understanding of the problematic aspects of Hythloday's characterization prevents us from becoming so blindly enamored, as he is, with Utopian society. Consequently, literal readings of Hythloday as a reliable narrator or as More's spokesperson are insufficient and incomplete, and they overlook More's use of irony, his familiarity with the conventions of satire, and his ability and skill as a rhetorician.

The limitations posed by literal readings of Utopia compel us to explore the motivations and implications underlying More's use of ironic language. To this end, Chapter Three will begin by considering the friendship between More and the renowned humanist scholar Erasmus, as their shared intellectual interests and mutual appreciation for humor and wit are perceptibly reflected in their respective works Utopia and Encomium Moriae. More and Erasmus were fascinated by the works of the classical satirist Lucian. They recognized Lucian's parodic depictions of Hellenic society as a valuable means of social criticism. More and Erasmus accordingly applied
Lucianic techniques in their own early writings in order to comment upon certain aspects of contemporary sixteenth-century English society. Particularly for More, Lucian’s dialogues provided an effective model from which to construct the character of Hythloday.

The examination of Hythloday as a satiric persona offers a much more insightful understanding of his characterological function than traditional interpretations that view him as a reliable spokesperson. When considering the possible target of More’s satiric scrutiny, an analysis of the debate in Book I reveals the similarities between Hythloday’s demeanor and argumentative style with those of Lucian’s cynic philosopher in his dialogue The Cynic. Lucian used irony and humor to satirize the dialectical method employed by contemporary idealistic philosophers. In the same way, More constructs the character of Hythloday in order to present a parodic depiction of the specious rhetorical techniques employed by the scholastic theologians and schoolmen in sixteenth-century England. Furthermore, Utopia’s association with satiric fiction helps us to recognize the strategy underlying More’s construction of Utopian absurdities in Book II. Rather than insisting that Utopia be interpreted as an ideal
commonwealth, More uses the imaginary society as a subtle means to ironically comment on the absurd features of European society. At the same time, More's consistent ambiguity requires readers of Utopia to be active participants in the process of interpretation and to be able not only to construe a sophisticated and elaborate jest, but also to discern the more profound and significant aspects of his ironic commentary.

While More was known for his wit and sense of humor and for his dedication to public service, he was also reserved about many of his individual beliefs. In so far as Utopia reflects the circumstances of More's life during the years of 1515-16, it has largely been considered to be a profoundly personal work. Accordingly Chapter Four will attempt to consider the greater implications of More's use of ironic and ambiguous language in order to explore the complex facets of the author and his work. Utopia provided More with a means to explore some exceedingly complex and intricate ideas. Particularly in Book I, More explores the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise when one is confronted with a decision that will significantly affect one's public status. More also understood the constructed nature of identity - an idea he presents in Utopia by way
of his "metaphor of the stage." As a result of his own various public and social roles, More was aware of the necessity of fashioning a private self. Thus More demystifies the conventional scholastic perspective of human behavior as based on a foundational system of ethics. Instead, he reveals life to be a series of roles inhabited by an individual for the purposes of accomplishing a specific objective. In More's view, this conception of human behavior underscored the importance of a practical intellectual education based in rhetoric in order to prepare oneself to cope with the challenging, unpredictable, and problematic circumstances of life.

Finally, through the ironic depiction of Utopian society, Utopia provided More with the opportunity to explore the limitations of the idealistic intellectualism that was typically exemplified by the scholastic theologians. Yet, in addition, More's irony was also subtly self-reflexive as it examined the idealistic objectives of the immense humanist project. While humanism believed that humans could aspire to attain happiness in life, it also acknowledged that human kind was irretrievably sinful and incapable of perfection. However, More's exploration of the limitations of human rationality acknowledged that reform
could not take place if humans could not conceive of a better society. Thus More’s *Utopia* exemplifies the humanists’ investment in the process of education by insisting that readers strive to contemplate the complex and multivalent features of his work, thereby ensuring the continued education and cultivation of the mind.
CHAPTER TWO

"ALL THINGS BEING THERE COMMON":

UTOPIA AS MODEL REPUBLIC

In The Republic (ca. 380 B.C.), Plato presents his conception of the ideal city. This politeia, ruled by the Guardian class of the Philosopher-King, possesses a socio-political structure that exemplifies Plato's philosophical notions of Justice. Plato's later work, The Laws, proposed a practical system of laws for an imaginary colony to be established on the isle of Crete. Subsequently, Plato's most distinguished student, Aristotle, composed Politics, which considers the Greek polis, or "city-state," to be the highest form of political association. These works were among the first in a long line of treatises devoted to the thought experiment of imagining the "best commonwealth" that would emerge over the course of the next several centuries. The ideas presented in these texts and in other ancient works of literature, moral philosophy, and political theory inspired the intellectual activity of the Renaissance and provided the foundation for humanist scholarship. Such works undoubtedly influenced Thomas More, who received an education grounded in the studia
humanitatis while attending Oxford from 1492 to 1494. The issues and concerns relating to statecraft and the order of the commonwealth were considered relevant topics for discussion among scholars and intellectuals at the turn of the 16th century just as they were for philosophers and thinkers of Greek and Roman antiquity.

Utopia has traditionally been viewed as a project similar in scope to the dialogue concerning Plato’s ideal city. These two societies not only share the practice of holding all things in common, but they also share a similarly structured moral philosophy. According to Book IV of The Republic, the “just” individual aims to fulfill the desires of the rational part of the soul, while resisting the desires of the spirited and appetitive parts. And the harmonious socio-political organization of the “just” city is achieved when all individuals fulfill the appropriate societal role fitted to them by nature. More’s Utopian system of order is likewise based on the natural primacy of reason: “for they define virtue to be life ordered according to nature ... and that he doth follow the course of nature, which, in desiring and refusing things, is ruled by reason” (156). Thus in both societies, the “just” or virtuous life is presented as the most pleasant. Yet Utopia
is not a simple restatement of the ideas set forth in *The Republic*. The Utopian regime is an amalgamated product of the socio-political organizations presented in *The Republic* and *The Laws*. In this "ideal" commonwealth, More expands the system of community of property, similar to Plato's standard in *The Republic*, to include all citizens of Utopia rather than restricting it exclusively to a "Guardian" class. Likewise, he devises a structure of government based upon a system of decrees, as proposed in *The Laws*, which is carried out by an organization of assemblies and councils, thereby eliminating the need for a class of Philosopher-Kings (Sacks 10-11). The association of *Utopia* with these texts is a fine way to pay tribute to Plato, but it has also served as a seemingly effective way, if the majority of previous scholarship is any indication, of providing the context for our interpretation of the work.

The influence of the classical tradition notwithstanding, the interpretation of *Utopia* as strict political theory is further based on the humanists' educational and social objectives. As Quentin Skinner explains, the northern humanists "continued to accept the well-established humanist belief that the links between sound learning and sound government are extremely close"
As a function of their perceived roles as educators and political advisors, the humanists produced a variety of handbooks devoted to the practice of counseling kings, princes, and other government officials. They likewise produced treatises devoted to educational reform and the discussion of the proper training to be offered by the studia humanitatis. These efforts were exerted with the intent that those who received a humanist education would be prepared to serve in a principal position of government. More’s consideration of the role of advisors in political and governmental affairs was not only based upon the general interest amongst humanists regarding this issue. It was also, on a very personal level, a matter of great consequence for More. For in Book I of Utopia, More presents two sides of the debate on counsel: “More’s” argument in favor of political involvement, and Hythloday’s argument in favor of withdrawal from civic affairs.

Critics have commented on the inherent ambiguity of More’s text with regard to the inevitable question of which of these two perspectives is intended to be understood as the valid position. One conclusion offered by George Logan concentrates on Giles’ comparison of Hythloday to Plato. This comparison associates Hythloday’s ideals with those of
moral philosophy, a branch, Logan states, "to which political theory is traditionally attached" (34). Indeed Hythloday does invoke the name of the great philosopher multiple times in the course of his argument. This, in connection with the similarities between Utopia and the elements characteristic of Plato’s dialogues, leads Logan to conclude: "In sum, Hythloday seems designed for the role Plato’s spokesmen play in these dialogues: that of completely reliable commentator on comparative politics and a highly authoritative political theorist" (35). To be sure, if one considers in addition that the debate on counsel is sparked by a compliment offered, during a moment of seemingly genuine admiration, in acknowledgment of Hythloday’s wisdom and astute faculties of observation and analysis of foreign governments, and if we recognize further that Hythloday is allowed to dominate the dialogue of Book I with his prolonged orations and that “More,” by comparison, is limited to relatively brief responses, then it would appear that Hythloday’s argument is intended to be considered the most persuasive. However, there is compelling evidence to suggest that we should refrain from interpreting Hythloday’s role so hastily and conclusively.
Since Book I demonstrates an indebtedness to the classical tradition, it would be worthwhile to consider the debate on counsel from the perspective of rhetorical theory. The debate falls within the purview of deliberative rhetoric, which is concerned specifically with persuasion - with moving the audience to action - by arguing the advantages or disadvantages of a proposed course of action. By examining the style of argumentation presented by "More" and Hythloday, we are able to see how their means of persuasion reveals a more accurate delineation of character (or ethos) in spite of Hythloday's ability to maintain the upper hand throughout the dialogue. While Hythloday's association with Plato confers on him a degree of historical and intellectual authority, it should be remembered that "More" and Hythloday are relative equals, unlike the naïve participants of typical Platonic dialogues who innocently set up the dialectical situation for Socrates to take advantage of. This underscores the necessity of evaluating the dialogue carefully, concentrating not only on the issue under debate, but also on how each character presents his position and what evidence each offers in support.
Hythloday establishes his stance by arguing that kings are only interested in matters of war and in enlarging their own wealth and territory. Furthermore, rulers surround themselves with counselors who aim to flatter and who believe their own counsel to be the only advice worth consideration; therefore they would scorn the proposals offered by another that are not in complete accord with their own.\(^1\) Hythloday concludes that if he were to serve as a counselor, he would not only be ineffectual, but he would also eventually lose his position as a result of his unconventional advice:

If I should propose to any king wholesome decrees, doing my endeavor to pluck out of his mind the pernicious original causes of vice and naughtiness, think you not that I should forthwith either be driven away or else made a laughingstock? (114)

As proof for these assertions, Hythloday offers two hypothetical scenarios: the first centers on a French king interested in conquering various lands throughout Europe, the second involves "some king and his council" devising ways to increase the king's treasury. With regard to the

\(^1\) See Sacks, *Utopia*, 96.
first scenario, Hythloday states that his advice to the king would be to concentrate his efforts on the enrichment of his own kingdom, since one realm is more than enough for a single sovereign to govern. With regard to the second, Hythloday’s counsel would be to remind the king that, similar to the task of a shepherd, it is his station to ensure the wealth and happiness of his people over his own. In closing, Hythloday directs the question to “More” with the assumption that these hypothetical situations are adequate support for his argument that he would inevitably fail as a political adviser: “These, and such other informations, if I should use among men wholly inclined and given to the contrary part, how deaf hearers think you I should have?” (120-21).

It is obvious why Hythloday would need to rely on the supposed or likely outcome of these invented scenarios for support; in spite of all he has observed while abroad and his understanding of European domestic and foreign policy, he has apparently had little practical experience in civic affairs. Moreover, Hythloday’s argument is based on broad generalizations informed by an overly reductive view of royal persons and government officials. Certainly, corrupt

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² See Sacks, Utopia, 117-19.
sovereigns and sycophantic counselors do exist; no one disputes Hythloday on this point. However, it would seem that the monarchs and advisors Hythloday has had experience with would lead him to an alternate conclusion regarding the potential for advisors to not only offer sincere counsel, but to do so in the service of thoughtful and honest kings. In his hypothetical scenarios, Hythloday refers to his knowledge of the Achorians (Greek for “people without a country”) who, after going to war for their prince and then witnessing the distress this action caused, demanded of their prince to chose one kingdom and relinquish the other. According to Hythloday, the Achorian prince conceded to the demands of his subjects. Hythloday also mentions his observation of the Macarians (“the blessed ones”) whose king, on the day of his coronation, declared the hoarding of money and property by a ruler to be illegal. However, insofar as these honorable peoples are entirely unknown to Giles and “More,” perhaps Hythloday intends to isolate corruption as a trait specific to European rulers and counselors. The fault with this conclusion becomes evident when we consider that Hythloday was previously in Europe for a time prior to his meeting with “More” and Giles. In recounting this prior visit,
Hythloday reveals his experience with political and social affairs to be not limited to distant nations. While in England, Hythloday had the opportunity to converse with Cardinal John Morton, who, as he specifically notes, was serving in the position of Lord Chancellor of England at the time of their meeting. Hythloday describes Morton as a man:

... not more honorable for his authority than for his prudence and virtue ... In his speech he was fine, eloquent, and pithy; in the law he had profound knowledge; in wit he was incomparable, and in memory wonderful excellent. These qualities, which in him were by nature singular, he by learning and use had made perfect. The king put much trust in his counsel ... (97)

Hythloday's praise of Cardinal Morton and his description of the Cardinal's conduct would seem to contradict the obvious disdain he exhibits toward those active in political affairs. The Cardinal agrees with Hythloday's assessment given during his critique of European society regarding the harsh punishment of thieves, and the Cardinal is eager to hear him discuss his observations further
The fact that his experience with Morton does not give Hythloday pause to consider a more nuanced assessment of counsellorship is a feature that serves to undermine his reliability as well as the validity of his argument.

