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THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE

Although the word “utopia” did not exist until Thomas More coined it in the 16th century, the “utopian impulse,” or desire to imagine or create a perfect society, dates back to Ancient Greece and Rome. In the 15th through 18th centuries, however, there was a dramatic increase in expressions of the utopian impulse, for many reasons. One factor was the Italian Renaissance, in which the “rebirth” of ancient ideas included a focus on the planning of ideal cities and societies. As this humanistic interest spread throughout Europe, a second development arose: the European encounter with the Americas. This “New World” seemed to offer the potential for the actual creation of ideal communities. The 16th century also gave rise to the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response, the Counter-Reformation. These religious clashes fed the utopian impulse, as the various denominations sought to establish their ideal communities.

Looking at a range of items, including Platonic dialogues, architectural treatises and plans, literary and theatrical works, historical documents and texts, and maps of real and imagined places, this exhibition explores the many ways that the utopian impulse has found expression in the western world.

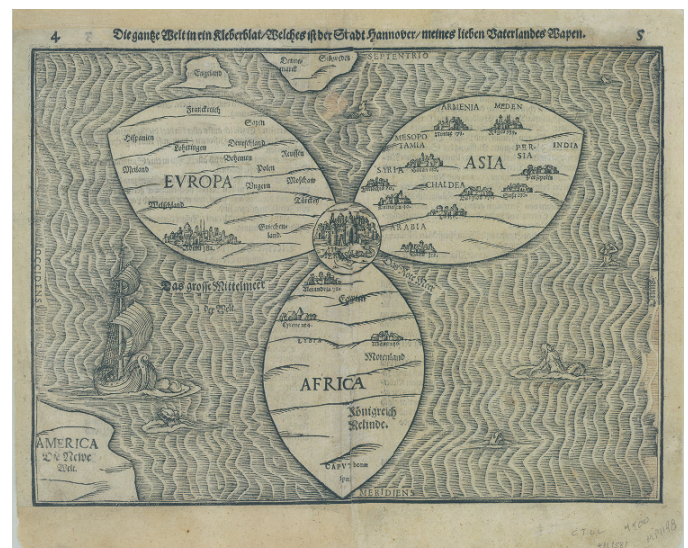
This exhibition was made possible through collaboration across the collections of the Yale University Libraries. The objects were selected from the Anne T. & Robert M. Bass Library, the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (BRBL), Manuscripts and Archives (MSSA), the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, the Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library, the Sterling Memorial Library general collections, and the Yale Map Department of Sterling Memorial Library.

Mia Reinoso Genoni

Mellon Special Collections Humanities Postdoctoral Fellow



Athanasius Kircher. *Topographia paradisi terrestri juxta mentem et conjecturas auctoris*. Amsterdam, c.1675. 11.4 x 16.5 in. Yale Map Department, 6 1675.



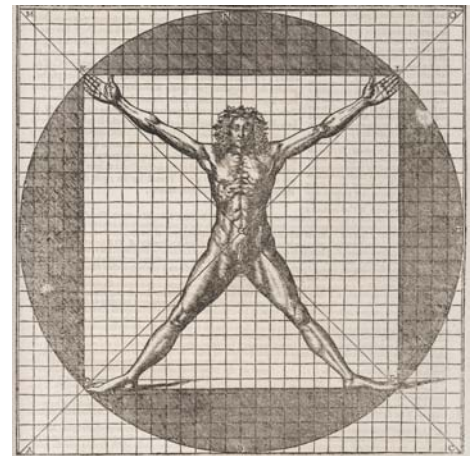
Heinrich Bunting. *Die gantze Welt in ein Kleberblatt, welches ist der Stadt Hannover, meines lieben Vaterlandes Wapen*. Magdeburg, 1581. 12.2 x 15 in. Yale Map Department, 11 1581.

ARCHITECTURE AND THE IDEAL

Architectural planning and utopian thought have a fundamental connection: the function of both is to structure a society, striving for the creation of the ideal. This interrelationship was particularly powerful during the Italian Renaissance. During this time of humanistic inquiry, the planning of buildings and cities was influenced by Plato's discussion of the physical forms and ethical nature of the ideal society. Particularly important were three of his late dialogues – *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and the *Laws* – in which he both outlined the characteristics of the ideal society as well as spoke of a divine creator as the architect of the universe.

The Renaissance also looked to another Antique source: the *Ten Books of Architecture* by Vitruvius. One of Vitruvius's most influential ideas was his belief in perfect geometric shapes that formed the basis for universal order. Architects like Leonardo da Vinci and Cesare Cesariano illustrated what is now known as "Vitruvian Man," based on Vitruvius's discussion of the proportions of the human body inscribed in a circle and a square.

