University of Reading

# *Early modern utopian fiction: Utopia and The Isle of Pines*

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Houston, C. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3062-1839 (2023) Early modern utopian fiction: Utopia and The Isle of Pines. In: Shrank, C. and Withington, P. (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Thomas More's Utopia. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 509-521. ISBN 9780198881018 doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198881018.013.29 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/86863/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198881018.013.29

Publisher: Oxford University Press

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the End User Agreement.

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

University of Reading

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

*The Oxford Handbook of Thomas More's Utopia*

Early modern utopian fiction

Chloë Houston, University of Reading

## Introduction

What did "utopia" mean in the early modern period? When the word was used in the decades following the 1516 publication of Thomas More's *De optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula*, it sometimes referred directly to the imaginary island described in that text. Discussing purgatory in his *Actes and Monuments* of 1570, for example, John Foxe writes: "I do not [...] thinke, that [...] there is any such fourth place of Purgatory at all (vnles it be in M. Mores Vtopia)" (Foxe, 1583, p. 1017). Here, More's fictional island is taken to mean a place that has no existence in reality, and this seems to have been the word's chief meaning during the early modern period, even when not directly associated with More by name or by reference to *Utopia* itself. Utopia's association with unreality was at least as present in early modern usage of the word as its association with an ideal or idealized society. Thomas Browne, in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), states of the mythical phoenix that "Some say it liveth in Æthiopia, others in Arabia, some [...] in Utopia" (Browne, 1646, p. 132). Utopia, first and foremost, was no-place. In fact, texts that actively sought to portray either ideal, real or conceptual locations or communities frequently distanced themselves from the concept of Utopia. William Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, writing in 1601, sought to defend his fellow Protestants' belief in a Catholic church of Christ, for example, in these terms: "I am assured that we all professe there is a Catholike church of Christ, not

a *Platonicall vtopia,* no where extant, but a company of Gods chosen euery where scattered" (Barlow, 1601, p. 108).

The writers and editors of travel literature knew all too well that to call a place utopian was to call its credibility into doubt. For Walter Ralegh, describing his travels in the late 1590s, the prospect of finding utopia in the new world was a seductive idea, but one that carried connotations of naivety: "it might be imputed for some blame to the grauity of wise men, lightly to bee carried with the perswasion and hope of a new found *Vtopia*" (Ralegh, 1600, p. 668). Samuel Purchas' *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1613) uses "utopia" to distinguish between "true history" and fanciful imaginings, for example, in recounting the travels of Iambulus to the "Islands of the Sun": "The reports of this his voyage sauour more of an *Vtopia*, and *Plato's* common-wealth, then of true Historie" (Purchas, 1613, p. 708). Travellers might long have hinted at the possibility of finding utopia abroad, but by the later 1500s, this dream was primarily associated with a naïve lack of judgement (Houston, 2010).

In the seventeenth century, then, Utopia was not only emphatically not a real place, but often carried comic associations. In the literature of the period, "utopia" is shorthand for a place that is ridiculous or fanciful, and is regularly employed for the purpose of satire, as is manifested by some examples from the 1630s. John Taylor, the Water Poet, uses "Utopia" or "Utopian" in a number of his poems; the following example describes "A Figure-flinger, Cunning-man":

> He'le tell you wonders when you are alone,
> Of the Philosophers admired stone:
> And that it from Utopia did come,
> Brought to him by a Spirit, he sent to Rome (Taylor, 1630, p. 13).

Taylor refers to Utopia in a similar manner in his poems "A Bawd", "A Whore", and "In Praise of Hemp-seed", printed in the same collection. Richard Brathwait also uses "Utopia" to mean an unreal or fanciful place, for satirical effect, in his poem "To the Pious Memory of

Sir Richard Hutton Knight". The poem mocks a captain who claims to have travelled to "Zealand" and "Brabant" with the marginal note, "These Countreys might have been in *Vtopia* for ought he knew" (Brathwait, 1641, B4r).