The logic underlying Hythloday's position on counsel reflects a scholastic worldview. It is a methodical perspective primarily interested in classical philosophy, ethics, and Christian theology. As with any earthly institution, in politics and government one will inevitably encounter corruption. However, Hythloday cannot tolerate any course of action that does not unequivocally exemplify his orthodox conception of right and wrong behavior. Aware that few rulers or counselors would respond favorably to his principled moral philosophy, Hythloday concludes that any attempt made by a wise person to advise a king or prince would be a futilely wasted effort. And "More" agrees. To Hythloday's question of whether his counsel would fall on "deaf hearers," "More" responds:

Deaf hearers doubtless, and in good faith no marvel. And to be plain with you, truly, I cannot

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3 During this discussion with Morton, Hythloday refers to the penal practices of the Polylerites ("much nonsense"), which serves as yet another example of More's coinage of ironical Greek names for various imaginary peoples and places.
allow that such communication shall be used, or such counsel given, as you be sure shall never be regarded nor received. For how can so strange informations be profitable, or how can they be beaten into their heads, whose minds be already prevented with clean contrary persuasions? This school philosophy is not unpleasant among friends in familiar communication, but in the councils of kings where great matters be debated and reasoned with great authority, these things have no place. (121)

"More" points out that Hythloday's scholastic philosophy, which "thinketh all things meet for every place," results in counsel that lacks expediency and is therefore ineffectual; Hythloday's recommendations and manner of delivery are not suited to obtain potential short-term advantages (121). Furthermore, it is useless to offer advice in such a fashion as to render it objectionable. Additionally, "More" brings to light a fundamental fact of human existence, namely that the course of action considered the most "moral" or "ethical," as Hythloday would define it, does not always coincide with the appropriate means of resolving the immediate issue at hand.
This leads "More" to propose, by way of his metaphor of the stage, the use of a practical civic philosophy advocated by contemporary humanists when dealing with matters of government:

But there is another philosophy more civil which knoweth, as you would say, her own stage, and thereafter ordering and behaving herself in the play that she hath in hand, playeth her part accordingly with comeliness, uttering nothing out of due order and fashion. And this is the philosophy you must use. (121)

"More's" metaphor of the stage envisions counselors playing a significant role within the dramatic setting of politics. "More's" practical approach reflects the Ciceronian, hence the humanist, principle of counsel embodying both wisdom and eloquence. In particular, "More" suggests the principle of decorum and insists that the manner and use of speech be suited to its occasion. In regard to matters of government, guidance must exercise prudence, be offered delicately, and aspire to expediency rather than disintegrate into pedantic sermonizing. In addition, "More" argues that the potential for dishonesty and corruption is no excuse to abandon the commonwealth. Rather, wise men should be involved in
political affairs in order to offer constructive counsel and effect as much positive change as possible:

But you must with a crafty wile and subtle train study and endeavor yourself, as much as in you lieth, to handle the matter wittily and handsomely for the purpose, and that which you cannot turn to good so to order it that it be not very bad, for it is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good, which I think will not be yet these good many years.

(122)

Thus, "More" suggests a method that is effective, practical, and mindful of the difficulties that arise on account of human fallibility. "More" proposes offering counsel that is appropriate and eloquently presented as a means to overcome these obstacles.

"More’s" response to Hythloday’s long-winded oration reveals much about his character. He presents his argument concisely, tactfully, and in a manner that exemplifies his approach to counsel; his is an eloquent expression that aims to graciously instruct, clearly convey thought, as well as to establish and maintain goodwill amongst the participants in the debate (Wegemer 290). In contrast,
Hythloday’s argument deteriorates into spiteful ranting that includes generalizations, hyperbole, *a priori* assumptions, and *ad hominem* attacks (Wegemer 293). Hythloday dismisses “More’s” suggestion and bitterly exclaims: “By this means, nothing else will be brought to pass, but whiles I go about to remedy the madness of others, I should be even as mad as they” (122). Hythloday’s lack of compelling proof and practical experience leads him to offer arguments *a priori* by appealing to assumed universal principles. Specifically, he invokes Christ and his insistence that his commandments be preached from the rooftops, and Plato’s declaration that wise men, seeing it impossible to “remedy the folly of others,” refrain from participating in the affairs of the commonwealth (122-23). After declaring all counselors to be corrupt and deceitful madmen, Hythloday focuses his attack on “More” by comparing him and such counselors that would apply his civic philosophy to duplicitous preachers:

But preachers, sly and wily men, following your counsel (as I suppose) because they saw men evil willing to frame their manners to Christ’s rule, they have wrested and wried his doctrine, and, like a rule of lead, have applied it to men’s
manners that by some means at the least way, they might agree together. Whereby I cannot see what good they have done, but that men may more sickerly [chiefly] be evil. (123)

Although Hythloday is characteristically associated with Plato, his emotionally vehement manner of argumentation is a far cry from the Socratic dialectical method that aims to impart knowledge and achieve consensus. Instead, Hythloday’s argument relies on harsh statements and self-evident propositions asserted without thorough examination or analysis. The debate on counsel reveals Hythloday to be a character whose discourse does less to persuade and elucidate than it does to provoke confusion and skepticism. The question surrounding Hythloday’s reliability suggests we would be remiss to read Utopia as a strict endorsement of his views as opposed to “More’s.”

The dialogue of Book I not only presents the debate on counsel, but it also enables Hythloday the opportunity, in his account of dinner at Cardinal Morton’s table, to offer a severe critique of English society. A discussion concerning the suitability and efficacy of punishment for those guilty of stealing leads to the examination of several factors that contribute to England’s extensive
social problems. Hythloday argues that starvation drives people to steal regardless of the punishment that might be suffered if one is caught. He then concludes that private property is the underlying cause for all civil discord: "where possessions be private, where money beareth all the stroke, it is hard and almost impossible that there the public weal may justly be governed and prosperously flourish" (123-24). In accordance with the contrastive rhetoric presented in regard to the issue of counsel, "More," relying on Aristotle’s line of reasoning in Politics, respectfully disagrees:

For how can there be abundance of goods, or of anything, where every man withdraweth his hand from labor? Whom the regard of his own gains driveth not to work, but the hope that he hath in other men’s travails maketh him slothful. (125)

In response, Hythloday delivers his description of Utopia, where the socio-economic structure is such that "with very few laws all things be so well and wealthily ordered" (124). Utopia is thus presented in Book II as a universal example of a thriving commonwealth built upon the principle of the community of property.
That the critique of European society provokes Hythloday's account of the Utopians has further led critics to determine the meaning or intent of More's text to follow properly along the lines of serious socio-political theory. For instance, Logan interprets More's description of the Utopian commonwealth as an exercise in comparative political analysis by providing a theoretical solution to the social problems discussed in Book I:

Unlike the Republic, which presents its conclusions simply in the form of argument, Utopia offers an actual model, so that it tests results - provides an opportunity to glimpse how they might work out in practice - even as it states them. (130)

And J.H. Hexter claims that More's inventiveness is not so much demonstrated by his concept of a nation that holds all property in common, but rather it is found in the:

... meticulous detail with which [More] implemented his underlying social conceptions, proposing all the basic rules of law and methods of administration necessary to make community of property and goods one of the motor forces in a going polity. (Idea 63)
These perspectives of *Utopia*, as a kind of solution to England's social problems, a theoretical strategy for reform, or as More's conceptual model of the ideal commonwealth, are based on a literal interpretation of More's language. However, by problematizing the character of Hythloday, More deliberately frustrates the inclination to interpret *Utopia* literally. Hythloday's fanatical and intolerant behavior during the course of the dialogue in Book I intentionally influences how we will construe his discourse in praise of the Utopians in Book II.

The policies and practices of the Utopians are founded upon the principles of rationality, expediency, and self-sufficiency, thus the island of Utopia ostensibly epitomizes the Greek conception of the model republic. According to Hythloday, a system designed around the precept of community of property ensures equality and reciprocity among the members of the commonwealth since one's effort is expended to ensure the success and well being of the state rather than to aid her/his own accumulation of wealth. Accordingly, the Utopians have effectively eliminated idleness by systematizing labor practices such that all citizens are brought up with the expectation that they will work in agriculture; and in
addition to farming, they are also trained in a particular trade such as wool working, carpentry, or masonry.\(^4\) In order to ensure that citizens do not become unfairly relegated to the strenuous labor demanded by farming, and thus resentful of completing such work against their will, every two years, half of every rural household is rotated out of the country and sent to the city. The same number is then sent from the city to take their places as farm workers.\(^5\) The Utopian system is also evidently superior because it restricts any potential inclination toward greed and self-indulgence since no one is in want of anything he/she needs and nothing is given in exchange for anything else. As Hythloday states:

> Certainly in all kinds of living creatures either fear of lack doth cause covetousness and ravin, or in man only pride, which counteth it a glorious thing to pass and excel others in the superfluous and vain ostentation of things. (143)

This kind of prideful display is without cause in a system where everyone takes only what is needed, knowing that there will never be any shortage of essential goods.

Furthermore, although the Utopians only devote six hours a day to work, any and all opportunities for licentious or depraved behavior are prevented as all "void time" (time between the hours of work, sleep, and eating) is rigorously structured around learning:

... every man as liketh best himself, not to the intent that they should misspend this time in riot or slothfulness, but, being then licensed from the labor of their own occupations, to bestow the time well and thriftily upon some other science as shall please them. (137)

Upon waking at roughly four o’clock in the morning, citizens can choose to attend any number of public lectures or devote their spare time to his/her trade. After supper, Utopians can amuse themselves with conversation, music, or with playing “moral” games that serve to reinforce good manners and virtuous principles.6

And yet in spite of the blind conviction with which he praises their institutions, Hythlodays’s description of Utopian social practices fails to effectively prove the Utopian system to be superior to or more desirable than any European system. Hythloday’s commentary indeed portrays a

6 See Sacks, Utopia, 146.
country that appears to have fewer problems thanks to a social order based on community of property. However, contrary to his assertion that the Utopians are a "people well ordered" requiring very few laws, Hythloday reveals the Utopians to be a people who are completely regimented by innumerable laws, decrees, and deeply entrenched social customs. For example, in addition to their organized labor practices and strict structuring of "free time," male children must train in the trade of their fathers. If they desire to learn a different trade, they are placed by adoption into a family of that occupation. City inhabitants must move and be reassigned to new houses every ten years. To maintain the size of all cities, it is decreed that each city will be limited to six thousand households. If there are too many households within a city, the excess number is transferred to another city. Similarly, if the number of adults within a household exceeds the maximum amount allotted, the excess number of adults is transferred to another household that is lacking in number. If the population of the entire island exceeds the designated quota, citizens from every city are removed and transported off the island to a colony on the mainland; and if the
population of the island should decrease sharply, citizens are brought back from the colonies to restore the numbers.\(^7\)

According to Hythloday, the travel of citizens within Utopia is also restricted and requires permission. Anyone who participates in the simple act of traveling to a neighboring city to visit friends, or to partake in a little sightseeing, must do so following the proper protocol, or else risk severe punishment:

If any man, of his own head and without leave, walk out of his precinct and bounds, taken without the prince's letters, he is brought back again for a fugitive or a runaway with great shame and rebuke and is sharply punished. If he be taken in that fault again, he is punished with bondage. (147).

While Hythloday repeatedly proclaims the "wealth and felicity of the Utopian commonwealth," one cannot help but wonder how any human being could live "joyfully" and "merrily" in a society that is so restrictive of the seemingly free choice to decide what trade one wants to pursue and where one can live and travel within their own country (198, 200). We might be further compelled to ask

\(^7\) See Sacks, *Utopia*, 142.
how the Utopians are able to willingly adhere to such a strictly controlled social system.

According to Hexter, Utopia is the "best of commonwealths," not necessarily because the Utopians are of a better nature or character than persons found in any other society, but because their "laws, ordinances, rearing, and rules of living are such as to make effective man's natural capacity for good, while suppressing his natural propensity for evil" (Idea 59)." Indeed, as Hythloday implies, the Utopians are not a faultless people, as can be seen by the penalties one might incur if any established law or decree should be trespassed against. However, the effective suppression of any instinctive human tendency toward self-centered preservation and accumulation is the product of the Utopians' strict adherence to a complex pattern of guiding cultural principles that are internalized by each citizen during various educational and socialization processes. The Utopian moral philosophy upholds human happiness as its primary concern, and happiness is derived by living a life devoted to pleasure. Yet the Utopian view of "pleasure" consists of a subscription to an Epicurean ethic that promotes intellectual reason, rather than transient physical
pleasures, as the highest form of virtue. According to
Hythloday, the belief that happiness and contentment derive
from seeking honest pleasure finds support in Utopian
religious principles: "the defense of this so dainty and
delicate an opinion, they fetch from their grave, sharp,
bitter, and rigorous religion." However, in Utopia,
philosophic rationalism must be exercised in conjunction
with their religious principles as it is reason that leads
men to accept and believe them: "Though these be pertaining
to religion, yet they should be believed and granted by
proofs of reason" (155-56). Thus religious tenets are
determined by way of reason rather than, as would be the
case of Christian doctrine, revelation.

