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## Similarities and differences in the approach of forming Utopia of Thomas More and W. B. Yeats

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### Abstract

This paper aims to explore the similarities and differences in the approach of creating Utopia of Thomas More and W.B. Yeats. Thomas More: 16th-century England, grappling with social inequities, religious turmoil and political unrest. More uses Utopia as a satire to critique these issues. Utopias are made-up dream visions in people's minds that beseech to address the flaws that affect their modern societies. Thomas More wrote "Utopia" to offer social commentary on the shortcomings of 16th-century England, wrapped in a satirical yet realistic picture of reality. The Renaissance in England was a time of elevated thought and social progress. Whereas among the writers of the early 20th century, the utopian impulse was not a minor quality, nor was it present in peripheral or insignificant characters. W.B. Yeats, an Irish renaissance scholar expanded the concept of utopia in his poetry, but it has generally and persistently been understood as an early, profound, or irrational representation of the human mind.

Keywords: Utopia, similarities, differences, vision, renaissance.

### Introduction

Utopias are typically characterized as ideal societies possessing features highly desirable to their creators. These features can encompass a vast array of human concerns, including free and fair political system, social equality, economic justice, technological advancement to improve ways of life.

However, the very nature of utopia as an

ideal raises questions about its feasibility. Critics argue that utopian visions, by their very perfection, overlook the complexities of human nature and societal dynamics. The pursuit of a homogenous, conflict-free society, for instance, may come at the cost of individual freedom and creativity.

Despite these criticisms, the concept of utopia remains a powerful tool for social critique and reform. By envisioning a better

world, utopian thinkers challenge the status quo and inspire movements for positive change. Even if a perfect utopia may be unattainable, the ideas it generates can inform real-world efforts to improve our societies.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing comparative literary analysis as the primary method. The research is interpretative and descriptive, aiming to understand the nuances of utopian concepts in the works of the two authors.

The comparative approach involves examining the similarities and differences in the portrayal of utopian societies by Thomas More in "Utopia" and W.B. Yeats in his various literary works. This method will help to identify the thematic and ideological connections and divergences between the two authors.

The research reveals fundamental differences between the historical backgrounds, societal critiques, and projected futures; these conclusions are bolstered by a comparison and contrast of the utopias on the subject written by Thomas More and Yeats.

The textual analysis comprises of readings from the novel and poems and other books relevant to the aim of the research.

### Similarities

When we look forward to the context of similarities of "Utopia" of Thomas More and W.B. Yeats, certain elements come to our notice that both the authors use satire and symbolism to draw the attention of the readers in their social commentaries. From my perspective, Thomas More's "Utopia" is a sarcastic criticism on the political and social issues facing sixteenth-century England. Using the fictional character, Raphael Hythloday, More parodies important socioeconomic ills. The death sentence for theft and poverty brought on by upper-class corruption are the most serious socio-political issues mentioned. In contrast, Hythloday demonstrates in Book I of Utopia

that the death punishment for stealing is both unjust and impracticable. Since theft and murder carry the same penalties, he believes it is unethical that thieves would really kill the victim of their steal in order to reduce the possibility that they will be discovered. By outlining how the irony of punishment encourages a criminal to commit a crime that is worse than the one he meant to commit in the first place. This is the first time the narrator exhibits his satirical ability. Additionally, he acknowledges that the penalty is wrong since it disobeys the law of commandment not to kill and elevates human law above divine law. He adds that the death sentence is simply "too extreme and cruel" for a crime like theft,<sup>1</sup> (Wilson). According to Hythloday, the poverty and unemployment that hegemonized England in the sixteenth century, in particular, afflicted three professions: farmers, serving men, and soldiers. In a satirical conversation, Hythloday describes their sheep as "great devourers and so wild, that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves," which is another fascinating fact. The abbots are referred to as "holy men no doubt" by him. The book's satirical allusion is the debate between the fool and the friar. The fictitious narrator sheds light on a number of other topics in a satirical manner. "Utopia has the shape and the feel - it has much of the form-of satire," claims Robert C. Elliott in his book "The Shape of Utopia"<sup>2</sup> (Elliott 317-334).

Besides satire, the use of symbols in "Utopia" elicits our response. There are different symbols are reflected in the fiction, such as the island, garden, fool, gold, etc. The title of the fiction Utopia is both figuratively and literally a separate place or island. As the story stated by the fictional character Raphael Hythloday, the land termed as Utopia was once a peninsula. Founder of Utopia, general Utopus, determined to detach his new nation from the mainland with the help from both local people and soldiers by digging a fifteen mile long channel (near- impossibility during Tudor Period). Those who viewed the new island, as

described by the narrator, "no sooner saw it brought to perfection than they were struck with admiration and terror,"<sup>3</sup> (Walton).

The existence of Utopia is an unexplored "New World," far away from any location, constructed on an artificial manner with the view of fictional purpose. By framing the island, Utopia with a long distance and unlikely, More uses the Island as a symbol of a distinctly different world in which unique laws, norms, and ethics can be introduced in a fictional manner.