Robert Burton's exploration of the idea of utopia in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621, also recognizes the comic and unrealistic aspects of utopia, even while Burton engages in constructing "one of mine owne". Burton begins from the premise that there is a need for social reformation, "some generall visiter in our age, that should reforme what is amis" (Burton, 1989, I, 84). He enumerates the many changes to be desired, which touch on all aspects of life, including religion, arts, sciences, education, and morals, and plans "a new *Atlantis*, a poeticall commonwealth of mine owne, in which I will freely domineere, build Citties, make Lawes, Statutes, as I list my selfe" (Burton, 1989, I, 85). But this utopia is a private space, inaccessible to anyone else: in a mockery of the traditional ambiguity as to the utopian place's precise location, Burton jokes that he will choose a site:

> whose latitude shall be 45 degrees (I respect not minutes) in the midst of the temperate Zone, or perhaps under the *Aequator*, that Paradise of the world […] the longitude for some reasons I will conceale (Burton, 1989, I, 86).

While Burton constructs a utopia in order to criticize aspects of the status quo, he does not conceive it as a serious response to social ills. Burton identifies human beings as the primary block to creating an ideal society. Real people are "partiall and passionate, mercilesse, covetous, corrupt, subject to love, hate, feare, favor, &c" (Burton, 1989, I, 92). The creation of a utopia is an explicitly fictional and individual process, not one that is socially useful (Houston, 2013). A little over a century after the term was first coined by More, "utopia" has fully absorbed the meaning of something unrealistic or unfeasible.

Just as Burton saw the need for social reform, but did not perceive that utopia had a role in achieving it, so those engaged in actual social reform in the seventeenth century

rejected the utopian form and the very word "utopia" in projecting their images of better societies. Samuel Hartlib and his associates, including reformers such as John Dury and William Petty, evidently had More's *Utopia*, and other utopian literature, in mind when they spoke of the need for social reformation and outlined their plans for how it should be achieved. Writing in the 1640s, Hartlib maintained that More's *Utopia*, "a most excell*ent* Booke", could offer "a true patterne of a rightly constituted Common*wealth* and w*hi*ch might easily bee put in practice" (Hartlib, 1649, 28/1/19B, 28/1/20A). In specific terms, when thinking about the creation of ideal scientific institutions, Hartlib turned naturally to the utopian projections of Francis Bacon in his *New Atlantis* (1627). Indeed, he specifically refers to Bacon's Salomon's House in his planning for such institutions. In undated notes contained within the Hartlib Papers, Hartlib comments under the title "Londons Vniversity": "Arca Noa and House of Salomon or a Library of Rep*res*entations" (Hartlib, Undated, HP 47/9/38A). However, he noted in his *Ephemerides* that utopian texts such as More's, or Tomasso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623), needed to be improved or "remedied" if they were to be of use to real people; they tended too much to ignore human defects, and focused on theory rather than practice. Despite these drawbacks, Hartlib viewed utopian texts as potentially useful "counsels", advice to help society improve itself (Hartlib, 1640, HP 30/4/57A, 30/4/57B). Nonetheless, he was careful not to use the word "utopia" to describe his own projected ideal societies or institutions, such as his "Office of Address" (Hartlib, 1647). Even the utopian text which was produced by the Hartlib circle via his associate Gabriel Plattes, *A Description of the Famous Kingdome of Macaria. Shewing its Excellent Government* (1641), largely ignores the conventions of the utopian form in favour of a direct portrayal of how England could – and, by implication, should – be run (Webster, 1979; Boesky, 1996). Utopian writings such as *Macaria*, and later John Harrington's *Oceana*

(1656), steered as clear as they could of the word “utopia” in an attempt to avoid its connotations of unreality, comedy and blind optimism (Houston, 2013).

The fact that the word “utopia” became associated with fanciful imaginings rather than serious political thought did not mean that the early modern period did not produce a significant number of utopian texts, and a number of these were directly concerned with social reformation. The utopian writings of the early modern period take a wide range of forms. There are mock travel narratives, early forms of science fiction which project fantastic societies in other worlds, like Joseph Hall’s *Mundus Alter Et Idem* (1605) and Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* (1638). There are works of political philosophy which present idealised societies as direct models for emulation, like *Macaria* and *Oceana*, and utopian dialogues of the later sixteenth century, which, like *Utopia*, highlighted problems with contemporary society and modelled solutions through imaginary foreign communities (Nicholls, 1579; Lupton, 1580). There are early utopian novels, like Samuel Gott’s *Nova Solyma* (1648), which portrays an idealised society in Nova Solyma, or New Jerusalem; the experience of living in Nova Solyma is an education for its English visitors on the question of how to live a good life as individuals, as well as how to build an ideal community. The practice of imagining idealised societies in print proliferated in the seventeenth century, as the questions of the ideal society and the good life were explored in many forms of writing beyond the conventional utopia (Houston, 2013).