It is this elaborately constructed system of belief,
which Hythloday recounts to "More" and Giles with such
fervor, that enables the "success" of the Utopian
commonwealth. The Utopians seek human happiness above all
else; and happiness is the result of pleasure, which is
deemed virtuous when it adheres to their religious
doctrine. And these tenets are the product of reason rather

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8 Raphael explains Utopian religious principles to be: "that the
soul is immortal and by the bountiful goodness of God, ordained
to felicity; that to our virtues and good deeds rewards be
appointed after this life and to our evil deeds punishments" (155).
than revelation. Furthermore, the "virtuous" life is one that is lived according to nature: "Therefore, even very nature (say they) prescribeth to us a joyful life ... and they define virtue to be life ordered according to the prescript of nature" (157). What the Utopians have effectively accomplished, and what serves as the means by which Utopia appears to be superior to European society, is the invention of a moral philosophy that aids in the complete subjugation of the individual will in order to benefit the concept of the "common good" by shrewdly declaring such an endeavor to be rational, virtuous, and natural:

But in that that nature doth allure and provoke men one to help another to live merrily (which surely she doth not without a good cause, for no man is so far above the lot of man's state or condition that nature doth cark and care for him only, which equally favoreth all that be comprehended under the communion of one shape, form, and fashion), verily, she commandeth thee to use diligent circumspection that thou do not seek for thine own commodities, that thou procure other's incommodities. (157) (emphasis added)
The Utopian moral philosophy attempts to naturalize certain human behaviors and actions that do not, in fact, come naturally, as the examination of numerous earthly societies would demonstrate, by declaring virtue and pleasure to be the natural products of philosophic rationalism. What Hythloday’s discussion of Utopian philosophy reveals, perhaps inadvertently, is that if Utopia is to be considered a model republic, then the simple dissolution of private property is not the only action necessary to solve England’s problems as discussed in Book I. Such a project would also apparently require the implementation of an immutable social order radically different from any currently known in Europe. It is not only necessary to prohibit private property, but to also strip citizens of any right to self-determination and to inhibit any inherent inclination to work earnestly for one’s own gain.

Thus *Utopia* presents a number of perplexing issues that must be dealt with (or ignored) if one is to insist on viewing More’s text strictly in terms of philosophy or political theory. In addition to the question of Hythloday’s reliability, there is the presence of various absurd and ironic names, which seem to allude to More’s sharp sense of humor. However, Logan’s reaction to such
instances of irony is to warn readers against making the "fatal error" of mistaking Utopia as nothing more than a "whimsical potpourri" and of assuming "that More's joking names signal his disapproval of the ideas associated with them" (71n, 137n). When trying to account for more problematic inconsistencies, such as emerge when Hythloday declares his disdain for counselors or political advisors, which would seem to contradict his esteem for Cardinal Morton, Logan demurely suggests: "One may, however, feel that it is likelier that More, trying to do too much at once, simply lost track of one of the implications of the passage" (47).

We must also consider the interpretation of More's text as the depiction of an ideal republic that presents a theoretical, though clearly impractical, solution to the problems evident in European society. Edward Surtz attempts to account for this impracticality by determining Hythloday's discussion of Utopia's community of property to be the accurate reflection of an ideal that is harmonious with More's Christian orthodoxy: "Hythloday represents
More’s ideal views.”⁹ At the same time, Surtz claims that the argument presented by “More” in Book I in favor of private property is indicative of More’s view as a sensible statesman who is aware of mankind’s inability to live in a Christian state where all property is held in common: “In a word, if he regards communism abstractly or academically, More favors communism. If he looks at what is in man, he defends private property” (182).

And finally we must deal with the dubious description of the Utopians as a “joyful” or “merry” people and with the tensions that arise when one ponders the implications of the Utopian social order. Hanan Yoran accurately identifies the self-contradictory nature of an order that proclaims a “general commitment to democracy and liberty” which is then undermined by a “reality severely restrictive of political participation and free human activity” (10). Thus, Yoran concludes that Utopia “fails to elaborate a coherent ethics and consequently fails to ground the Utopian social order.” As Yoran argues, Utopian moral philosophy likewise proves to be self-contradictory in its declaration that reason “leads to both a naturalistic

⁹ Surtz’s conclusion that Hythloday presents More’s ideal views must of course overlook the question regarding Raphael’s reliability as a spokesperson.
ethics and its ultimate transcendence” (14). In other words, Utopian philosophy claims that reason and virtue are natural human inclinations while at the same time it demands that citizens repress and overcome their natural (innate) tendencies toward self-interest.

And yet to assume that the presence of irony, contradiction, and absurdity within the text is the result of some shortcoming or oversight on More’s part would be to ignore a salient feature of his text. In that More intentionally coined various ironic Greek terms for his work, it seems negligent to disregard the possible implications of these amusing terms for our interpretation of the text. Furthermore, while the process of inventing an imaginary commonwealth may enable one to present a conceptual model of an ideal society in order to speculate how a society designed as such might conceivably function, the social problems described in Book I were very real concerns for More, and a description of an ideal commonwealth based on the principle of community of property would not offer a practical solution. In fact, Hythloday’s discourse in praise of Utopia exemplifies his own ineffectual approach to counsel. He argues in favor of a radical course of action that would not only be
exceedingly difficult to implement, but would also do nothing to resolve the immediate problems that he discusses in Book I. To presume that Hythloday presents More's view of an ideal, then, is to limit the relevance and significance of his work in regard to the definite problems evident in sixteenth-century English society. And while the observation that the Utopian social order fails on account of the fact that "More does not introduce any principle external to its fundamental assumptions concerning reality" is very perceptive, it is based on a pre-established assessment that Utopia is intended to be read literally as political theory and accordingly fails to offer a useful theoretical model of a flawless social order (Yoran 14). However, it should be noted that the inability of the Utopian society to be grounded in any principle or view of reality outside of itself is not only the failure of the Utopians, but of any several social orders founded upon such metaphysical concepts as "reason," "freedom," or "democracy."

In fact, any resolution to view Utopia as the description of a model commonwealth means that there is no choice but to attribute these problematic elements to failure or oversight. Yet in doing so, the text is
effectively closed off, and there appears to be no need to give any further consideration to obvious instances of irony or contradiction. However, More's Oxford education, his reputation as a scholar, as well as his professional achievements as a successful lawyer and politician, would seem to suggest that he had an exceptional knowledge of language, and was accordingly able to use discourse artfully and successfully over the course of his political and literary career. According to Arthur F. Kinney, such an expert understanding of language was characteristic of the humanist writers, whose intellectual training was founded upon the classical trivium: the study of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. With respect to this humanist tradition, from which More, his colleagues, and Utopia emerged, Kinney states that More can plausibly "engage in wordplay" because he can rely on readers who "understand that although words are a necessary means to knowledge, they are also always multiple in their referents and at best approximate meanings in their capacity to convey thought" (56).

The implication then is that rather than overlooking occurrences of humor, inconsistency, and contradiction, we might consider them as a means of opening the text for further exploration. Accordingly, a more thorough
investigation of More’s work needs to consider how and why Utopia’s irony, complexity, and ambiguity serve to deliberately problematize any attempt at a conventional reading of it. Thus More intentionally compels and, in fact, requires readers to become skeptical interpreters. Literal interpretations of Utopia purely as a theoretical model for social reform or as a description of More’s ideal society are both insufficient and incomplete. Likewise, a reader’s interpretive choice made without acknowledging More’s use of irony and without attempting to resolve the instances of paradox or contradiction makes for a simplistic and reductive reading. Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate the deeper levels of meaning underlying the elaborate discourse of Utopia.
CHAPTER THREE

"TO RESEMBLE AND COUNTERFEIT THE FOOL": DISCOVERING UTOPIA'S IRONIC SUBTEXT

In the summer of 1499, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam made his first trip to England at the invitation of his former pupil William Blount, Lord Mountjoy. While there, he was introduced to Thomas More, who was almost ten years younger than the Dutch scholar, and at that time, in the midst of completing his training as a barrister at Lincoln's Inn. The encounter between the two men led to an enduring friendship founded upon their mutual enthusiasm for scholarship and intellectual activity as well as their shared appreciation for spirited wittiness and humor. Later, in 1509, when Erasmus returned to London from his travels abroad, he lodged at the home of his dear companion Thomas More. During his stay, Erasmus, spurred by More's fervent encouragement, completed a modest work in the span of a few days wherein he displayed his clever sense of humor through a skillful application of wit and irony. Erasmus dedicated his work, a mock encomium titled In Praise of Folly, to his good friend More and was, in fact, delighted with the verbal pun More's named presented in the
Latin translation of the title: *Encomium Moriae* - “In Praise of More.” The work was finally revised and published in Paris in 1511. In the prefatory letter, which he addressed to More, Erasmus discusses the origin of his idea to compose a work in praise of folly:

My first hint came from your family name of More, which is just as close to Moria, the Greek word for folly, as you are remote from the thing itself. In fact, everyone agrees that you are as far removed from it as possible. Besides, I had a suspicion that this joke would be agreeable to you because you particularly enjoy jests of this sort - that is, if I don’t flatter myself, jests seasoned with a touch of learning and a dash of wit. (3)

Erasmus alludes to More’s sophisticated sense of humor and lively appreciation for clever jokes and jests. In his closing remarks, Erasmus charges More to “defend [his] Folly faithfully” (5).

And defend it he did. Erasmus’ *Moriae* was a humorous, yet incisively satiric, examination of the excessive folly exhibited by contemporary pedantic theologians and schoolmen and corrupt rulers, courtiers, and members of the
clergy. The implicit social commentary, delivered through Folly’s oration, did not escape the attention of the doctrinaire scholasticists. In 1514, when it became abundantly clear that more editions of the work would be forthcoming, Erasmus’ adversaries deemed it necessary to issue a confutation of the accusations put forth in the *Moriae*. For the task, the offended parties chose Martin Van Dorp, an aspiring theologian and former acquaintance of Erasmus. Van Dorp promptly issued the first of two letters publicly discrediting Erasmus and the charges presented by Folly. In response, Erasmus composed his *Defense of Folly*. In 1515, when Van Dorp issued his second letter attacking Erasmus, More became involved in the “humanist-scholastic” debate and accordingly composed his own extensive letter to Van Dorp in defense of the *Moriae* (*Satire 31*).

More’s involvement in the controversy surrounding the reception of Erasmus’ *Moriae*, as Warren W. Wooden points out, is significant as it testifies to their mutual concern over the detrimental effects of medieval theological dogma and scholastic intellectualism (32). Additionally, More’s defense of Erasmus speaks to their shared appreciation for the ability of humorously satiric discourse to effectively comment upon instances of pride, hypocrisy, excess, and
corruption evident in society. Furthermore, this time period, from 1515 to 1516, is noteworthy in relation to More’s own literary productivity as it was during this period that he, while embroiled in the humanist-scholastic controversy and writing his letter to Martin Van Dorp, was also at work composing his *Utopia*. And yet, More’s and Erasmus’ familiarity with the function of satiric irony, as a means to critique social institutions and comment upon the established cultural practices in which they themselves were immersed and invested, began to develop before the emergence of *Encomium Moriae*. In 1505, Erasmus, in his efforts to expand his knowledge of the Greek language, developed an interest in the works of Lucian. He and More, who shared Erasmus’ appreciation of the classical satirist, began translating the dialogues of Lucian from Greek into Latin. The Latin versions of Lucian’s works were completed and published in the winter of 1506. Lucian’s skillful execution of satire and his sharp wit, elegant style, and great capacity for invention and creativity would serve to influence the works of both Erasmus and More. As E.E. Reynolds writes:

So Erasmus could see in the contemporary world material for the pen of a Lucian, and his own
genius could supply the wit and satire. More had
the same turn of mind and the two friends could
enjoy Lucian and then apply the same method of
criticism to the abuses they saw around them.

(54)

Even as *Encomium Moriae* and *Utopia* reveal their foundations
to be fixed in the classical rhetorical tradition, these
works also exhibit characteristics of irony and satire that
are of a distinctly Lucianic nature. Like Lucian, More and
Erasmus found the dogmatic and moralistic idealists of
their day to be prime targets for satiric examination.

Lucian of Samosata was born in Syria, in roughly
125 A.D., near the Euphrates and lived during the "age of
rhetoricians" (*Works viii*). He eventually traveled to
Ionia, where the cities of Smyrna and Ephesus were brimming
with sophists and teachers of rhetoric. It was a time in
the classical age when skilled sophists and famous rhetors
traveled to various cities and exhibited their skills by
appearing in the public forum and delivering an oration ex
tempore about any subject proposed by the audience. Lucian
would similarly earn his living by showcasing his abilities
in rhetoric and public oration while in Ionia, Greece,
Italy, and Gaul. Yet in approximately 163-4 A.D., after he
settled in Athens, Lucian's career as a rhetor came to an end as he determined that this particular style of discourse was more appropriate for those in the legal profession who vigorously sought to achieve success rather than to discover truths. For the sophists and rhetoricians, victory was achieved by the obfuscation of issues and the application of specious appeals. Lucian's interests eventually turned to philosophy, particularly the Socratic method practiced by Plato; he determined the Socratic procedure, or dialectic, to be the means to elicit truths (Works xi). Between 165 to 175 A.D., Lucian's most prolific period, he would appropriate this method in his own series of dialogues. Using humor and irony, Lucian offers a parodic portrayal of philosophical dialectic to interrogate the seeming validity of the disingenuous and hypocritical philosophical schools of thought commonly favored by the educated. In his application of the Socratic dialogue form to parodic and satiric purpose, then, Lucian provides one precursor to the method we seem to observe in the dialogue in Book I of More's Utopia.