Plato, Vitruvius, and other classical authors inspired Renaissance architects and urban planners throughout Europe to design ideal cities based on patterns of human proportion and harmonious geometric order. To build an ideal city was to give structure to an ideal society, in both physical and moral terms. The ideal city of the Renaissance was one of architectural order and harmony, one whose urban fabric and individual buildings helped its dwellers to lead ideal and proper lives as good citizens.



Left: Detail, Plato's ordering of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*. In *Chaleidij viri clarissimi luculenta Timaei Platonis...* Paris, 1520. 8.25 x 13 in. BRBL, Gfp66 +Pbf520.

Middle: Detail, drawing of a city in the shape of a man. From early 16th-century copy of Francesco di Giorgio Martini's *Trattati di architettura ingegneria e arte militare*. 16.1 x 10.2 in. BRBL, MS 491.

Right: Detail, drawing of Vitruvian Man. *Cesare Cesariano, Di Lucio Vitruvio Pollione de Architectura*. Como, Gotardus de Ponte, 1521. 10.5 x 16 in. BRBL, GGnv90 bi521.

THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA*

Thomas More was a humanist, Christian scholar, and author, as well as a lawyer and statesman. For *Utopia*, More took as his model one of Plato's most famous dialogues, *The Republic*. He was also influenced by Christian works, including the 4th-century sermons of St. Ambrose and St. Benedict's 6th-century monastic rules. More began the text while part of an English delegation to the Low Countries, where he was also a member of the humanist circle of Erasmus.

The humanist debates in which he participated heavily influenced the ideas in *Utopia*, which was first published in Latin in Louvain (1516) and Basel (1518). Drawing on these discussions, More created a dialogue about socio-political reform, addressing the real issues of Early Modern Europe through his fiction. *Utopia* is meant to appear, at first glance, to be the narrative of real events that take place in Antwerp. In the story, Peter Giles, a (real) colleague, introduces the (fictionalized) character of More to the (fictional) sailor Raphael Hythloday, supposedly one of Amerigo Vespucci's crew. Hythloday has returned from a trip to the island of Utopia, and he speaks of the good elements of its society as well as in contrast to abuses present in English and other Europeans societies. In his tract, then, More describes an ideal society that has been realized elsewhere, if only in fiction. The name that More gives this society – "utopia" – highlights its identity between the ideal and the real: a neologism coined from Greek roots, "utopia" resonates with two ideas: "eutopia," a good or happy place, and "outopia," no place.

In form and content, More's *Utopia* came to define the genre of utopian literature. Some typical elements are: the dialogue form; the author as character(s); a blend of Christian mores and civic rules; the existence of a utopian civilization on an island and/or theretofore undiscovered world; a description of the structure of the city and society; and a reference to voyages to the Americas. However, the reforms that More espoused are not necessarily what one might expect: they range from a discussion of the fairness of the death penalty to his belief that men and women should have the (chaperoned) chance to see each other naked before marriage, to ascertain the health of one's future mate.



Map of the island of Utopia.

Left: Thomas More. *Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reip. statu, deq[ue] noua insula Vtopia...*

Louvain: Thierry Martens, 1516.

5.5 x 8.25 in.

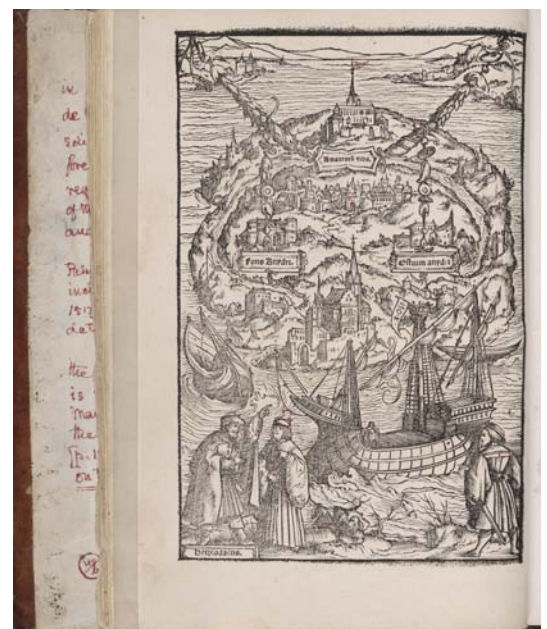
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Right: Thomas More. *De optimo reipublicae statu, deque noua insula Vtopia...* Basel, 1518.