It is tempting to see these various forms of utopian literature in the decades that followed 1516 as constituting a neat division of elements that were united in More’s work: *Utopia*’s playfulness going into satirical travel narratives, and its political philosophy into works dedicated to social reform, for example. In fact, both overtly political and overtly fictional utopian writing of the early modern period continue to share interests, and, in

particular, fictional or literary utopias often remain concerned with political questions, even when they seem to obscure such concerns. All utopian writing from this period took from *Utopia* a focus on the question of what it means to live a good life and a profound questioning of the status quo, and fictional utopias, forerunners of the utopian novel, remained close to *Utopia* in a number of ways.

While each utopian text needs to be understood within its own context, rather than treated solely as an example of utopian fiction, early modern utopian texts are often profitably discussed in comparison with one another, and a number of shared concerns can be identified even in utopian texts dating from the furthest limits of the early modern period. For the rest of this chapter, we will consider some similarities between More's *Utopia* and one of its strangest literary descendants: *The Isle of Pines* (1668), by the Civil War republican Henry Neville. There are manifest differences between the two texts: *Utopia*'s sustained and explicit interest in the immediate social context of the time of its production, compared to *Isle*'s comparative silence on this subject; *Utopia*'s more sophisticated engagement with political and moral philosophy; *Isle*'s centring of the travel narrative format in place of the dialogue, for example. Nonetheless, or perhaps in light of these differences, a number of similarities between the texts demonstrate the productivity of their comparison. An examination of both texts' earliest publication histories, their use of paratexts, their playing with generic boundaries and their critique of representation shows that these two utopian texts share a number of qualities and interests, even if these are not immediately apparent.

## *Utopia*

The publishing history of the earliest editions of *Utopia* is complex. J. H. Hexter's hypothesis that Book II was written first, when More had leisure during his visit to the Low Countries in 1515, and that Book I followed later when time allowed on his return to England, has been widely accepted (Hexter, 1952). It seems likely that More completed both parts of the manuscript by the late summer of 1516, with additions and amendments being made under pressure of time (Baker-Smith, 2000). In September of that year, he sent the completed book, together with a preface addressed to Peter Giles, to his friend Erasmus in the Netherlands. Erasmus edited the text, adding marginal notes and requesting prefatory letters, including those from Giles and Jerome Busleyden. Gerard Geldenhauer, who also provided some verses, informed Erasmus that the book would be published by Thierry Martens in Louvain, and would include a map by "an illustrious artist", Ambrosius Holbein (Baker-Smith, 2000, p. 35). The first (Latin) edition appeared at Louvain at the end of 1516, and seems to have been immediately successful, with Erasmus planning a new edition straight away. There followed a Paris edition in 1517, two in Basel in 1518, and one in Florence the following year. The first editions of *Utopia* were thus the product of numerous hands, with a wealth of paratextual material (at least sixteen paratextual elements in the March 1518 edition printed at Basel, for example). The presence of paratextual material, and especially the use of prefaces, was something that later utopian fiction would frequently replicate. The preface was "conventionally the place where such works reflect upon their own fictitious nature, which was probably necessitated by the ancient suspicion against travellers' tales", and "a rumination on the truthfulness of the traveller's story in the prefatorial position is almost always found in utopias", probably dating back to Lucian's *True History* (Csaba, 2013, p. 18). Given that it constitutes an effort on behalf of author, editor

and other contributors to shape the reader's response to the text, paratextual material forms an important layer of meaning in More's multifaceted utopia.

In particular, there are a number of ways in which the paratexts of *Utopia* destabilize the notion that Utopia itself represents an ideal society. The French humanist Guillaume Budé's letter to Thomas Lupset was first published in the second edition, printed at Paris in 1517, and was reproduced in subsequent versions, including the 1518 edition upon which the standard Yale text is based (Houston, 2013). Budé introduces Utopia as follows:

> The island of Utopia, however, which I hear is also called Udepotia, is said (if the story is to be believed) still to preserve, by marvellous good fortune, access both in its public and its private life to the truly Christian customs and the authentic wisdom (More, 1996, pp. 118-9).