Lucian's satiric style and inquisitive nature would eventually earn him the reputation as a "scoffer" (Works xxv). "Lucianism," as R. Bracht Branham explains,
became “synonymous with a particularly virulent form of disbelief, associated not merely with an absence of faith, but with a kind of skepticism informed by ridicule for the credulity of the faithful” (24). It was this tradition of prose satire, also referred to as Menippean satire, which Erasmus and More, along with earlier Italian humanists who were fascinated with Lucian, helped revive during the European Renaissance. Their translations of Lucian’s dialogues underwent multiple printings and were widely read. As a result, his works were “among the first Greek texts to excite aspiring Hellenists of the early Renaissance” (Bedlam 19).

Lucian wrote in the tradition of Menippean satire. The term “Menippean” finds its origin in Greek literature; specifically, it derives from those works, now lost, written by the Greek Cynic Menippus. According to Scott Blanchard, the biographer Diogenes Laertius labeled Menippus’ writing style as spoudogeloion (seriocomic), as it combines verse and prose forms and mixes humor with philosophical insight. It also utilizes the Cynics’ signature manner of diatribe and invective enfolded within a dialogue or presented in the form of a mock encomium or symposium (15). The various manifestations of folly are the
primary targets of Menippean satire. Northrop Frye explains that the Menippean satirist sees evil and folly as "diseases of the mind" (309). Accordingly, Menippean satire deals with attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies rather than individual dispositions or temperaments; characters are considered in terms of their "occupational approach" to life rather than their social conduct or behavior. Consequently, the characters of Menippean satire appear unnatural and stylized and thus serve as spokespersons for the philosophical practices or schools of thought they appear to represent (Anatomy 309). More’s interest in Lucian’s dialogues would profoundly influence his own work. Like Lucian, More was interested in the potential of satire to interrogate the presumed authority and stability of idealized cultural traditions. And More would accordingly apply his knowledge of Menippean themes and techniques in his landmark work, Utopia.

Lucian was superbly skilled at constructing humorously satiric characters for the purposes of ironically commenting on various features of Hellenic culture, and his dialogues subsequently provided More with a framework for his creation of the character Hythloday. It was likely from Lucian’s works that More discovered how to invent a satiric
caricature in order to parody particular attitudes and practices seen in contemporary sixteenth-century English society. Our awareness of More’s familiarity with Lucianic techniques serves to elucidate those aspects of Hythloday’s character we initially find so perplexing and problematic. The examination of Hythloday as a satiric persona offers a much more insightful and rewarding understanding of his characterological function than the traditional interpretations that view him either as a reliable narrator or as More’s spokesperson. Hythloday’s argumentative technique in the dialogue of Book I can be viewed as an exaggerated and parodic depiction of the dialectical method employed by the scholastic theologians and schoolmen that were prevalent in More’s day.

The scholastic method attempted to reconcile classical philosophy and medieval Christian theology. As Paul Oskar Kristeller explains, medieval theologians synthesized Biblical teachings, the writings of the early Christian fathers, and classical philosophical methods that appeared compatible with Christian doctrine, especially Stoic and Platonic methods, in order to “transform the subject matter of Christian theology into a topically arranged and logically coherent system” (77). In their examination of
various theological questions, the scholastics attempted to resolve points of disagreement or contradiction through a dialectical method that relied upon the understanding that words can possess multiple meanings. Thus the apparent ambiguity or contradictory aspect of a theological issue could be resolved by the application of logical analysis and argumentation. More, who advocated the humanist position for a return to the Bible as the original source of Christianity, vehemently opposed the scholastic method of *disputatio*, in which the scholar could argue either side of a question with equal proficiency and with complete disregard for determining the true or accurate position (*Satire* 37).

Hythloday's argumentative techniques are presented through a satiric rendering of the formalistic and outdated scholastic tradition. Hythloday's rigid viewpoint and didactic and uncooperative style reveal that he is attempting to forcibly instruct and persuade his two interlocutors. Rather than participating in a genuine conversational exchange of ideas, Hythloday presents a long-winded disputation in response to the question of counsel. Hythloday's overwhelmingly pompous erudition and pedantic philosophical language, accompanied by his
confidence in his interpretation of the scriptures in addition to using the teachings of Plato as universal support for his assertions, exemplify a rhetorical style that relies on sophistic flair rather than impartial and unbiased observations or practical logic. Hythloday’s idealistic persona accordingly dominates the conversation.

The dialogic exchange among Hythloday, “More,” and Giles is reminiscent of the parodic portrayal of philosophical dialectic seen in Lucian’s dialogue The Cynic, which was among the works More translated in 1505. Like the cynic philosopher, Hythloday, in the role of the philosophus gloriosus, is associated with a conventional, if not widely respected, scholastic intellectual tradition. In The Cynic, the questions posed by the curious and unsuspecting Lycinus incite the cynic philosopher’s oration extolling the virtues of the ascetic lifestyle, as well as his vicious diatribe condemning the folly of humankind. Yet throughout the course of the dialogue, the cynic philosopher’s defense of the ascetic lifestyle becomes fixated on the virtue of the cynic’s distinct physical appearance rather than on the resilience of his moral convictions. His tirade deteriorates further as a result of the cynic philosopher’s application of illogical reasoning,
unfounded generalizations, and *ad hominem* attacks.

According to Branham, the humorous effect of *The Cynic*, is:

... primarily a function of the particular type of dialogue developed by Lucian that serves to dramatize the comic inability of either speaker to grasp fully the other’s point of view because of their absorption in distinct universes of discourse. (27)

A similar comic strategy using the dialogue form can likewise be identified in Book I of *Utopia*.

Critics have acknowledged More’s clever construction of Hythloday as a means to effectively enable the achievement of *prosopopeia*, the distinctive depiction of a fictive persona in order to heighten the dramatization of two opposing viewpoints. Hythloday’s exaggerated and argumentative demeanor serves to satirically accentuate the points of conflict and opposition between his philosophical viewpoint and the humanist viewpoint espoused by “More” and Giles. When “More” suggests that the application of a civic philosophy would be more suitable in the practice of counseling kings than Hythloday’s academic philosophy, Hythloday employs the specious methodology of the scholastics by resorting to *a priori* universals: the
scriptures and the teachings of Plato. And when "More" questions the practicality and efficacy of a social order based on the community of property, Hythloday does not offer a clear and sensible response that would serve to answer or address "More’s" justifiable concerns. Instead, he brushes them aside viewing "More’s" concerns as proof of his ignorance: "I marvel not that you be of this opinion. For you conceive in your mind either none at all, or else a very false image and similitude of this thing" (126). He likewise claims to have access to exclusive knowledge of such a social system and thus proceeds to offer his illustration of Utopia. As Gerard Wegemer explains, Hythloday’s response demonstrates the extent of his gnosticism.¹ Rather than presenting evidence in support of his assertions that would function on a mutually comprehensible level with "More" and Giles, Hythloday claims to possess esoteric information to which no one else has access (302).

In spite of Hythloday’s ability to comment on England’s social problems, the gnostic and cynical aspects

¹ The island of Utopia alludes to the influences of gnostic philosophy; Hythloday refers to the name of the country before Utopus’ arrival as "Abraxa." According to Sacks, this Greek name was “given by the second-century Greek gnostic Basilides to the highest of the 365 heavens that he posited” (128n).
of his attitude underscore his removed and disinterested attitude. The degree of Hythloday's lack of involvement with the customs and practices of European society, and with the opinions and concerns held by "More" and Giles, are reinforced early in the dialogue of Book I. In addition to his role as enigmatic traveler long dispatched to various parts unknown, Hythloday has gone to lengths to ensure that no relations or ties would oblige him to act in any way contrary to the principles of his rigid, formalistic rationalism. When "More" and Giles suggest that Hythloday might enter the service of a king in order to be of some use to his relatives and friends, he explains:

As concerning my friends and kinfolk, I pass not greatly for them, for I think I have sufficiently done my part towards them already. For these things, that other men do not depart from until they be old and sick ... those very same things did I, being not only lusty and in good health but also in the flower of my youth, divide among my friends and kinfolk, which I think with this my liberality ought to hold them contented, and not to require nor to look that besides this, I
should for their sakes give myself in bondage unto kings. (95)

This physical and emotional detachment is a condition specific to a distinct kind of satiric persona; it enables such characters, through the outward guise of objectivity, to launch into a caustic harangue in their criticism of society, while at the same time presuming themselves superior to the human behaviors and social practices they vehemently condemn. Lucian's cynic philosopher implicitly refers to himself when he declares: " Accordingly the Gods have no needs, and those men the fewest who are nearest Gods" (par. 12). Likewise, Hythloday appears to have few worldly needs, concerns, or associations, and thus appears concentrated on achieving the degree of "otherworldliness" supposedly attained by those of the ascetic frame of mind. Therefore he exhibits no affection, concern, or responsibility toward his fellow man. In fact, Hythloday's argument in favor of withdrawal is founded in large part on a desire to remain isolated and detached:

Now I live at liberty after mine own mind and pleasure, which I think very few of these great states and peers of realms can say. Yea, and there be enough of them that sue for great men's
friendships and, therefore, I think it no great hurt if they have not me, nor three of four such others as I am. (95)

Hythloday's disillusionment with conventional European society gives way to a preference for idealism and independence. As Hythloday becomes more vigorous in his assertions, his evidence moves from the factual (his account of dinner with Cardinal Morton), to the increasingly hypothetical and imaginary (his supposed scenarios involving invented kings and counsels), to the completely fantastic and esoteric (his exclusive knowledge of unfamiliar societies and of the island of Utopia) (Kinney 81).

Yet More goes beyond the parodic send-up of Lucian's cynic philosopher. Hythloday's character is one of the fundamental elements that testifies to the incredible breadth of complexity More is able to achieve in Utopia. For More deliberately problematizes the character of Hythloday, lest we become completely captivated by his righteous indignation and high moral deportment, or feel inclined to write him off as a mere caricature of scholastic pedantry. He is unlike Erasmus' Dame Folly, who, after she offers an oration in praise of herself, directly
refers to the folly of her attendants. In the second half of *Moriae*, Folly is hardly ambiguous in her scrutiny of human foolishness and vice. In fact, as Reynolds explains: “It is now the direct voice of Erasmus rather than Erasmus speaking by the mouth of Folly. The transition is skillfully done, but a harsher note is sounded” (70). While the motivation underlying Folly’s ironical pronouncements is more easily discerned as she continues her oration, in *Utopia*, Hythloday remains a consistent instrument of More’s skillful use of irony and carefully constructed ambiguity. In spite of our suspicion of Hythloday’s reliability, insofar as Hythloday, at times, seems to espouse humanist principles, we are never quite certain when we will need to reverse what he is saying; we are only certain that we will invariably be forced to confront the irony embedded in his discourse.

One such instance of multi-layered irony is in his account of dinner with Cardinal Morton whereby he offers his critique of European society. Hythloday’s discussion regarding the suitable punishment of thieves, the ostentation and greed of aristocrats and merchants that contribute to rising poverty among farmers, tradesmen, and laborers, and the hypocrisy and corrupt behavior of rulers
and state officials echoes the humanist interest in social reform. However, the accuracy of Hythloday's assessment is undercut by the fact that he offers this account as evidence for his argument in favor of withdrawal from political service, and for his assertion that counselors would not be interested in his sensible advice, in spite of the fact that Cardinal Morton is clearly the exception to this generalization. Hythloday compliments the gracious and eloquent Cardinal in spite of the fact that Cardinal's demeanor and behavior are contrary to his preference for strict and unyielding counsel. This sort of multi-layered irony serves to heighten the complexity of Hythloday's characterological function within the dialogue.

In the same instance in which Hythloday delivers his critique of European society, he includes an account that is of profound importance specifically for the reader of Utopia. In summing up his account of dinner with Cardinal Morton, when the other attendants at the table praise Hythloday's suggestions solely because they appear to be endorsed by the Cardinal, Hythloday launches into a seemingly incidental digression recounting the quarrel that erupts between a "certain jesting parasite" and a friar who is also a "graduate in divinity," both of whom are also
present at the table. Hythloday recollects the event casually enough:

I cannot tell whether it were best to rehearse the communication that followed, for it was not very sad [serious]. But yet you shall hear it, for there was no evil in it, and partly it pertained to the matter before said. (111)

Hythloday then offers a peculiar introduction for the parasite:

There chanced to stand by a certain jesting parasite, or scoffer, which would seem to resemble and counterfeit the fool. But he did in such wise counterfeit that he was almost the very same indeed that he labored to represent. He so studied with words and sayings brought forth so out of time and place to make sport and move laughter that he himself was oftener laughed at than his jests were. (111) (emphasis added)

As Hythloday’s description indicates, he is incapable of a more nuanced assessment of the parasite’s function; he cannot quite distinguish the difference between a genuine fool and one who would “counterfeit the fool.” Hythloday naively interprets the parasite’s ability to provoke
laughter as an indication of his foolish awkwardness, and he believes the parasite's occasionally successful exhibitions of cleverness to be merely the result of luck. After Hythloday and the Cardinal discuss the possibilities for restructuring the laws regarding the treatment of thieves and vagabonds, one of their party wonders aloud how they might deal with those who are fallen into poverty as a result of old age or infirmity and are therefore unable to work to earn a living. The parasite ironically suggests that these types of needy persons might be sent to the monasteries to become nuns and laypersons. The friar sees this as a jest at the expense of secular monks and priests, so he makes his own attempt at a witty quip. However, the parasite adroitly turns the friar's remark against him by equating the mendicant friars with vagabonds. When the guests see that the Cardinal does not disapprove of the parasite's retort, they join in laughter at the friar's expense.