The island also symbolizes detachment and purity. Occasionally, it is mentioned by Hythloday that Utopian involvement on the continent, Utopia itself is unsullied and untouched by the rules, beliefs, action or assumptions of any other group of people. The reference of such distinct land with little or no reference of the realities of Tudor England shows the ability of More to create a completely unique world. Francis Bacon, on the other hand might have inspired to use the symbol as his utopian work, "New Atlantis", which came out over a century after More's "Utopia"

In fiction, the use of gardens serves as a symbol. More returns home with his interact partners at the beginning of the book: More as a fictional character describes "After greeting one another and exchanging the usual civilities of strangers upon their first meeting, we all went to my house. There in the garden we sat down on a bench covered with grassy turf to talk together". Here the usage of garden is an important symbol in the text. In Latin, the meaning of garden is "locus amoenus" or "pleasant place"; it denotes a pre-existing context for philosophical discourse in past writings, particularly those from antiquity. While More's characters go back to the garden, it shows the philosophical nature, in spite of its primary subject matter travelling and exploration.

The use of Fool in the text refers to both character and symbol. Fools are meant for

performing entertainment and also speaker of truth in early modern English society and literature. Who could not necessarily be punished for any criticism they spoke. While the Friar in Utopia is criticised as comparing to beggar, by the Fool, the Friar becomes infuriated. On the other hand, the Fool has been known to be forthright in expressing his opinions against certain unpopular Church practices.

Generally, Gold is a symbol of wealth and treasure. More reverses this idea by forming a world in which gold is as deprecated as "they make their close-stools of gold, chamber-pots and silver", as well as fetters for slaves. Even, the narrator Hythloday tells a story about a group of outsiders like ambassadors who visits Utopia clothed in gold and jewels criticized by Utopian as slaves. Therefore, gold in Utopia is not regarded as treasure but as a controlling others. By rendering "useless" gold to mercenary soldiers or other government, they can hammer out for whatever they want without the loss of any valuable things<sup>4</sup> (Logan).

When I consider to the poems of Yeats and his use of satire, it seems moderate. At the early part of his writing career, he was romantic at heart to address his poems. However, some of his love poems are addressed to the praise of Maud Gonne's (beloved) beauty and personality. Poems such as "No Second Troy" (1908), "Easter 1916" (1916) "A Prayer for My Daughter" (1919) are found with glimpse of satire. The poems cited above represent limitations on women's potential as well as critiques of feminine attractiveness. Yeats's "No Second Troy" is a well-known poem. The poem expresses his dissatisfaction with his beloved Maud Gonne's indoctrination of violence into the Irish Independence Movement. He also cynically critiques Gonne's beauty and her aristocratic status, which are out of step with the era in which she lives.

Even though Yeats does not mention Gonne by name in "No Second Troy," he begins the poem with the lines, "Why should I blame

her that she filled my days/ with misery" (1-2). These lines show Maud Gonne, his beloved, in a somewhat reflective manner; his love-sick life is evident in this poem. Many readers and critics have interpreted "No Second Troy" as a love lyric that contains a mild satire of Maud Gonne's character. Familiar scholar of Yeats, John Unterecker, remarks that the poem "No Second Troy" in "A Readers Guide to W. B. Yeats" that this poem pertains to mostly with the admiration of Maud Gonne's beauty. He also claims that she is described as "as beautiful as Helen", the Trojan War heroine that is fiction. In addition, some experts maintain that the poem primarily refers to Maud Gonne's attractiveness, but there are other hints that point to it being a satire of her aggressive and dominant nature.<sup>5</sup> (Unterecker).

In the poem, "A prayer for My Daughter", Yeats's expression of women and the exultation of beauty has been criticised. In order for his daughter to suffer a catastrophe in the future, he prays that she won't achieve great beauty. He fears that her extraordinary attractiveness could make her appear stunning to everyone who happens to come across her. Yeats wishes to limit his daughter's beauty and nature to the point where he restricts women to being feminine. It is seen that the poem is appeared just after the refusals or rejection of his persistent proposals to Maud Gonne. So it can be concluded with the message that the poem is a reflection of mild satire on his love-sick life.

Yeats also makes an attempt to critique women and their growing voice in the poem "Easter 1916". It is intolerant in his opinion. According to Cullingford's book, *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poems*, men of Yeats's age were afraid that women who had been oppressed by patriarchal society might start oppressing their male counterparts in return if they were to succeed in achieving liberty.<sup>6</sup> (Cullingford). It alludes to the uneasiness that was prevalent among men in the early 20th century. In other words, Yeats hates the dominance of women. Conversely, it might

become clear that Yeats directs their (females') progress in the direction of masculine sovereignty. Such satirical moments can also be found in "Easter, 1916." Yeats makes an effort to critique the growing voice of women in a time that is intolerable to their astute voice. It is conveyed subtly in the beautiful statement "Easter, 1916". His criticism of women who were vocal in their revolutionary manoeuvres against English control over Ireland is shown in these lines. The poetic lines as:

"That woman's days were spent

In ignorant good-will,

Her nights in argument

Until her voice shrill." <sup>7</sup> (Yeats lines 17-20)  
(Khan 42-59)

If we consider the poem, "Second Coming", which has been described as a utopian poem of Yeats with a new vision seeking for establishment of civilisation with peace and prosperity and the possibility of a Christian second coming and something hopeful. But the image used by the poet that evokes dark turn towards his strange vision of Sphinx. It is just the opposite of Christ as Anti-Christ. So we may conclude there is kind of quality of satire or parody here.

