



Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia / New Atlantis / The Isle of Pines

Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Henry Neville

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With the publication of *Utopia* (1516), Thomas More provided a scathing analysis of the shortcomings of his own society, a realistic suggestion for an alternative mode of social organization, and a satire on unrealistic idealism. Enormously influential, it remains a challenging as well as a playful text. This edition reprints Ralph Robinson's 1556 translation from More's original Latin together with letters and illustrations that accompanied early editions of *Utopia*.

This edition also includes two other, hitherto less accessible, utopian narratives. *New Atlantis* (1627) offers a fictional illustration of Francis Bacon's visionary ideal of the role that science should play in the modern society. Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668), a precursor of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, engages with some of the sexual, racial, and colonialist anxieties of the end of the early modern period. Bringing together these three New World texts, and situating them in a wider Renaissance context, this edition - which includes letters, maps, and alphabets that accompanied early editions - illustrates the diversity of the early modern utopian imagination, as well as the different purposes to which it could be put.

Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia / New Atlantis / The Isle of Pines Details

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Amy says

Okay, I actually quite liked this difficult as it was at times to read, but it is interesting to have a perspective of the world put forward by a text written nearly 500 years ago. I'm referring mainly to Thomas More's "Utopia", as it's basically a political account narrated in story form, which tells More's view on what he perceives as the perfect society. He covers everything from warfare to religion, and it was interesting to see how a 16th Century scholar living in the early Renaissance perceived idealism.

Henry Neville's "Isle of Pines" was an easier read with it being shorter and newer (written in 1668), and it covered the same basic principals: laws, rules and regulations, marriage, religion. Utopian fiction tends to curve predominantly towards the use of "wholesome laws", which appear to be the base of what holds a Utopian society together and what makes it such a "paradise".

Looking forward to dissecting this for my Utopias/Dystopias module.

I-kai says

All three quite interesting, even though I'm already quite familiar with New Atlantis before picking up this book. I don't know if there is a better translation of More's Utopia; the Robinson one which is in this book is quite archaic and the glossary in the back doesn't really come in handy anyway. One would even appreciate Utopia more if its allusions and explicit references to the Republic and Laws are seen. More definitely seems to have picked up Plato's practice of irony very well... :P

Igor says

I haven't read all the book, but the introductory part to help me with other book: 'Dystopia: A Natural History', de Gregory Claeys. This last one I am reading in full.

I have noticed:

- 1) accessible text;
- 2) nice analysis;
- 3) I gave grade 4 following the average already here.

Kei says

Meh.

I think I would have almost been okay just reading the introduction (even taking into account the level to which she loved the sound of her own voice.)

Utopia was interesting enough to pull quotes from, New Atlantis came across as a love affair with science and ego, and The Isle of the Pines was.... sort of wanting to clean my brain out with Lysol. Definitely an interesting piece, given the time it was written in, but... I didn't need to read it.

Overall I am looking forward to making sure my next book is in something closer to modern English.

Harry says

A proto-Communist reverie by a Catholic saint; a text from 1627 featuring lasers, cloning and syntetic biology; and a raunchy, sexist, racist castaway tale; what's not to like?! And all this before the advent of the omniscient narrator, adding a pseudo-documentary touch that feels strangely modern in our age.

alissa says

I would call this a selection of speculative fiction from the 17th century. The three works depict the workings of an idealized or alternate society, couched in the form of travel narratives. The travel narrative allows a distance from the political and social baggage of the Old World. For example, Thomas More's Utopia, though predominantly Christian, has state religion set up in a manner meant to preclude the denominational schisms and religious wars that so coloured his age and the preceding centuries.

I particularly liked that the other two texts were placed in this anthology with the more well-known Utopia. Set against each other, these three narratives seem to be snippets of a vast Enlightenment conversation on good society, providing a window into anxieties and hopes of an age that encouraged reflection on such topics.

Justin Evans says

The stars rating doesn't work for a book like this. More's 'Utopia' is entertaining and sophisticated; Bacon's and Neville's works won't be of any interest to you unless you want to write a paper on them or get off on history of (bad) ideas. The apparatus for this book, though, is excellent: the introduction is well written, clear and interesting; the notes have just the right level of detail. But if you want something to read for kicks, you'll want to stick to More. As with Erasmus, the irony is so pervasive that it should undermine the book, but actually just makes it more entertaining; unlike Bacon, the ideas are worth discussing; unlike Neville, it's readable.