Hythloday offers this account as evidence in support of a particular assertion; again, he refers to the disingenuous response of the courtiers and counselors who mistakenly support the parasite's comic suggestions only after the Cardinal responds favorably to his jesting.
However, the reader is able to discern Hythloday's digression as evidence of something much more significant. On one level, the digression functions as another opportunity for More to satirize the specious methodology and routinely spiteful behavior of the pedantic theologian who relies on his universals - the scriptures - as the means to counter the parasite's taunts and refute his implicit accusations. Moreover, the parasite proceeds to enrage the theologian to such a degree with his clever jesting that the indignant theologian resorts to hurling boorish insults. As Hythloday relates, the friar was:

... in such a rage that he could not refrain himself from chiding, scolding, railing, and reviling. He called the fellow ribald, villain, javel, backbiter, slanderer, and child of perdition, citing, therewith, terrible threatenings out of Holy Scripture. (112)

The friar's response only stimulates further concentrated jesting and ridicule from the parasite. As Hythloday recounts: "Then the jesting scoffer began to play the scoffer indeed, and, verily, he was good at it, for he could play a part in that play no man better" (112) (emphasis added). The resultant commentary emerges: the
parasite may be, as Hythloday implies, "playing the fool," yet he maintains his composure, while the seemingly learned friar loses all sense of poise and self-control, and thus reveals himself to be the genuine fool.

And yet the digression works on an even subtler level by providing a clue to the underlying rhetorical strategy in *Utopia*. Hythloday inadvertently offers a description of a character, the friar/theologian, whose role is, in some ways, analogous to his own. Similar to the theologian's response to the parasite's statements, the concerns raised by "More" provoke Hythloday to resort to personal attacks aimed at "More's" character, and to appeal to scholastic universals - his interpretations of Plato and the scriptures - which are likewise manipulated and taken out of context in order to support his assertions, ironically resulting in the degradation of Christian and philosophical doctrines. While Hythloday uses the digression to illustrate the impediments to sensible and productive discussion among courtiers, as Branham points out, the Cardinal's reaction serves as an example of how we should approach the ironic, humorous, and outwardly ambivalent discourse presented in *Utopia*: "For the Cardinal's own more adept responses serve implicitly as a model of the very
interpretive skills *Utopia* requires of its readers"; thus More requires readers to construe a sophisticated and learned jest and to be able to distinguish the profound and provocative aspects of Hythloday’s discourse that are enfolded in language that appears superficially humorous and whimsical (33).

Early in his literary career, More also translated *Menippus*, another dialogue by Lucian, whereby he would become familiar with another trope of Lucianic seriocomedy: the *theatrum mundi* - the dramatic metaphor of “life as a stage play” - the notion that humans are constantly engaged in role-playing. More, who greatly appreciated Lucian’s adroit sense of humor, would adapt this trope for his own work *Utopia*. In *Menippus*, the title character grows up listening to the stories of the Gods written by the poets Hesiod and Homer. The poets’ tales describe the Gods’ violent and rapacious behavior; yet when Menippus becomes a man, he discovers that human laws contradict the poets and forbid the depraved behavior exhibited by the Gods. To resolve his confusion, Menippus seeks out the philosophers in order that they, as he explains, “would make what they would of me and give me a plain and reliable map of life” (158). Yet to his dismay, he finds the philosophers
advocate differing and contradictory principles in response to his question. Furthermore, he observes: "that the practice of these same people was diametrically opposed to their precepts" (159). Disappointed by the absurdity and duplicity of the philosophers' methods, Menippus undertakes a journey to the underworld in search of Tiresias, the blind seer of Thebes, to learn the best kind of life. During his journey through the underworld, Menippus observes the dead, many of them celebrated heroes and rulers of ancient Greece, only now they possess none of the distinguishing characteristics that made them remarkable in life, such as wealth, fame, and beauty. This leads Menippus to a profound realization regarding the condition of humankind:

... the life of man came before me under the likeness of a great pageant, arranged and marshalled by Chance, who distributed infinitely varied costumes to the performers. She would take one and array him like a king ... another she dressed like a slave; one was adorned with beauty, another got a ridiculous hunchback; there must be all kinds in the show. (164)
With a similar stage metaphor in mind, in Book I of *Utopia*, "More" advocates the use of a more civil philosophy that "knoweth ... her own stage," and emphasizes the merits of role-playing for the purposes of providing useful counsel. Furthermore, "More's" practical advice echoes the importance Tiresias places on common sense and expediency when he finally offers, by whispering in Menippus' ear, his view of the best way of life:

> The life of the ordinary man is the best and most prudent choice; cease from the folly of metaphysical speculation and inquiry into origins and ends, utterly reject their clever logic, count all these things idle talk, and pursue one end alone - how you may do what your hand finds to do, and go your way with ever a smile and never a passion. (167)

By questioning Hythloday's radical assertions, "More" begins to target his intolerant fanaticism and the futility of his idealistic philosophy. In spite of Hythloday's academic logic and high moral purpose, the practicality of "More's" advice resonates with the reader.

Of course Hythloday cannot perceive the significance that the role-playing metaphor might have on his
understanding of the nature of human action and behavior. When “More” suggests the use of a more civic approach to counsel, Hythloday cannot conceive of the tangible circumstances that would make his idealistic vision impossible to achieve. Because of the lengths Hythloday has gone to in order to remain detached from the European social order, he lacks the ability to comprehend the complexities of human existence, and the ability to ponder the full range of factors that contribute to the inevitable need to fulfill specific roles in life, such as counselor perhaps, for the sake of appropriateness, efficacy, and expediency. As he demonstrates earlier in his account of the parasite, who eventually began to “play the scoffer indeed ... for he could play a part in that play no man better,” Hythloday cannot distinguish when a person might perform in a particular role in order to accomplish a specific objective. In the case of the parasite and the friar, the parasite uses the fool’s comic mask to ironically, and accurately, comment upon the hypocrisy and arrogance exhibited by the theologian. Hythloday, like the courtiers at Cardinal Morton’s table, is oblivious to the ironic subtext of the parasite’s discourse.
While "More" and Giles patiently endure Hythloday's long-winded oration and sophistical argumentation, they do not appear entirely convinced at the end of the dialogue. Hythloday's assertion of Utopia's superiority to European societies elicits from "More" a justifiable degree of doubt, as well as a genuine curiosity in regard to how a society based upon the community of property could conceivably function. Yet it is Giles who seems to undergo the more drastic change - from enthusiastic admirer to something more resembling the Lucianic scoffer. Initially, Giles is impressed by Hythloday's vast knowledge, and this amazement is what leads to the debate on counsel:

I wonder greatly why you get you not into some king's court? For I am sure there is no prince living that would not be glad of you as a man not only able highly to delight him with your profound learning, and this your knowledge of countries and peoples, but also meet to instruct him with examples and help him with counsel. (94)

However, by the close of the dialogue, when Hythloday appeals to his esoteric knowledge in his praise of Utopian institutions and practices: "if you had been with me in Utopia and had presently seen their fashions and laws, as I
did ... then doubtless you would grant that you never saw a people well ordered, but only there..." Now, Giles is overtly skeptical: "it shall be hard for you to make me believe that there is better order in that new land than is here in these countries that we know, for good wits be as well here as there" (126). Likewise, the reader of *Utopia* anticipates the discourse in Book II with a measure of genuine curiosity, although perhaps mixed with a commensurate amount of skepticism.

Since Utopian practices and institutions appear, at least on a superficial level, to successfully eliminate the social ills pointed out by Hythloday in Book I, we may be tempted to embrace his description of Utopia as a model commonwealth. However, the ironic subtext underlying Hythloday’s discourse results in numerous absurdities and contradictions that frustrate any inclination to interpret *Utopia* as a literal ideal. While we might lose sight of the fact that Hythloday is, in essence, presenting an encomium in praise of an imaginary "No Place," a fact that becomes troubling every time it comes to mind, it is equally confounding to realize that Utopian society appears to be disturbingly xenophobic and misanthropic. The geographic characteristics of Utopia and England are strikingly
similar, and certainly sixteenth-century England did historically exhibit a measure of insularity; however, the Utopians go to great lengths to ensure their island’s impenetrability. For example, the bay of Utopia is filled with dangerous rocks just below the water’s surface, making it possible for only native Utopians to navigate the channels successfully. Therefore strangers must necessarily have the accompaniment of a Utopian guide. Yet it appears that when Utopus, the country’s legendary founder, conquered the country, he was not satisfied with the land’s natural defenses. Before his arrival, the land he conquered was attached to the mainland with an isthmus. To further ensure the country’s seclusion, Utopus ordered the strip of land to be dug up: “For King Utopus ... caused fifteen miles space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up, and so brought the sea round about the land” (128-9). Yet, in spite of the Utopians’ distaste and distrust of peoples or customs unknown and unfamiliar, these sensibilities do nothing to prevent their aggressive sense of entitlement. Without a moment’s hesitation, the Utopians, as part of their population regulatory practices will establish a colony on the mainland. Should the native inhabitants refuse to live as ordered under the Utopian law
appointed by the colonists, the Utopians simply drive the inhabitants out of their native land: "And if they resist and rebel, then [the Utopians] make war against them, for they count this the most just cause of war, when any people holdeth a piece of ground void and vacant to no good nor profitable use ..." (142).

Furthermore, this misanthropic sentiment is not only manifested by a xenophobic reaction toward other peoples and cultures; it is also directed inward, influencing the way the Utopians behave toward one another. Nowhere is this more clearly displayed than in the Utopian patriarchal family unit. Harry Berger, Jr. identifies the function of the Utopian political system in the formation of an obedient and docile population by way of social institutions that are designed to assist the interests of "misanthropic self-deception" (271). Utopia is presented as a happy and contented society since its system ensures that there will never be a shortage of essential goods and nothing is ever to be given in exchange for what is needed. In this way, as Hythloday announces: "the whole island is as it were one family or household" (148). However, Berger sees the Utopian family unit as an extension of the civil government and, ironically, as an example of Utopian
misanthropy - the deliberate attempt to encourage detachment and prohibit the formation of abiding familial bonds among relatives. According to Berger:

... the Utopian mentality treats the private family space as a potential seedbed of conspiracy against the state, a place in which the constant face-to-face relationships enable people to keep their backs to the world, confide in each other, share secrets, and hatch plots. (282)

Hence, the quality of philia that leads to reciprocity, support, and cooperation among members of a nuclear family is pre-empted and forcibly redirected to the larger society. The result is the various, and disturbingly impersonal, Utopian practices that serve to benefit the good of the society rather than autonomous, individually sustained families, such as moving and separating families at will for purposes of population control and regulation, the rotating system of rural and urban laborers, and the essentially mandatory practice of communal meals.

A more thorough examination of Utopia's institutions and practices reveals a variety of absurd and troubling elements that would appear to contradict the status of Utopian society as an "ideal." In addition to their
suspicious view of family relationships, they also exhibit an equally cynical view of the marriage relationship and the human capacity for romantic love, which results in a pre-marital practice that even Hythloday acknowledges as completely ridiculous. When choosing marriage partners, the prospective bride and groom are displayed to each other, under the supervision of a respectable woman and man, completely naked. The Utopians compare the selection of a mate to the practice of purchasing livestock only after a thorough inspection has been made, lest some sore or lesion be hidden by the saddle or some other covering. Thus a woman’s beauty cannot be determined merely by the attractiveness of her face or hands. The reason for this practice, as Hythloday explains, is founded on the fact that some undisclosed offensive or disgusting feature may result in the hatred of married partners toward each other for the rest of their lives:

For all men be not so wise as to have respect to the virtuous conditions of the party, and the endowments of the body cause the virtues of the mind more to be esteemed and regarded, yea, even in the marriages of wise men. Verily, so foul deformity may be hid under those coverings that
it may quite alienate and take away the man's mind from his wife, when it shall not be lawful for their bodies to be separate again. (170)

Yet this obsession with bodily appearance, and potentially offensive deformities or abnormalities, seems to be in outright opposition to the Utopian principle that considers the use of cosmetics for the purposes of improving one's beauty to be a prideful and detestable practice. Hythloday explains this attitude only a few pages after the discussion of Utopian marriage customs:

For they know even by very experience that no comeliness of beauty doth so highly commend and advance the wives in the conceit of their husbands as honest conditions and lowliness. For love is oftentimes won with beauty, so it is not kept, preserved, and continued but by virtue and obedience. (172) (emphasis added)

While the Utopians are so anxious about the potential for the body to provoke disgust that they consider it an absolute necessity to base the entire decision of marriage on the examination of prospective partners in full nakedness, Hythloday nevertheless attempts to assert that virtue and obedience are esteemed more highly in Utopian
society than physical beauty. With Hythloday’s seeming unawareness of the contradictory implications of his descriptions of Utopian practices, one cannot help but feel that he is making things up as he goes along and, in so doing, loses sight of the resulting paradoxes that emerge, or else that he is so blindly enamored of Utopian society that these problematic elements simply do not occur to him, and therefore he does not consider them worth accounting for.