Budé presents an image of Utopia based on Christian ideals, and goes on to say that this has been achieved through community of property, love of peace, and contempt for gold and silver. He asserts, therefore, as Hythloday will later maintain, that the "true wisdom" of Christianity amounts to little more than communality of possessions, a seeming simplicity which sounds a note of caution. In the same breath as commending the Utopians' Christianity, Budé puns on Utopia as "Udepotia" or "Neverland", and adds the cautionary aside of "si credimus", "if we are to believe" Hythloday's story. Here Budé touches on one of the central problems of *Utopia*. The text pretends to represent a society structured in an ideal manner and open to Christianity, but in doing so it demands that we question the true purpose and wisdom of that religion. Budé goes on to wish that all societies could follow the basic principles of Utopian legislation, and asks what sort of holiness the Utopians had to possess not to fall victim to avarice and cupidity. But rather than address this wish to God, he calls instead upon "superi" and "diui immortals" ("the powers above", "the immortal gods"), referring to people as "mortals" and to the devil as "the Stygian adversary". Budé's terms of reference are pagan and classical rather than Christian. He suggests that divine

powers have behaved in a less kindly manner to the states of Christendom: “Would that God, in his infinite goodness, had dealt as kindly with those regions which still keep and proudly proclaim their allegiance to the faith called by his holy name!” (More, 1996, p. 119). If Christian societies could live like the Utopians, Budé suggests that “the golden age of Saturn would return”, continuing to offer a confused frame of reference for Utopia which is at once Christian and classical (More, 1996, p. 119). How can Utopia be, as Budé claims, simultaneously “one of the Fortunate Isles, near neighbour to the Elysian Fields” of classical culture, and “Hagnopolis”, the holy city, “blessedly innocent, leading its own exalted life” (More, 1996, pp. 119-20)? By collapsing the difference between Christian and classical frames of reference Budé questions how compatible the two really are, and undermines his own presentation of Utopia as a purely Christian example of good living.

Following this prefatory letter, there are several episodes in Book I that destabilise the presentation of Utopia as an ideal state. The text rarely makes the chronology of its publication explicit, but at times we are reminded that More knew already how Utopia would later appear when he was writing Book I. One such occasion happens early in Morus’s account of Hythloday’s narrative of his journeys. Morus says that while travelling, Hythloday introduced the magnetic compass to a people who had not previously known of its existence (More, 1996, p. 12). It seemed at first a useful innovation, but the mariners, unused to their new tool, soon became incautious and ventured out in dangerous weather, so that “this discovery, which they thought would be so advantageous to them, may become the cause of much mischief” (More, 1996, p. 12). Read before Utopia has been encountered, this odd little anecdote may seem insignificant, but it serves as a momentary reminder that not all innovations are advantageous, and that what works well in one place does not always have the same positive function when transferred to another. The inclusion

of the story about the compass and the reference to the dangers to be encountered on sea-journeys can be read as a criticism of the notion that travel is purely a beneficial experience. Morus reminds his audience that travelling can be dangerous; the cultural exchange represented by the use of the compass is potentially a difficult and hazardous process. This episode serves to counter the idea that one culture can only benefit from adopting the practices of another, a warning against taking the seemingly advanced habits of Utopia as recommendations for contemporary England.

More's drawing on the conventions of travel literature through his inclusion of the anecdote about the compass is just one example of the way in which his text plays with generic boundaries. The question of how to categorise *Utopia* generically and how to describe the genre of the literary utopia has occupied scholars for generations (Vieira, 2010; Chordas, 2010). More's borrowings from the conventions of travel writing – like the paratextual materials – frequently serve to threaten the notion that *Utopia* is a representation of an ideal society and enhance the instability of the text. In his letter to Peter Giles, for example, More employs the well-worn convention of travel literature that the author should emphasise the first-hand nature of his experience and thus the authenticity of his narrative, claiming that he is only repeating "what you and I together heard Raphael describe" (More, 1996, p. 3). More then makes a show of insisting that he has in spite of this been as truthful as possible in relating Hythloday's tale:

> For, as I've taken particular pains to avoid untruths in the book, so, if anything is in doubt, I'd rather make an honest mistake than say what I don't believe. In short, I'd rather be truthful than correct (More, 1996, p. 5).