6 x 8.25 in.

BRBL, Zd 1309.

Map is possibly by Ambrosius Holbein.



TRANSLATING (AND TRANSFORMING) *UTOPIA*

In the 16th and 17th centuries, More's *Utopia* was translated into many languages. Each time, it was also transformed. Most of these changes were purposeful, meant to shape More's vision to fit different cultures and societies. For instance, the French and Italian editions reworded their versions of the title to emphasize the "happy" (eu-topian) nature of the work, perhaps to suggest that a utopia really was achievable. Sometimes these alterations were practical, as it cost less to produce an unillustrated work, as were the first Italian and English editions. They also reflected the changing ways that More's work was understood. The first Dutch and Spanish editions, which were the last of these European translations, shortened the title to "The Utopia of Thomas More." This shift reflects two developments: the work had become famous enough to be referred to with the shorthand title "Utopia," and the publishers wished to emphasize that the author of the work was the celebrated humanist scholar, Thomas More. These choices reveal the ways in which Early Modern editors marketed works to appeal to their buying public. *Utopia* remained popular in later centuries, and new editions with new transformations continued to be created.

The publications of these translations also helped inspire new utopian tracts. Notably, Anton Francesco Doni, who was responsible for the first Italian edition of More's *Utopia*, composed the satirical work *I Mondi*, or *The Worlds* (Venice, 1552-3). It includes a utopian world that is inhabited by madmen – the *Mondo de' Pazzi*. Fascinatingly, Doni also describes a star-shaped city based on the ideals of Italian Renaissance urban planning and humanism. Doni's work, in turn, was also translated and transmitted throughout Europe.

Chronology of the first editions in print:

1524, German. Translated by Claude Chansonnette, printed in Basel.

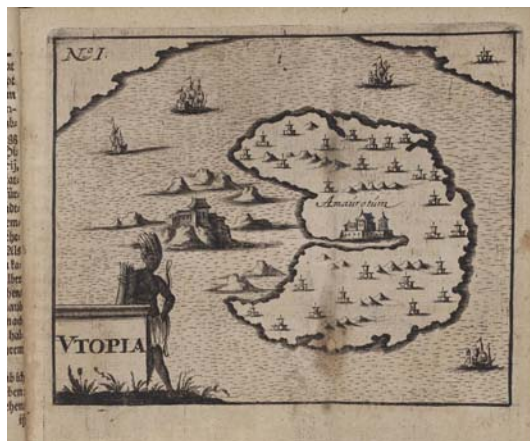
1548, Italian. Translation prepared for print by Anton Francesco Doni, printed in Venice.

1550, French. Translated by Jean LeBlond, printed in Paris.

1551, English. Translated by Ralph Robinson, printed in London.

1553, Dutch. Translator unknown, printed in Antwerp.

1637, Spanish. Translated by Don Jerónimo Antonio de Medinilla y Porres, printed in Córdoba.



Left: Map of utopia. Thomas More. *Ordentliche und außführliche Beschreibung der uberaus herrlichen und gantz wunderbarlichen doch wenigen bißhero beandten Insul Utopia...* Frankfurt, 1704. Map 7 x 6 in. BMBL, 1974 3368.

Right: Detail, illustration of Doni's star-shaped city. Anton Francesco Doni. *Les mondes celestes, terrestres et infernavx* Translated by Gabriel Chappvis. Lyons: Honorati, 1578. 6.3 x 4.1 in. BMBL, Hd28 203k.

17TH-CENTURY UTOPIAN LITERATURE

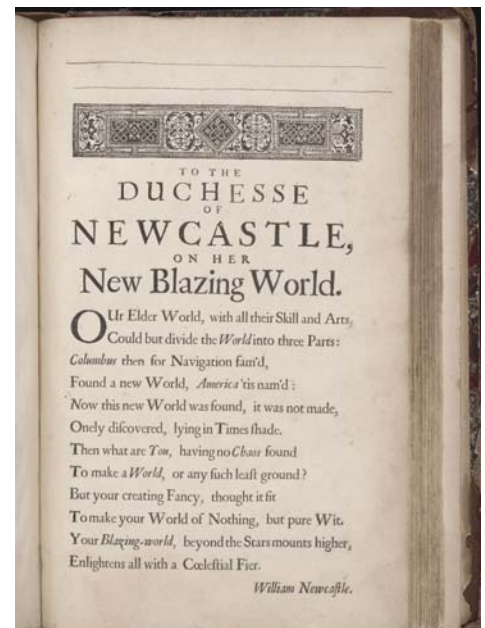
Throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, numerous other authors wrote utopian texts. Three fascinating examples are from the 17th-century Italian and English traditions. They are representative of their specific cultural origins and also testify to the continued cosmopolitan nature of the genre, reflecting ideas that were under discussion throughout Europe. The first of these works is Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, composed in Italian in 1602 and published in Latin in 1623 in Frankfurt. Next is Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, an unfinished work published posthumously in 1627 in London. The third is *The Blazing World* written by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, and published in London in 1666.