Another example of inconsistency in Utopia is demonstrated in their philosophy of war. According to Hythloday, the Utopians despise war:

> War or battle, as a thing very beastly and yet to no kind of beasts in so much use as to man, they do detest and abhor. And contrary to the custom almost of all other nations, they count nothing so much against glory as glory gotten in war.

(177)

What would seem to follow is a description of a tranquil, pacifist society. However, Hythloday goes on to describe in some detail a society that spends a majority of its “free time” involved in military training, exercises, and games, that involve the entire family in the act of combat, and in
public triumphs when they have skillfully and deceitfully overcome an enemy. Furthermore, for a people that detest war, Hythloday relates their preference for battle-axes as opposed to swords, as they "be mortal as well in sharpness as in weight, both for foins [thrusts] and downstrokes" (184). They also excel in laying ambushes and in their invention of machines of war. They claim to despise war, yet ironically they unscrupulously hire mercenaries, offer bribes, and plot assassinations in order to subdue their enemies. The Utopians are revealed to be a hostile, mean-spirited, and emotionally vacant people who are aggressive in their self-defense as well as in maintaining their dominance among neighboring nations. Apparently, the Utopian’s have participated in warfare often enough to have accumulated from their conquered enemies a great deal of wealth and a large number of landed estates in numerous different countries. In his recounting of the Utopian methods of warfare, Hythloday is ironically oblivious to the fact that they rely on many of the very same methods employed by European societies, which he condemns in Book I.

Thus the dichotomy Hythloday establishes at the outset of his discourse on Utopia begins to break down. His
assertion that Utopian society is superior to European society begins to lose its hold on us as we come to recognize that some of their practices are not only ludicrous, but also largely impractical. As Branham observes, the comic paradoxes are “generated by the sheer consistency of the Utopians’ utilitarian logic” (34). The utilitarian ideology that underlies Utopian institutions is primarily concerned with maximizing the good for the greatest number of people, meaning that egalitarianism must be preserved at all costs. Consequently, the Utopians are fanatical in their practice of the equitable distribution of all resources, including food, clothing, goods, and land. A utilitarian ethic also includes the evaluation of actions and conduct based on the principle of consequentialism: the view that the results of a given action or policy are what ultimately matter, and that the outcome is what establishes the acceptance of one action or policy over another. Accordingly, actions are determined purely by their eventual consequences rather than the means by which such ends are achieved. This ideology explains, in part, many of the Utopians’ seemingly hostile behaviors and impersonal traditions. Likewise, similar to Hythloday’s point of view in Book I, the absurdities that result from a
strictly rationalistic approach reveal the Utopians' lack of a nuanced sensibility that would be capable of contemplating the actions and behavior of humans as they are realistically expressed in a material and ultimately flawed world.

While Hythloday claims that the Utopians' utilitarian ideology has evidently resulted in some advantageous and beneficial effects, it has also resulted in the Utopians' distinct, culturally contingent attitudes toward gold and silver. The Utopian social order is built upon the belief that the accumulation of private property is the primary cause of social disorder and chaos, and for the greed, corruption, and arrogance exhibited among people. However, insofar as they are required to maintain a store of wealth (for how else do you go about hiring mercenaries, offering bribes, and financing assassination attempts?), they must guard against the estimation of gold, silver, and jewels as valuable commodities and therefore desirable to possess. To accomplish this, the Utopians inflate the practical function of iron as a stronger, more superior, and more easily attainable mineral than gold or silver. At the same time, they attempt to devalue precious jewels by giving them to children to play with as toys, and to lessen the
appeal of gold and silver by using them to fashion common necessities and for marking slaves:

... of gold and silver they make commonly chamber pots and other vessels that serve for most vile uses, not only in their common halls but in every man’s private house. Furthermore, of the same metals they make great chains, fetters, and gyves wherein they tie their bondmen. Finally, whosoever for any offense be infamed, by their ears hang rings of gold, upon their fingers they wear rings of gold, and about their necks chains of gold ... (150)

One might wonder about the efficacy and practicality of chains made from gold, a relatively soft metal, to use for the purposes of restraining slaves and criminals. Further, one can discern how the Utopians’ treatment of precious metals and stones and the great lengths they go to diminish the value of gold and silver serve to paradoxically highlight their complete and utter fascination with them.

Such comic paradoxes function in Book II to frustrate any sense of an emerging ideal. Throughout Hythloday’s discourse, we are forced to consider a moderating third view, one that considers the valid points of Hythloday’s
argument in relation to his fanatical idealism, and
considers the humanist argument voiced by “More” and Giles
in relation to their skeptical response to Hythloday’s assertions. In addition, we are engaged in a process of
evaluating Utopian institutions and practices from the
perspective of the subject positions we inhabit and from
those cultural systems in which we are invested. To
emphasize this aspect of *Utopia*’s rhetorical strategy, More
includes a digression in Hythloday’s discussion of the
Utopians’ attitude toward gold and silver. Similar to the
digression of the parasite and friar in Book I, Hythloday
offers an anecdote in Book II detailing the arrival in
Amaurote of the Anemolian ambassadors who are arrayed in
gold, jewels, and fine clothing, and are unaware of the
Utopians’ disdain for wealth and ostentation.

But the Anemolians, because they dwell far thence
and had very little acquaintances with them,
hearing that they were all appareled alike and
that very rudely and homely, thinking them not to
have the things which they did not wear, being
therefore more proud than wise, determined in the
gorgeousness of their apparel to represent very
gods and with bright shining and glittering of
their gay clothing to dazzle the eyes of the poor Utopians. (151)

The Utopians, mistaking the elaborately dressed ambassadors for slaves and fools, greet the Anemolian servants as their distinguished guests. Insofar as the Anemolians appear to possess assumptions similar to Europeans, the digression serves Hythloday’s idealizing perspective and functions as evidence of the folly of European society and to reinforce the superiority of Utopian ideology. However, the digression also serves to highlight the subtle satiric perspective of Book II. According to Branham, the satiric perspective emerges as an effect of “viewing European practice in light of Utopian rationality” (34). Thus More satirizes European society by having their Anemolian surrogates, who arrogantly presume to dazzle the Utopians with their finery, presented as the object of Utopian laughter and ridicule.

Yet this satiric perspective serves a more significant purpose in Utopia. As Branham explains, the humor of the anecdote is the result of a distinctively Lucianic form that depends upon “juxtaposing in a single context two divergent cultural perspectives” (36). Hythloday’s digression destabilizes the readers’ perception of the
authority of prevailing cultural orthodoxies and conventions. It problematizes the tendency to view any social practice or tradition as "natural," recognizing them instead to be products of cultural construction and reinforcement. Thus, while the Anemolians acknowledge gold as possessing a "natural" or objective value, the Utopians reject this view entirely. Should we feel inclined to embrace Utopian moral philosophy as a valid interpretation of life "according to nature," we need only to recall the account of the Anemolian ambassadors to comprehend the arbitrary condition of cultural systems of practice. Because More was clever enough to construct a Utopian perspective in contrast to apparently European attitudes, we become aware of the fact that while Utopia's ironic subtext leads us to identify Utopian practices as impractical and absurd, the Utopians would just as likely laugh at our cultural practices and beliefs and find them to be ridiculous as well.

Interestingly, the digression of the Anemolian ambassadors comes just before Hythloday's discussion of Utopian moral philosophy. The Utopians claim the "just" life as the most pleasurable and, furthermore, that virtue, pleasure, and a devotion to the common good are the natural
products of philosophic rationalism. However, as happiness is the Utopians' primary concern and is consequently derived from a life devoted to pleasure, their system also espouses a naturalized hierarchy of pleasures that ranks the pleasures of the body below the pleasures of the mind. And within the category of bodily pleasures, the pleasure of eliminating excess falls below the pleasures of the harmonious state of physical health. In Utopian philosophy, the elimination of excess equates such actions as defecation or relieving an itch by scratching with sexual intercourse, the discharging of semen into the woman for the purposes of generating children. Insofar as satiric discourse customarily relies upon the anatomy of the grotesque in order to reduce the self-inflated perception of humankind, the Utopian fascination with the body may serve as another indication of Utopia's Menippean influences. As seen in their moral philosophy, which focuses a great deal on the hierarchical ordering of bodily functions, and their premarital customs, which demonstrates their obsession with potentially disgusting physical imperfections, the Utopians reveal their fixation on the animalistic and grotesque aspects of human nature in both their sacred and ritualistic practices.
Throughout Utopia, More cleverly adapts Lucianic themes and techniques and in so doing, displays his own adroit sense of humor, as well as his appreciation for an amusing jest and lively intellectual activity. His ironic commentary, aimed at scholastic theologians, idealistic philosophy, and the abuses of European society, is executed with a tremendous degree of skill and poise. Indeed he shared this skill and appreciation with his good friend Erasmus, who demonstrated his own clever sense of humor in Encomium Moriae. In the prefatory letter to the Frobenius edition of Moriae (1515), Giradus Listrius makes the following observation:

... there are truly things in it which cannot be understood except by the learned and attentive ... partly on account of the allusions both frequent and silently present, and partly because of the clever subtlety which cannot be easily sensed ... For there is nothing requiring more talent than to joke learnedly.

The observation can be similarly made in regard to More’s Utopia. Both works were certainly composed with the intent to inspire vigorous intellectual inspection and debate. Yet while the motivations underlying Erasmus’ use of satire and
irony are relatively discernable, to the extent that his work elicited an outraged and indignant response from the Louvain theologians, More’s own “voice” in Utopia is rather obscure. Thus the complexity and subtlety of irony in More’s work seems to surpass even that of the paradoxical Moriae. In addition to identifying the targets of More’s satiric commentary, the reader is actively involved in the practice of assaying the two sides presented of the debate on counsel, as well as grappling with the humanist and idealistic assertions of the seemingly contradictory and problematic spokesperson, Hythloday. The intricacies of Utopia perplex and confound. Yet there is the sense that More composed Utopia not merely for intellectual amusement. He intentionally “counterfeits the fool,” but with a definite purpose in mind. As Reynolds explains, both More and Erasmus were interested in more than composing literary works purely for the purposes of entertainment. Their works were expressions of their powerful convictions and deeply held beliefs:

All their mature work was an expression of their belief in the importance of Christian morals and the wisdom of Christ. It was part of their achievement to show that wit and humour, satire
and irony, could all be used in the service of righteousness, and that dullness and goodness are not synonymous. (68)

However, while Utopia may allow us to catch a glimpse of More’s genuine beliefs, he deliberately refuses to offer us any clear indication of his intent. Thus we can conclude, in the very least, that part of his fundamental aim was to obscure his own position, or any authoritative position for that matter, to the extent that the reader would be forced to grapple with the ramifications involved in any attempt to envision and construct an ideal commonwealth. As More chose to include his namesake within the fictive frame of Utopia and, at the same time, endeavored to keep any overt references to his own argumentative viewpoint outside the confines of his innovative work, the rhetorical strategy of Utopia accordingly reflects the spirit of a man who enjoyed a good joke and a witty jest, but who was also reserved, profoundly serious, and exceedingly private about many of his beliefs.
CHAPTER FOUR

"WHAT PART SOEVER YOU HAVE TAKEN UPON YOU":

THE COMPLEX FACETS OF UTOPIA AND ITS CREATOR

From his early years, Thomas More appeared destined for a life of public service, if not by inclination, then certainly by virtue of his family tradition. His father, Sir John More, had been a successful lawyer and judge and was resolute in his wish that his son likewise pursue a legal career. After completing law school at Lincoln’s Inn in roughly 1500, Thomas More began his career as a barrister and maintained a prosperous legal practice. By 1510, More was appointed as Undersheriff of London and was thus fully ensconced in his vocation as a competent lawyer and civic administrator. As Undersheriff, More presided over the Sheriff’s Court where he arbitrated in all manner of cases and countless litigation proceedings involving diverse crimes and offenses, disputes over commercial matters, property, and possessions, and the honoring of debts or other obligations. More’s position also obliged him to serve as London’s chief legal advisor in matters related to the effective maintenance and administration of city affairs. His reputation as a fair and proficient
arbiter, and as an eloquent and gifted orator, was widely acknowledged and resulted in additional appointments to various councils and committees. Accordingly, in 1515, when commercial disputes flared between England and the Low Countries, More was a sensible choice to accompany the diplomatic embassy to the Netherlands.

More’s steadily advancing political career suggests a temperament that was vigorously devoted to public duty. And his experience as a lawyer and as Undersheriff provided him with specialized knowledge of civic and commercial matters, which provided him, during the course of his six-month sojourn in the Netherlands, the opportunity to invent Utopia’s detailed political and socio-economic structure. While the organization of More’s imaginary island-nation may initially appear feasible, as we have seen, More infuses the discourse of Utopia with enough comic irony and absurdity to deliberately frustrate the reader’s inclination to accept Hythloday’s proposal of Utopia as an “ideal commonwealth.” At the same time, Utopía has traditionally been regarded as a profoundly personal work—a work that reflects the dilemmas of its author. Thus in addition to being argued that Book II serves as a model of More’s conception of an ideal commonwealth, it is also
widely considered that the debate dramatized in Book I between "More" and Hythloday reflects More’s uncertainty and indecision over embarking on a career in royal counsel. Cardinal Wolsey and King Henry VIII offered More a position in the king’s service in January 1516, and this event ostensibly motivated the composition of Book I. More had already largely completed what is known as Book II of Utopia by the time of his return from the Netherlands to England in October of 1515. Insofar as More had been serving tirelessly as a civic administrator since 1510, it seems reasonable to expect his abiding commitment to public service. Accordingly, we can understand the debate in Book I as not merely exploring the question of withdrawal or engagement in relation to public service in general; rather the debate grapples with the implications of these two courses of action specifically in regard to the issue of service as counselor to the king.