This play at verisimilitude reminds the reader of the falsity associated with the genre of travel writing from classical times onwards: More's account of Utopia is based entirely on the experiences of another, and so his claim to be telling the truth at the expense of all

other considerations is self-consciously false. Later, in conversation with Morus and Giles, Hythloday makes his own claim for truthfulness, asserting the authority of the eye-witness: "you should have been with me in Utopia and seen with your own eyes their manners and customs, as I did - for I lived there more than five years" (More, 1996, p. 40). In doing so he calls to mind the similar declaration of Lucian in the *True History*, where he claims the traveller's privilege of superior knowledge: "Well, that is what is was like on the Moon. If you do not believe me, go and see for yourself" (Lucian, 1990, p. 262). The similarity of these two claims reminds us that neither Lucian nor Hythloday has been to the society he imagines; and that neither society really exists. Like Lucian, who describes the "Saladfowls" and the "Garlic-gassers" he encounters, More uses comic names for the people and landmarks of Utopia, such as the river Anydrus ("waterless") and Utopia itself ("no place") (Lucian, 1990, pp. 254-55). In doing so, and in his ostentatious claims for truthfulness, he allies his text with Lucian's travel satires in which descriptions of the ideal society are so hyperbolic as to be ridiculous. Reminding us of the tradition of satirising travel literature, More establishes the ironic and playful context in which his text must be read.

This context affects the degree to which Book II of *Utopia* can be taken to provide solutions for the English social ills and problems that are debated in the dialogue of Book I. For example, through its use of irony, *Utopia* points to ways in which seemingly ideal Utopian customs are ill-fitted for its European readership. The playing of religious music is one such example. In Utopia, Hythloday states, the production of music in religious ceremonies involves an exact match between the method of expression and its subject:

> all their music, both vocal and instrumental, renders and expresses natural feelings and perfectly matches the sound to the subject. Whether the words of the psalm are cheerful, supplicatory, serene, troubled, mournful, or angry, the music represents the meaning through the melody so admirably that it penetrates and inspires the minds of the ardent hearers (More, 1996, p. 106).

Utopian religious music precisely "matches the sound to the subject", or in the Latin, "ita sonus accommodatur ad rem […] ita rei sensum quendam melodiae forma repraesentat, ut animos auditorum mirum in modum afficiat, penetret, incendat": the music has an effect on the spirits of the listeners because it represents meaning with total accuracy. But the instruments that produce such music are entirely different to those known by Hythloday's own audience, being "quite different in shape from those in our part of the world" and in many cases "not even comparable" (More, 1996, p. 106). The perfect capacity of Utopian music to replicate exactly its subject is thus unattainable for the European audience, and Utopian music itself cannot be replicated elsewhere. Their musical arts are, like the Utopians, separated from the known world (Jameson, 1977).

*Utopia* also critiques its own facility to represent accurately by questioning the notion that the text itself can provide an exact or truthful representation of its subject. The paratextual materials frequently cast doubt on the text's capacity to represent Utopia correctly, and it seems appropriate that the text should place the question of its own veracity at its very beginning. The "preface" of the 1516 and 1518 editions of *Utopia* was More's own letter to Peter Giles, and the question of the text's truthfulness is raised immediately, in More's apology for not having managed to transcribe Hythloday's relation of Utopia as quickly as he would have liked. The credulous reader may believe More's claim in his opening paragraph that "All I had to do was repeat what you and I together heard Raphael describe", but by the time any reader has encountered the description of Utopia itself, it will be obvious that More's role in the creation of *Utopia* goes beyond that of scribe (More, 1996, p. 3). When More states at the end of this opening paragraph that, "Truth in fact is the only quality at which I should have aimed, or did aim, in writing this book", it is impossible to miss the significance of that "*should* have aimed". The question of the text's

truthfulness is foregrounded elsewhere in the paratextual materials: Giles' letter to Busleyden, for example, jokes that both he and More missed hearing Hythloday explain where the island was actually located when one of their company coughed at the wrong moment (More, 1996, p. 25). More's letter also bemoans the fact that he does not know in which sea Utopia is situated: "I am quite ashamed not to know even the name of the ocean where this island lies about which I've written so much" (More, 1996, p. 5). *Utopia*'s paratext repeatedly questions the text's capacity for truthful representation. In this respect, *Utopia* itself exemplifies Kate Lilley's description of later early-modern utopian writing, that it "offers a critique of the world as it is, and also of representation as it is" (Lilley, 1992, p. 109).