The interests of these three authors are typical of the 17th century. Campanella was a Dominican scholar and poet, who focused on philosophy, theology, and astrology. Bacon was a scholar and statesman in the mold of More: a philosopher, scientist, lawyer, and diplomat. Cavendish was a prolific author of poetry, plays, and tracts. Like Bacon, her areas of study included philosophy, science, and natural history. The works of these three authors feature both elements recognizable from More's *Utopia* as well as components that reflect the 17th-century understanding of, and commitment to, scientific progress. These three utopias are marked by: reflections on Christianity and Christian society; discussions of the link between imperial and colonial enterprises and the discovery or creation of the "perfect" world; a focus on the ideal society as a structuring element; a belief in scientific progress as the means through which an ideal society can arise; an interest in the observation of the natural world, natural history, and alchemy; and the ever-present fascination with voyages to the New World. Among these utopias, Cavendish's work is of particular interest. It is considered to be one of the earliest feminist tracts and one of the first works of science fiction to be published; also remarkable is the support she received from her husband William, Duke of Newcastle, as is seen in his dedication page.



Left: Title page to Francis Bacon's *Sylva sylvarum* and *New Atlantis*. London, 1626/7 (published posthumously). 7.3 x 11 in. BRBL, lh B132 +627

Right: William Cavendish's dedication page from *The Blazing World*. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. *Observations upon experimental philosophy. To which is added The description of a new blazing world*. London: A. Maxwell, 1666. 7 x 11.5 in. BRBL, 1971 +87.



FROM UTOPIA TO SHIPWRECK

It is not until the 19th century that the word “dystopia” is coined, by John Stuart Mill in an 1868 speech to the British parliament:

It is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or caco-topians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable.

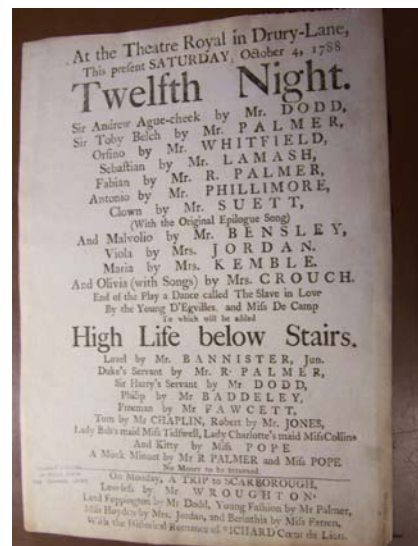
Yet in the 17th century, William Shakespeare was well aware of the problem of knowing *whose* utopia to choose, and of the difficulty of putting utopian ideas into practice. In works like *Twelfth Night* (1601) and *The Tempest* (1610-11), Shakespeare explored the intricacies of locating and defining utopias, among many other plots and subplots. Both plays have been considered comedy or romance, and they both seem to have been inspired by stories of voyages to the New World – including documented, real reports as well as fictional or allegorical narratives.

In the 18th century the literary form of the novel was invented, and the shipwreck became a popular theme. Far from utopian, however, the islands featured in these works were dangerous and savage. Most notable is Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*, published in London in 1719. The sole survivor of a shipwreck, Crusoe lives on a South American island for twenty-eight years until he is rescued.

These renderings of shipwrecks by Shakespeare and Defoe remained popular throughout the following centuries and have also spawned a vivid literary and theatrical tradition. It remains active today, and still runs the gamut from comedy to drama, with or without romance. Some recent examples include the television shows *Gilligan’s Island*, *Survivor*, and *Lost*.



Left: Playbill for *The Tempest* and *Harlequin's Invasion*. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, England, Dec. 27, 1786. 7.1 x 9.8 in. MASA, Crawford Theater Playbills, I, B. Box 23, Folder 161.



Right: Playbill for *Twelfth Night* and *High Life below Stairs*. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, England, Oct. 4, 1788. 7.1 x 9.8 in. MASA, Crawford Theater Playbills, I, B. Box 23, Folder 162.