If Book I was intended to provide a forum for More to work out the complicated question of counsel for himself, then what is perhaps more remarkable than More’s ability to dramatize two sides of the argument – one in favor and the other against royal service – is his ability to do so without offering any clear verdict of his own deliberations.
on the subject. Indeed the offer from Wolsey and Henry VIII would have left More with much to consider. He was well respected as Undersheriff, and his private legal practice had been steadily flourishing; he would have to resign these positions were he to enter the king’s service. Also, his intellectual and scholarly interests would obviously have to go by the wayside, as the interests of the king would become his first priority. Furthermore, he was undoubtedly aware of the propensity for corruption and the abuse of power in royal affairs. Certainly these are among the considerations that would have given him pause. However, in the autumn of 1516, More was appointed to the Council of the Star Chamber where his successful appearance and performance in legal proceedings were consistently observed by Cardinal Wolsey. In the meantime, More completed Book I of *Utopia*, and the first edition was published in Louvain in December of 1516. More’s accomplishments as an arbiter and examiner in the Council of the Star Chamber only earned him greater recognition, and he was entreated by Wolsey and Henry VIII all the more fervently to become a member of the king’s court. In 1517, More embarked on a second diplomatic embassy, this time to
Calais, to resolve commercial disputes that had arisen between England and France.

The suggestion that Book I provided More with a means to explore the possible courses of action in response to the king’s offer is further supported by the traditional belief that More was reluctant to enter the king’s service. Some evidence exists that seems to support this assertion. More’s reluctance to serve as Henry VIII’s counselor is reportedly confirmed by Erasmus, who seemed to give the impression in his letters that More was practically “dragged” into the king’s service (Guy 48).1 Also, Erasmus’ disapproval of More’s decision to accept Henry VIII’s offer is also widely received as fact; as E.E. Reynolds states: “Erasmus opposed any such engagement and he always regretted that More eventually became a Councillor” (116). Indeed More did delay in accepting the offer. In a letter he wrote to Erasmus in February 1516, More relates the details of the proposal and explains his reasons for refusing it:

This, however, I have hitherto refused, and shall, I think, continue to do so, because, if I

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1 John Guy offers an engaging and insightful exploration of the traditional view of Thomas More as a “reluctant courtier” in Chapter 3 of his biography Thomas More, pages 42-61.
took it, the place I now hold in the City, which I prefer to higher office, would either have to be given up, or retained, much to my regret, with some offence to the citizens, who, if they had any dispute with the government, as sometimes happens, about their privileges, would have less confidence in me as a paid pensioner of the King.

(qtd in Reynolds 115)

As his explanation reveals, More’s refusal was not necessarily the result of uncertainty over the issue of royal service; rather, it was in relation to his steadfast commitment to the citizens of London, whose interests he felt it was his duty to administer and defend.

Yet other facets of More’s life lead some to believe that he may have favored withdrawing from active participation in politics. As a young man, More exhibited a growing interest in the humanist learning that was intensifying during his years at Oxford, and his enthusiasm for Greek texts allegedly threatened to cause a rift between him and his father. More’s desire to continue his education of Greek, as well as his early epigram and verse compositions, may indicate his preference for the life of a scholar and “man of letters” as opposed to that of a public
servant. His personal desire for a life of solitude and detachment is further supported by the assertion that he was considering entering the religious vocation of a monk or priest. More spent approximately four years, beginning in roughly 1500, residing in or nearby the Charterhouse, the monastery of the Carthusian order in London. While he spent his time in religious devotion and prayer and participated in the spiritual exercises of the order, More’s early biographers expressly state that he did so without any vow.² Yet, Reynolds concludes that More’s association with the Charterhouse proves: "Thomas More felt drawn towards the monastic life and tested his vocation as thoroughly as he could short of entering the novitiate" (35). However, as Peter Ackroyd points out, the practice of laymen participating in monastic activities was not unusual: "the Charterhouse was one of the two or three Carthusian foundations where young men of spiritual tendency could lodge while at the same time pursuing a secular career - in the Inns of Court, for example" (97). Likewise, John Guy emphasizes More’s decision to pursue an

² For discussion of More’s “Charterhouse years” see Reynolds, 34-36; Ackroyd, 96-97; and Guy, 21-38.
"active" life in spite of his affiliation with the Charterhouse during 1500-1504:

The significance of the Charterhouse years is likely to be that More spent his time trying to understand the proper relationship between philosophy and public life. He left the philosophical debate open-ended, but in practice opted for a legal career. (38)

The uncertainty surrounding More's supposed reluctance to enter the king's service, or of his preference for contemplative withdrawal over active participation in politics, demonstrates the difficulty one faces when trying to determine which character (if any) in Book I is intended to represent More's actual position in the debate on counsel. Such a task becomes even more difficult if we consider that More's first meeting with Prince Henry in 1499 seems to reveal an early and calculated ambition to gain favor in the eyes of the future king of England. At the time, the prince was nine years old and was staying at the royal palace in Eltham nearby where More and Erasmus were lodging in Greenwich. Upon meeting the prince, More presented him with a series of verses which he had composed to commemorate the special event. Erasmus, who had not been
informed of the purpose of their visit to Eltham, had no complimentary verses prepared and was dismayed at having nothing to offer the prince. As More’s meeting with the young Prince in 1499 suggests, he had long held the clever and intellectual King Henry VIII in high regard. At the same time, More had energetically pursued advancement in his political career. As Guy argues:

More’s ‘call to counsel’ was the climax of a progression by which he steadily gained the attention of Henry and Wolsey ... More’s legal and commercial work in London, Bruges and Calais between 1510 and 1517 was so extensive, and so closely linked to the interests of the Crown and State, that if it was not at least a limited form of commitment to a career in politics, what was?

(58)

Whatever reservations More initially may have had about accepting Wolsey’s and Henry’s offer, given his established commitment to civic service, it was only a matter of time before the Cardinal and the king succeeded in convincing him to enter the king’s service. By the spring of 1518, More had become the personal attendant to Henry VIII and was, in the words of Erasmus, *totus ... aulicus* - "wholly a
courtier" (qtd. in Ackroyd 121). By the summer of 1518, More had resigned his appointment as Undersheriff of London.

More's decision was not an easy or uncomplicated one. While the role of royal counselor carried with it certain aspects that would lead him to accept the position, he must have had grave reservations about it. Certainly one is liable to experience a measure of conflict over such a weighty decision. However, any attempt to conclude that Hythloday reflects More's true stance on the issue of counsel is clearly problematic. While the debate in Book I appears, on a superficial level, to represent a struggle over the choice between two courses of action, the sense of conflict seems to have less to do with More's indecisive commitment to public service or his wavering devotion to his king. In fact, the progress from a legal career to royal service was customary. Furthermore, such a path was not considered incompatible with More's interest in humanism. As Ackroyd points out, members of the court and council included other humanists from More's scholarly circle, such as Richard Pace and Cuthbert Tunstall. And Thomas Linacre served as the king's physician, while John Colet was the court preacher (183). Even Erasmus, who is
largely considered to be on the side in favor contemplative withdrawal and idealistic philosophy, accepted a position as councilor to Charles the King of Spain, who would later become Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. Rather, the debate in Book I enables More to demonstrate his acute awareness of how the decision to serve as a courtier or counselor inevitably stimulates contradictory sentiments and emotions and conflicts of interest.

This is the facet of More’s “self” that is dramatized so skillfully in the characters of “More” and Hythloday. More understood that the complex and varied facets of human nature often found to reside within a single individual (emotions, ambitions, principles, obligations, desires, and beliefs) rarely converge neatly to provide an obvious choice totally in favor of one action over another. Often such a decision will hinge on a dialectic of contradictory inclinations either in favor of engagement or withdrawal. More dedicated himself to the king’s service in spite of the fact that such an act would unavoidably result in the manifestation of these conflicting feelings.

Although Hythloday is allowed to dominate the debate in Book I, rather than his arguments in favor of withdrawal from political life, it is the theatrical metaphor
presented by "More" that seems to more accurately reflect More's perspective, as it is an approach that he applied in his own life. In his metaphor of life as a stage play, "More" advises Hythloday: "What part soever you have taken upon you, play that as well as you can and make the best of it, and do not, therefore, disturb and bring out of order the whole matter" (121). While Hythloday considers this civil approach to be sly and deceptive, "More" advocates adapting oneself to a role for the express purpose of benefiting the commonwealth. And as "More" points out, the approach advocated by Hythloday would be ineffectual and absurd. More understood that circumstances in life would necessarily demand that a person give expression to one facet of their being and act on the basis of certain beliefs in a given moment. More's experience in public administration enabled him to recognize that progress and reform could not take place if one refused to confront and engage the tangible, less than ideal outcomes of human action and behavior.

More demystifies the conventional scholastic perception of human behavior originating from idealized foundational ethical principles. While the foundationalist philosopher is concerned with lofty ideals and is rigidly
devoted to the search for "Truth," More acknowledged the importance of rhetorical techniques, such as eloquence and civility, in practical human affairs. In More's view, the "rhetorical man" is educated to cope with the vicissitudes one inevitably encounters in life. Accordingly, he reveals life to be a series of dramatic roles assumed for the purpose of accomplishing a specific objective. He uses Utopia as a means to explore the constructed nature of identity - the essential need to deliberately fashion a distinct self for the purposes of public performance and interaction. In his own life, More apparently concluded that in the role of counselor, he would be in the best position to advise and persuade the king to act in the manner best suited to benefit the commonwealth.

According to Stephen Greenblatt, Utopia reflects More's self-conscious role-playing - his awareness of his own mode of engagement within society:

[More] was evidently a canny judge of human motives, possessed a firm grasp of the complex network of material interests that underlay the intricate formalities of Tudor government, and knew well how to make his own place within these formalities. (15)
More’s survival in Tudor politics depended upon this awareness of the need to craft a public identity that was separate from his private identity. Thus More’s consistent decision to pursue an active life in politics meant that he would do so within the particular persona he had “fashioned” for himself. Yet More was also a profoundly reserved man who chose to keep many of his thoughts private and to leave various of his opinions unexpressed. As Greenblatt asserts, More’s constructed social identity necessitated a private retreat – a means to distance himself from his public role as politician, counselor, and statesman:

More’s sense of his own distinct identity is compounded of a highly social role, fashioned from his participation in a complex set of interlocking corporate bodies – law, parliament, court, city, church, family – and a secret reserve, a sense of a life elsewhere, unrealized in public performance. (41-2)

Greenblatt’s notion is significant. If we consider Utopia as a reflection of More’s self-conscious role-playing, as well as his attempt at “self-cancellation,” then we are relieved from the perplexing and reductive task of
determining which side of the debate represents More's "true" perspective. Instead we can view Utopia as a "playground" wherein More was allowed to explore the intricate facets that influenced the construction of his own identity. Utopia is perhaps an expression of the complexity of More's inner conflicts - the conflict between the self that maintained a sincere commitment to political activity, and one that perhaps fantasized about the freedom and relief of withdrawal and isolated philosophical contemplation. In this sense, the character of Hythloday provides More the means to give expression to his fantasy of self-cancellation; Hythloday's arguments in favor of withdrawal provide the necessary justification for terminating the need to fashion multiple selves - the need to assume roles in order to function in society.

Greenblatt's concept of Utopia as More's attempt at self-cancellation further influences our view of Book II. Rather than struggling to determine whether the discourse of Utopia is, or is not, truly a description of More's ideal commonwealth, we can see it as the progression of the experiment More begins in Book I. Hythloday proposes the abolition of private property as the only means to put an end to the social problems he discussed earlier: "But that
they may be perfectly cured and brought to an upright state, it is not to be hoped for whiles every man is master of his own to himself" (125). However, More disagrees questioning how there can be an abundance of goods if no man is motivated to work for the purpose of his own prosperity and increase. Hythloday’s argument is based on the perception that it is private property that provokes competition among men. Individuality causes people to dwell on the material, tangible aspects that differentiate people one from another. The implication, according to Greenblatt, is that “private ownership is causally linked in Utopia to private ownership of self ... to abolish private property is to render such self-conscious individuality obsolete” (38-9). Utopia’s social structure is an extension of this proposition. Their strictly regimented institutions and practices, communal social habits, utilitarian ideology, even their so-called policy of religious tolerance, result in the destruction of the individual. As Greenblatt states, Utopian society prohibits the development of a distinct and private self by “eliminating, among other things, most of the highly particularized corporate categories in which a man could locate himself and by means of which he could say, 'I am this and not that'” (42). Utopia’s limitation
and restriction of seemingly intrinsic personal rights discourages individuation, and their policy of rigorous surveillance ensures conformity. Utopia is a society where all circumstances that necessitate public performance and the assumption of distinct social roles are removed.