*Isle of Pines*

Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines* appears to be a very different sort of text, describing a very different sort of place, from More's *Utopia* (Ladani, 2014, 38). Recent scholarship on the text has often sought to emphasise its distinctiveness from what might be called "the conventional literary utopia" or the "static ideal societies familiar to European readers" (Scheckter, 2011, p.8). John Scheckter, in his recent critical edition of the text, suggests that it depicts a society balanced between order and chaos, which looks back on the past "with both relief and further fear of disorder" (Scheckter, 2011, p. 11). Susan Bruce, in her introduction to *Utopia*, *New Atlantis*, and *Isle of Pines* in *Three Early Modern Utopias*, reads all three texts as engaged with a discourse of origins, interested in the genesis of the societies which they depict and in the roots of the utopian genre (Bruce, 1999). Neville's utopian text frequently looks backwards to its forebears, despite the obvious care taken by Neville to distinguish the Isle of Pines from Utopia itself.

Though both texts depict a fictional encounter with a fictional island, located at some distance from the narrator and reader's own society, Neville's Isle of Pines bears little relation in terms of its physical environment, its inhabitants, and its social organisation, to Utopia. Rather than being an island deliberately cultivated and with a long history of human civilisation, like Utopia, the Isle of Pines is a desert island, apparently discovered in 1589 by five survivors of a shipwreck and subsequently populated by them. The text begins with a letter purporting to be from Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten, a Dutch sailor whose ship was blown off course en route to the East Indies, "and wracked near to the Coast of *Terra Australis, Incognita*" (Neville, 1668, A2r). Finding themselves on the unknown island, Van Sloetten and his companions encounter a community of English-speaking people, numbering around 2000 in total. Their leader, William Pine, explains that the island was originally discovered and populated by his grandfather, George Pine, and his four companions following their own shipwreck a century before. Pine and his fellow survivors, who are the daughter of his master, two maidservants, and an enslaved black woman, find life on the island to be remarkably comfortable, with abundant food and clement weather. George Pine's narration of this stage of the Isle's history has been read as an arcadia, with human inhabitants living at one with the natural world (Mahlberg, 2012a, p. 61). Although Pine does eventually impose some rules on his many offspring, decreeing after a period of forty years, when the population has reached 560, that all members of the community must read the Bible once a month and refrain from marrying their siblings, he is a remarkably passive ruler, and the society demands little intervention from its patriarch. Following his death, however, the Isle of Pines encounters conflict, as Pine's descendants break the two rules that have been given to them and decline into social disorder; "the idyll degenerates into a dystopian nightmare" (Denbo, 2007, p. 158).

Despite the obvious differences between these two utopian locations, however, there are a number of resonances between the texts themselves which point to the ways in which More's presentation of his fictional island influenced subsequent utopian writing. The earliest version of Neville's *Isle of Pines* was first published in June 1668, one hundred and fifty years after the expanded edition of More's *Utopia* was printed at Basel. This first publication consisted solely of the fictional narrative of George Pine, whose ship, like Van Sloetten's, is wrecked on its journey to the East Indies. In this narration, Pine describes how he and four fellow travellers set up a community on the deserted island. Eventually beginning sexual relations with each of the women, Pine becomes the patriarch of this society, which finally includes 1789 of his descendants. By the end of the history, he has witnessed the deaths of all four of his consorts, and passed his narrative, along with his rulership of the island, to his eldest son.

Although this version (hereafter Part One) was presented on its own both in this original printing and in some later editions, it was quickly followed, in July 1668, by *A New and Further Discovery of The Isle of Pines*, which, as John Scheckter has written, "changes and complicates every angle of the original" (Scheckter, 2011, xii). *A New and Further Discovery*, or Part Two, has for its narrator Cornelius Van Sloetten, the Dutch captain who reaches the island in 1667 and makes his own observations about the place and its inhabitants. Pine's original narrative is passed to the Dutch sailors by William Pine; this narrative is copied, but then apparently stolen, a gap in the pagination testifying to where it would have been included in Part Two. Were this not complicated enough, there then appeared, just weeks later, a third publication, or Combined Version, in which Part One is inserted back into Part Two, where, according to Van Sloetten, it should have been all along, and the entire text is again titled *The Isle of Pines*. In the Combined Version, the Dutch

narrator is now called Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten, and, in addition to his narration and that of George Pine, the text includes some supplementary paratextual material in the form of two prefatory letters, an engraved frontispiece, a four-panel illustration of the plot of the entire work, and a coda. Like *Utopia*, the title page of the Combined Version continues to present it as a genuine travel narrative: "The ISLE of PINES, OR, A late Discovery of a fourth ISLAND near *Terra Australis, Incognita* BY Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten".