Yeats is a unique and exceptional symbolist in the annals of the English-speaking world when it comes to the context of symbols. He is England's leading representative of the symbolist movement. His poetry is replete with symbols. There are two major forms of symbols as natural symbol and cultural symbol. Natural symbols are extracted from the unconscious realm of the mind cultural symbols from the particular cultures across world. In Yeats's poetry, the same symbol is often used for different context and in different purpose; thereby it becomes obscure and almost unintelligible to the uninitiated reader. Most of the symbols of Yeats are derived from occult studies, which reflect a fascination for fairies, astrology, banshees, and prophetic dreams. The



cultural symbols of Yeats are used to express eternal truths and that are still used in different religions. He applies symbols to convey his inner sensations, his mystic experiences and his vision. His early poems are packed with elementary symbols. There are no complexities in meaning and these are all traditional symbols. He has used a number of symbols such as the rose, the tower, the gyre, the sword, the wheel, the sea, the tree, the bird, the moon, the sun, the earth, the silver, the air, the water, and the fire<sup>8</sup> (Dash).

Out of these symbols 'the Rose' may be expressed as the major symbol. Successively, these symbols improve and flourish in the later period of his writing. These become personal, complex and complicated. Byzantium and Second Coming are the fine examples of this kind.

Both the authors, Thomas More and W.B Yeats express about the present scenario and quest for an alternative future. Though, they are having the gap of around four centuries in between their birth. Moreover, they emphasize the significance of community and shared values.

**Differences:** When the matter comes to define the difference between Thomas More and W. B. Yeats's the vision of shaping "Utopia," I think to demonstrate in the manner of tone, specificity and political ideology with the intention of composing "Utopia" of Thomas More and sense of utopia in the poetry of W.B. Yeats.

**Tone:** Utopia is comprised with several literary devices, but the tone is one of the most useful features of the fiction determining the views of More as an author. In the fiction "Utopia", More commonly perpetuates a satiric tone, sometimes it is accompanied by irony, ambiguity and comedy. These essential features support the readers to convey what More intends to explore the true message behind it. More uses the device of tone in "Utopia" with the aim of displaying the intrinsic distinction between the European society of contemporary period and Utopians.

Another eminent tone applied by More throughout the story is irony. He applies irony as a distinct tone next to satire, through various characters to define the difference between Utopia and Europe. To captivate the readers he uses characterisation as a tool in describing irony. The readers are introduced with several characters in the first part of the book, two of them being More himself as a fictional character and Raphael Hythloday. While the author as a fictional character uses himself with a sceptical voice and Raphael Hythloday to be the main advocate of Utopia to describe the story. Though, the character is named after himself, ironically More's true intention of thought exists within Hythloday's criticism of contemporary European society. Moreover, the ambiguity is another tool in the story, that the view of More as an author and as a fictional character with Raphael for the formation of Utopia, viewing England and its current system. So the ambiguity of the text protects its discrepancy and gives the reader the possibility to illustrate Utopia from several points of view, while framing the fiction, concerns universal appeal.

But the tone of Yeats's poetry is dreamy, wistful, prophetic and sombre or melancholy. When we consider some of his popular poems, like "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", "Second Coming" and "Sailing to Byzantium" are packed with different tones. The tone of the poem "The Lake of Innisfree" is wistful and dreamy by virtue of the speaker desires for a place very different from the city he is dwelling in. The tone of the poem "Second Coming" is sinister and prophetic. These characteristics originate through the speaker's anticipating mood, in which he envisages what will happen in future. Grounded on the catastrophic present situation of the world, the speaker predicts an abstract and obscure vision of approach in the near future. The tone of the poem "Sailing to Byzantium" is melancholic and meditative. The speaker of the poem expresses himself as old, decrepit and useless. He finds himself that he is left out in the modern world, and desires for a

place of peace and acceptance.

**Specificity:** To the context of specificity both the authors are different in their way of interpretation. The “Utopia” of Thomas More is comprehensive and concrete while visions of utopia of Yeats is open ended and ambiguous.

**Political Ideology:** When matters come to the political ideology of More and Yeats, there is a subtle difference in their vision of writing. The political ideology of More inclines towards socialist ideals, while Yeats’s perspectives are more complex and sometimes contradict themselves.

### Conclusion

By considering the comparison between two Utopian texts of More and Yeats, I gain some insight into the aspiration and anxieties of different historical periods. At the same time, dealing with some common ground, their respective visions that emphasize the multiplicity of utopian imagination and its persistent evolution in response to changing social and cultural atmosphere.

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