While Greenblatt's analysis provides us a means to consider Utopia through the perspective of More's exploration of role-playing and the construction of identity, it should be remembered that More places the argument in favor of the abolition of private property, in order to prevent the development of individual selves, in the mouth of a "peddler of nonsense." Thus we can also recognize the extent to which Utopia is also an expression of More's satiric and lively sense of humor. The existence of a society structured such that the need to construct identities for oneself is eliminated is an example of idealistic thinking; hence, More's exploration of self-cancellation ironically results in the portrayal of a ludicrous and illogical society. One of the most consistent features of Utopia is its focus on exposing the limitations of idealistic thinking. It is this quality that compellingly demonstrates Utopia's association with satire. More's familiarity with Lucianic techniques provided him
with a medium of expression suited to his life-long fascination with the contradictions that result from humanity’s over-confident belief in appearances and illusions. Since such confidence is typically considered to be the consequence of pride, satire seeks to reduce the self-inflated perception of humankind. Satiric discourse commonly draws attention to the fallen, animalistic aspects of human beings. At this point, when humans begin to think of themselves as lofty and enlightened creatures, they are first confronted, and then disgusted and disillusioned, as a result of the reflective function of the satiric portrayal - by the realization of their inherently foul and grotesque qualities. Accordingly, lest we begin to accept the assertion of the Utopians as a rational and idyllic people, we are presented with an account of their hierarchical ordering of bodily functions, their bizarre premarital customs, and their obsession with bodily appearance. This obsession with the body makes Hythloday’s admiration of the Utopian lifestyle all the more peculiar. Hythloday dogmatically argues in Book I in favor of philosophical contemplation, which implies the otherworldly notion that the mind should be fully devoted to contemplating the divine while shunning the material. At
the same time, he praises the Utopian's method of rationalization and their moral philosophy, which appears deeply obsessed with all things bodily and physical.

The humanist recovery of Menippean forms paralleled the foregrounding of an educational program based on rhetoric. The emphasis on rhetorical technique provided a practical approach appropriately suited to the cultural and political climate emerging in early modern Europe. "More's" advocation of a civic approach to counsel is an approach to political involvement that was beginning to replace the scholastic belief in foundational ideals - the kind of inflexible stability Hythlodlay describes as the foundation of Utopian society. Yet More was not only targeting the scholastic proponents of philosophical ideals. The ironic commentary in *Utopia* is also subtly self-reflexive. Humanists were extremely conscious of their social roles as intellectual innovators and disseminators of cultural practices and beliefs. As a result, Scott Blanchard explains, humanist scholars customarily turned to the conventions of Menippean satire as a means for exploring the implications of the immense humanist project:

Menippean satire is a genre both for and about scholars; it is an immensely learned form that is
at the same time paradoxically anti-intellectual. If its master of ceremonies is the humanist as wise fool, its audience is a learned community whose members need to be reminded ... of the depravity of their overreaching intellects, of the limits of human understanding. (14)

More's own use of the Menippean form allowed him to comment, at least indirectly, on the very humanist mode of thought in which he was deeply invested. One of the fundamental principles of humanism was its belief in the potential of humankind. As Arthur F. Kinney explains, humanists became certain that through education, moral and ethical development, and intellectual progress, they could "fashion and refashion and refashion themselves," and accordingly society would follow; thus "being educable, man might also be perfectible" (5). More was an enthusiastic supporter of educational reform and likewise ensured that learning would have a principal role in his own home, for his daughters as well as his son. Yet More was also confronted by what Alistair Fox calls, the "fracture" at the core of Christian humanism:

On the one hand their humanist enthusiasms tempted them to believe that men could aspire to
cultivate their natures and society with an expectation of attaining happiness in this world. On the other hand, Christianity and the findings of their own realistic perception of contemporary circumstances, instructed them to accept that human nature was irremediably sinful. (105)

The result of this "fracture" in regard to the humanist objective of refashioning society is that any attempt to realize the vision of an ideal society will ultimately be frustrated. Though it is unlikely that More intended Utopia to serve as a literal model of social reform, it did perhaps serve as a means for More to express his conflicting feelings about the aspirations of the humanist project, and in so doing, he presents an alleged model society in order to expose the limitations of any idealistic policy of social reform. However, at the same time, the recognizable absurdity of Utopian society illustrates the humanist notion that the process of reform must begin at the individual level rather than the institutional level. Ultimately, the education of the individual is upheld as the most important step, if not for the achievement of a perfect society, then at least in the hope that society could be much improved.
As the multi-faceted nature of *Utopia* demonstrates, More was highly skilled in the art of ironic discourse. Yet More’s use of comic irony was not a trait specific to himself; as Fox explains, the literature of the early Renaissance was consistently concerned with politics, either directly or indirectly (3). As a result, the use of irony for the purposes of criticism, commentary, and argument emerged as a trademark technique of Renaissance literature. This due to the fact that many writers of the period served as courtiers and in various other political and administrative offices. As a result, Fox states, “early Tudor literature is, above all, dramatized and indirect” (3). The Tudor age was turbulent and problematic, hence fictive literature produced by writers of the time relied upon dramatized scenes and dialogues and reflected their interest in self-preservation. According to Fox, the age was “full of tensions, ambiguities, and paradoxes, and these are precisely the aspects of life that their literature dramatizes” (4). For instance, the critique of European society in Book I demonstrates *Utopia’s* strategy of indirectness as it comes from the mouth of Hythloday (“speaker of nonsense”) rather than from the mouth of “More.” More’s experience as a lawyer and as Undersheriff
gave him a comprehensive understanding of civic and commercial matters as well as a specialized knowledge of London’s societal and economic affairs. Consequently, his grasp of the difficulty and complexity underlying far-reaching social problems is demonstrated in Utopía. While More deliberately problematizes the issue of Hythloday’s reliability, the critique in Book I illustrates the systemic nature of social problems. Accordingly, Hythloday’s discourse begins with considering the issue of the appropriate punishment for stealing, which leads to the examination of various other issues—all of which affect each other. Hythloday’s observation that the problem of thievery remains rampant in spite of the harsh punishment that is meted out as consequence can be recognized as an accurate assessment. The continued occurrences of theft then are indicative of a greater problem involving the underlying issues of pride, greed, and ostentation of society. As Hythloday’s critique demonstrates, social problems affect the body generally, like a disease, and must be treated as such. Rather than mitigating the symptoms of social problems with innumerable or excessively harsh laws—for instance, punishing thieves with death—it is only by treating the disease as a whole that society
can be returned to good health. This of course leads to
Hythloday’s radical proposal of the complete elimination of
private property:

Yea, and whiles you go about to do your cure on
one part, you shall make bigger the sore of
another part, so the help of one causeth
another’s harm, forasmuch as nothing can be given
to anyone, unless it be taken from another. (125)

At this point, the reader is poised for Hythloday’s
impending discourse of Utopia, which brings with it
descriptions of ridiculous social practices. More’s ability
to move from serious social commentary to comically absurd
material functions as a way to obscure his genuine
sentiments and makes his social critique less threatening,
thereby limiting any potential consequences.

The folly of European society is not limited to the
dialogue of Book I. We can also recognize distinctly
European practices in Book II in Hythloday’s account of the
Anemolian ambassadors as well as in the discussion of the
Utopian’s views of laws and the honoring of treatises.

According to Hythloday, the Utopians object to the making
and renewing of treaties since other nations are constantly
breaking them. Thus treaties are completely ineffective in
maintaining harmonious relations between countries because rulers lack the virtue necessary to abide by them. Likewise, they consider it unjust to expect citizens to accept and obey laws that are impossible to understand:

They have but few laws, for to people so instruct and institute very few suffice. Yea, this thing they chiefly reprove among other nations, that innumerable books of laws and expositions which either be in number more than can be able to be read or else blinder and darker than that any man may well understand them. (173)

However, this observation regarding the making of vague and unintelligible laws brings about an amusing comment concerning lawyers: "Furthermore, they utterly exclude and banish all attorneys, proctors, and sergeants-at-the-law, which craftily handle matters and subtly dispute of the laws" (173). It may initially seem contradictory for More to criticize lawyers and render them superfluous, given his own legal career. However, it is another example of More's ironic sense of humor. Who better to mock the vice of lawyers than one who is thoroughly familiar with the conventional role and reputation of lawyers in society? Of course, this account of the Utopian's disdain for European
practices comes just before the description of their policy concerning warfare. In addition to some of their other practices, such as their ordering of bodily functions, and their view of marital relationships, readers of Utopia are likely to find the description of the Utopian’s treacherous behavior in military affairs vile and repellent. And this is clearly what More intended - for the reader to be repelled by the behavior of the Utopians, but to see the parallels between their society and this invented one - for the reader to recognize aspects of her/his tangible society within the account of an imaginary one.

As much as Utopia appears to be, on some level, a reflection of More’s inner self, More deliberately uses irony and comic elements to distance himself from the work. More maintains his ambiguous position all the way up to the very end of the book. Following Hythloday’s peroration at the close of Book II, “More” offers us a rare glimpse of inferiority:

Thus when Raphael had made an end of his tale, though many things came to my mind which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted and founded for no good reason, not only in the fashion of their chivalry, and in
other of their laws, but also, yea and chiefly, in that which is the principal foundation of all their ordinances, that is to say, in the community of their life and living, without any occupying of money, by the which thing only all nobility, magnificence, worship, honor, and majesty, the true ornaments and honors, as the common opinion is, of a commonwealth, utterly be overthrown and destroyed ... (201)

Whether we are completely persuaded by Hythloday's discourse or not, evidently "More" is unable to bring himself to fully endorse Hythloday's assertions. While "More's" statement, that "nobility, magnificence, worship, honor, and majesty" serve as the true ornaments of any nation, would seem to contradict More's widely reported contempt for pride and ostentation, the statement should be considered in relation to Utopia's ironic and humorous spirit.³ Rather than offering us a clear indication of where, or with whom, our sentiments should align, More

³ This is in particular response to J.H. Hexter's discussion of this statement as More's "frivolous defense." In his book, More's Utopia: Biography of an Idea, he argues the following: "Not one of those contemporaries would have maintained for a moment that what mattered in a commonwealth were splendor, magnificence, and majesty. What mattered to them were order, harmony, justice, peace, and prosperity" (36-7).
allows the conversation to drop off and remain open-ended. More’s remarkable ability to maintain this level of ambiguity serves to identify *Utopia* as an exemplar of humanist, rhetorical discourse. More insists on continuing the process of education and intellectual development by asking the reader to grapple with the multiple and conflicting implications involved when considering the arguments of “More” and Hythloday, and when contemplating the policies and practices of Utopian society. Thus *Utopia* stays true to the dynamics of humanist fiction in which the aim, as Kinney states, is “not merely to entertain or challenge the reader, but to instruct him. It is another event that can discipline and cultivate – teach – the mind” (55). At the same time, More understood the limits of human rationality, namely that the fallen state of human nature would never be able to adequately bring the vision of an ideal into existence. The discourse of Utopian society serves as a candid exploration of the limitations and contradictions that are inherent in humanist thinking. However, our recognition of this facet of *Utopia* should not diminish our understanding of More’s commitment to humanism. More was himself an idealist in many ways and accordingly comprehended the value of humanism’s idealistic
pursuits. For More, and arguably for humanists in general, the ability to conceive of a perfect state of existence on earth, in spite of the inability to realize it, is one of the only ways to provoke change for the purpose of improving society. As Fox explains from the perspective of humanist thinking: “If men could not adequately conceptualize the state that their idealism prompted them to seek, far less could they ever expect to realize it on earth” (102). In other words, reform of any kind cannot occur if humans are incapable of envisioning a better condition of existence.

There is no question that More chooses to deliberately obscure his position in relation to the issues discussed in *Utopia*; he refuses to offer us any clear indication of his intent. As is demonstrated through the multivalent nature of *Utopia*, and as Guy so adequately states, the greatest paradox about Thomas More is: “his ability to dissimulate and speak the truth simultaneously” (58). However, it is telling that More chooses to conclude the discourse between “More” and Hythloday with a final reinforcement of a civil philosophical approach. “More,” who has had ample opportunity to observe Hythloday’s temperament, decides against disagreeing with his assertions openly:
... because I knew that he was weary of talking and was not sure whether he could abide that anything should be said against his mind, specially remembering that he had reprehended this fault in others, which be afraid lest they should seem not to be wise enough, unless they could find some fault in other men's inventions, therefore, I, praising both their institutions and his communication, took him by the hand and led him in to supper, saying that we would choose another time to weigh and examine the same matters and talk with him more at large therein. (201)

Rather, "More" reinforces his argument regarding the essential and practical need for role-playing in social situations even in his interaction with the idealistic traveler. Apparently, given Hythloday's intolerant and dogmatic behavior, there is no other way to courteously conclude a discussion with him than to assume the role of someone who agrees with his rigid point of view. But Hythloday is not merely an idealist, he is one who claims to have identified, and hence has defined, the ideal commonwealth. As such, he sees no need to seek it out, or to strive to bring about the improvement of any other
society, hence his argument in favor of withdrawal, and his inclination toward disinterest and inactivity. Through *Utopia*'s complex structure, ironic characteristics, and remarkable multivalence, More skillfully exposes the limitations of rigid, idealistic thinking, and simultaneously demonstrates that the pursuit of the ineffable and unattainable ideal is necessary to sustain our concerted efforts toward progress and reform.
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