Annalisa says

It's unlikely anyone will go looking for a review of this book--it's more "I got assigned this in class" than "what should I read next? Well, I've had a hankering for early modern fiction...." But I have to comment on the third work in this book.

The first two are pretty well known--More's "Utopia" is either the most or second most famous utopia story

every written (depending on how you feel about Plato's Republic) and while very dry in places is most quite engaging. Through our lens, More appears to be advocating communism 3 1/2 centuries before it was written, but his comfort with extreme levels of governmental control (such as moving children from one communal family to another to keep numbers balanced) is unnerving.

Bacon's "New Atlantis" is probably not widely known, but Bacon himself is and this one piece of fiction he published very much reflects his non-fictional essays. And the scientific "houses" are actually great fun.

And then there's "Isle of Pines" which has to be one of the weirdest pieces I've ever read. When I ordered this book for my Renaissance Literature class I never expected a Garden of Eden parody/male wish fulfillment in which a man and 4 women are washed up onto an island paradise and, with nothing better to do, start having tons of sex (and then babies). No, I'm not kidding. Read it yourself and see.

Roberta says

'Utopia' is an important book to read so as to understand where all consecutive utopian and dystopian books come from. It describes an island with the perfect society, though to 21st century citizens that society seems quite restrictive and utilitarian.

'New Atlantis' describes a much softer, more pleasant-seeming society on a far-away island that has willingly chosen to remain hidden, while exploring other countries' scientific and industrial innovations.

'The Isle of Pines' is a short story of 20 pages that tells of a stranded handful of people who decide to be fruitful and multiply, becoming over 2000 from 5 in just a century.

M.M. Strawberry Reviews says

I have enjoyed Oxford World Classics for a long time because of the notes, biographies, and other content that is added to the book to supplement the stories themselves. This is a decent collection of three stories, with all the necessary notes and such. If you're curious about Utopia, buy this book and you'll get two other visions of Utopia as well, making for a good overall reading experience (once you get past the old language, which is rather clunky at times, but that is how it was written) and you'll learn a few things too.

Sarah Dorothea says

2.5 out of 5 stars! ?? We read it in a seminar at university. It was informative and interesting buuuut I would definitely not read it in my leisure time... ???

Mel Vincent says

The 3 Modern Utopias were very intriguing and very prophetic in a way that it precisely predicted the outcomes of science and technology.

Utopia (Thomas More): Before reading the book I thought that Thomas More would formulate a theory that

would suggest an advanced and science centered society would be the driving force in creating the "Utopia" that the world needs. But as it turns out, the Utopia theory is actually regressive than progressive because it merely points out that tribalism is the purest form of "Utopia" that is present in this world. It didn't shock me but hell, I was disappointed but still regardless of it I found the book entertaining and exciting to read how Thomas More relayed the information, description and culture of a "Utopia" charged society.

New Atlantis (Francis Bacon): This book was more eye opening than the first because everything that Francis Bacon said of the "New Atlantis" was now realized in our modern era, from industrialization to plant and genetic engineering, retardation of age etc.

Isle of Pines (Henry Neville): True enough it can be said that this is the precursor of Robinson Crusoe but better, it deals with how individuals can create societies, cultures, heirarchies, structures and laws on themselves and make something out of nothing in complete obscurity. This to me was the best of the three because it tackled a lot of issues like race, religion, politics, colonialism, culture and the like.

Whisper19 says

like some of More's ideas, but i wouldn't want to live there - i'd be a bit bored :)

Anna says

More's Utopia: Some surprising modernistic ideas within the text, on feminism in particular - female soldiers and priests, provides a great insight into the social history of mankind. Bacon's New Atlantis: like reading a list of ideals and ideas. Henry Neville's The Isle of Pines: reminded me of Genesis, the beginnings of a society founded by one man! This edition was very well produced having not only useful explanatory notes to the works, but also short biographical time-lines, and a glossary.

Vanessa Braganza says

Loved Bacon's New Atlantis.
