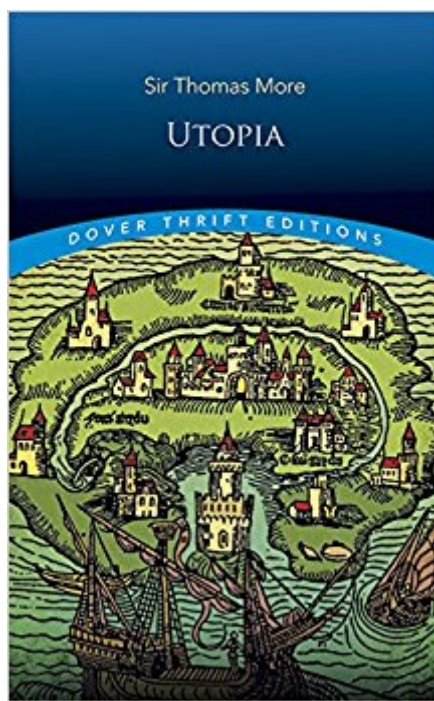


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Utopia (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

First published in Latin in 1516, *Utopia* was the work of Sir Thomas More (1477–1535), the brilliant humanist, scholar, and churchman executed by Henry VIII for his refusal to accept the king as the supreme head of the Church of England. In this work, which gave its name to the whole genre of books and movements hypothesizing an ideal society, More envisioned a patriarchal island kingdom that practiced religious tolerance, in which everybody worked, no one has more than his fellows, all goods were community-owned, and violence, bloodshed, and vice nonexistent. Based to some extent on the writings of Plato and other earlier authors, *Utopia* nevertheless contained much that was original with More. In the nearly 500 years since the book's publication, there have been many attempts at establishing "Utopias" both in theory and in practice. All of them, however, seem to embody ideas already present in More's classic treatise: optimistic faith in human nature, emphasis on the environment and proper education, nostalgia for a lost innocence, and other positive elements. In this new, inexpensive edition, readers can study for themselves the essentials of More's utopian vision and how, although the ideal society he envisioned is still unrealized, at least some of his proposals have come to pass in today's world.

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Customer Reviews

The Life of Thomas More is Peter Ackroyd's biography--from baptism to beheading--of the lawyer who became a saint. More, a noted humanist whose friendship with Erasmus and authorship of

Utopia earned him great fame in Europe, succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor of London at the time of the English Reformation. In 1535, More was martyred for his refusal to support Henry VIII's divorce and break with Rome. Ackroyd's biography is a masterpiece in several senses. Perhaps most importantly, he corrects the mistaken impression that Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* has given two generations of theater and film audiences: More was not, as Bolt's drama would have us believe, a civil disobedient who put his conscience above the law. Ackroyd explains that "conscience was not for More an individual matter." Instead, it was derived from "the laws of God and of reason." If the greatest justice in this book is analytic, however, its greatest joys are descriptive. Ackroyd brings 16th-century London to life for his readers--an exotic world where all of life is enveloped by the church: "As the young More made his way along the lanes and thoroughfares, there was the continual sound of bells." --Michael Joseph Gross --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

According to Ackroyd (Blake; Hawksmoor), More "embodied the old order of hierarchy and authority at the very moment when it began to collapse all around him." Symbolizing that collapse was Henry VIII's defiance of the pope in the "great matter" of his much-desired divorce of Catherine of Aragon. Refusing to compromise with the break from Rome, More willed his own death. He dies well in Ackroyd's narrative, but he does not live a life as saintly as he leaves it, piously amassing wealth and power, piously writing philosophical works as ambiguous as *Utopia* and as scatological as *Responsio*, piously harassing religious reformers and smugly condemning them to the stake. As a biographer of More (the first since 1984), Ackroyd is also an effective novelist. He evokes late-medieval London in sight and in smell; sends More on his workaholic schedule of legal, political, diplomatic and courtly activities; exploits familial and hagiographic anecdotes for their story values; and repeats unscholarly untruths (as Luther's cloacal epiphanies) because fiction can be more colorful than fact. Only Henry VIII in Ackroyd's large cast fails to be realized in the round, but the king, recognizing More's loyal services, does "graciously" reduce his sentence from disemboweling to beheading. After an awkward, conditional start ("But it might be more fruitful to recognise... "/ "...but it might be worth rehearsing certain of its aspects... "/ "It has in the past been noticed... "), Ackroyd's clotted language metamorphoses into elegant English, and the nobility of More's demise will move readers who persist to the end. 27 b&w illustrations not seen by PW. BOMC, History Book Club and QPB selections. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

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