IDEAL COMMUNITIES IN CONNECTICUT

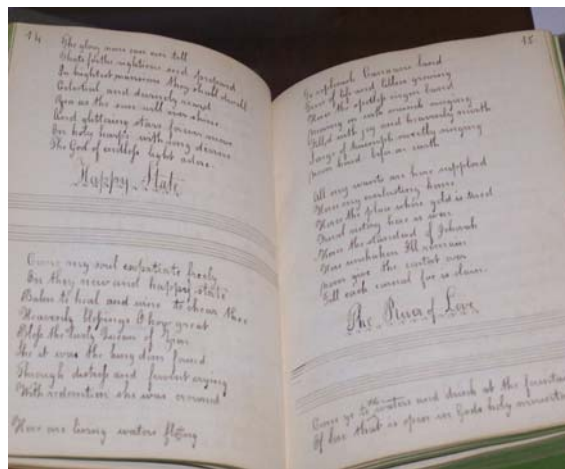
The 17th century was also the time of the first permanent settlements in what would become the state of Connecticut. The Dutch had explored the area in the beginning of the century, and built a settlement near Hartford in 1633. The character of the region, however, was determined by the influx of English colonists in the later 1630s – transplants south from Massachusetts. These colonists had two main motivations, both of which resonate with the utopian impulse. They were seeking greater religious freedom, as well as looking for a more fertile land where agriculture, and thus their society, would flourish.

Originally called Quinnipiac and founded in 1638, New Haven became an important center for both sought-after elements. The decision to rename it “New Haven” reveals that the community saw the town as a place of safety, plenty, and freedom. Its famous nine-square plan was also one of the earliest grid-systems in the United States, reflecting an attention to city planning. When Yale University moved permanently to New Haven in 1718, both the purpose of the university and the planning of its buildings became fundamental components of the physical and moral shaping of this society.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Connecticut was home to numerous religious experiments, including the communities of the United Society of Believers, or the “Shakers.” A Protestant sect with origins in England, the Shakers came to New York in 1774. The nickname of “Shakers” is a shortened form of “Shaking Quakers,” a descriptor inspired by their practice of sitting in quiet meditation until a vision from God led them to shout out, sing, and/or shake. Although there was a period of initial skepticism and of fear of these unfamiliar practices, the Shakers did find a home in Connecticut. In the 1780s and 90s, the religion took root, eventually establishing a strong community in Enfield.



James Wadsworth. *Plan of the city of New Haven*, taken in 1748. 24.4 x 18.1 in.
BRBL, ZZ35 5 1.



View of the hymn “Happy State,” from a Shaker manuscript. No date - late 18th to 19th century. Enfield, Connecticut. Inscribed by Henry Youngs, on October 16, 1856. 4.3 x 6.9 in.
The Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Mx75 S4 En2.

MAPPING IDEAL AND REAL WORLDS

...time shall in fine out breake
When Ocean wave shall open every Realme
The wandering World at will shall open lye,
And Thyphis shall some newe founded Land Survey
Some travellers shall the Countries farre escrye,
Beyond small Thule, known farthest to this day.

- Seneca, *Medea* (from the John Studley translation of 1581)

As shown in Heinrich Bunting's image of "The Whole World in the Shape of a Cloverleaf," on display at the beginning of this exhibition, ancient and medieval traditions held that there were only three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. This idea was first put forth by Ancient Greek sailors, and was espoused by the earliest philosophers, the Ionians of Miletus. Although some, including Herodotus, challenged this system, it nonetheless took hold in both popular culture and scholarship, lasting through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. The encounter with the Americas at the end of the 15th century challenged centuries of thought.

Christopher Columbus sought to make sense of this new information by turning to another ancient source. As his son Ferdinand reports, Columbus found his answer in the lines of the so-called Senecan prophecy. Part of Seneca's tragedy play *Medea*, these lines are a prediction that a "new found land" will appear, discovered across the ocean by travellers, located far beyond the edges of the known world. In their written reports and maps created from personal and second-hand accounts, Early Modern Europeans struggled to reconcile ancient knowledge with modern discoveries. As the travel narratives and maps show, they sought to represent the new alongside of the old, and to place real discoveries in the context of ideal, and sometimes even mythological, beliefs.

Left: Edward Wells. *A new map of the terraqueous globe: according to the ancient discoveries and most general divisions of it into continents and oceans.*
Oxford, 1726 or 1738.
17.3 x 21.7 in.
Yale Map Department, Cross 11 1701.