Like *Utopia*, *The Isle of Pines* was quickly translated out of its original language, with a number of editions appearing in Europe soon after its first publication (Mahlberg, 2012b, 1-2). If the early publication history of the Latin *Utopia* is complex, with numerous editions following one another, and the second edition expanding on the first in terms of its paratext, then the early publication history of *The Isle of Pines* is convoluted in the extreme, as though Neville had taken the idea of a multi-layered, multiple-edition fictional travel narrative and pushed it to the point of absurdity.

As with *Utopia*, the paratext of *The Isle of Pines* destabilises the direct communication of information by the main narratives: in Scheckter's words, the "transmission of information" is "unsettled" (Scheckter, 2011, p. 54). The two fictitious letters added to the Combined Version purport to be from a Dutch merchant, Abraham Keek, the "*Friend and Brother*" of their unnamed recipient (Neville, 1668, A2v). Far from testifying to the authenticity of Van Sloetten or the veracity of his narrative, however, Keek's letters "offer only a tentative, unsubstantiated version of events", naming neither Van Sloetten nor George Pine, nor the island in question (Scheckter, 2011, p. 55). Keek apparently writes his first letter when Van Sloetten's ship has landed in at La Rochelle on its way to Amsterdam, having received an early report of Van Sloetten's narrative from "*a Merchant in this City*"; the second letter is written after the ship has sailed onwards for

Amsterdam. Both letters, brief and apparently written in haste, undermine the veracity of the narrative which is to follow. For one thing, Keek misrepresents the position of the island, placing it in the north Atlantic, "*about 2 or 300 Leagues Northwest from* Cape Finis Terre", and the population, which he estimates at "*about* 2000 English *people*", rather than the figure of "ten or twelve thousand persons", which is offered on the title page (Neville, 1668, A2r, A2v). Keek recognises that errors may have been made in the geographical calculations, which he will seek to correct: "*it may be that there may be some mistake in the number of the Leagues, as also of the exact point of the Compass, from* Cape Finis Terre; *I shall enquire more particularly about it*" (Neville, 1668, A2v). This calls to mind More's letter to Peter Giles in *Utopia*, in which he regrets the fact that he may have made errors in the exact calculation of distances and measurements, and requests that Giles should verify these calculations via Raphael Hythloday. Keek's gross error in placing the Isle of Pines in the north Atlantic rather than the southeast Indian ocean – in not only the wrong sea but the wrong hemisphere – is so inaccurate as to be entirely unbelievable, and strongly reminiscent of More's particular mention of the difficulty of fixing Utopia in an ocean. Like More's letter to Giles, which is apparently written before he has made the decision to put *Utopia* into print, Keek's letters exist in a fictional time located historically in between the completion of the narrative and before its actual publication. As Scheckter points out, by the time the reader encounters Keek's letters, they are "factually irrelevant, useful only for their sense of pressure", much as More's letter is no longer factually accurate by the time it is encountered by the reader, serving to call attention to errors and inconsistencies rather than to lend veracity to the main narrative or clarify "unfamiliar presumptions in [the] source text" (Scheckter, 2011, p. 55)

The veracity of the text seems to have been the focus of its initial reception. On his copy of the Combined Version of *The Isle of Pines*, Anthony à Wood wrote: "W[he]n this was first published 'twas look'd upon as a sham" (Neville, 1668, A2r). Wood, like Pepys, may have had the text bound with other, genuine, travel narratives, but he clearly perceived it as a work of fiction; shams were a popular form of writing in the Restoration, permitting as they did the expression of unorthodox or scandalous ideas and opinions. However, outside of Neville's own circles, it seems that a number of readers were taken in by the text's pretence and "believed that Utopia was a real place" (Chordas, 2010, p. 66). Such readings would have been encouraged by the fact that, although Wood identified Neville as the author of the text, Neville himself never admitted to his authorship (Carey, 2010, p. 203, p. 204; Mahlberg, 2006b, 133-4). The earliest responses to *The Isle of Pines* constituted a discourse on its truthfulness, with at least one reader, Henri Justel, making a "hopeful enquiry" about the island's existence and being disappointed eventually to learn of its falsity (Carey, 2010, p. 204). Like *Utopia*, *The Isle of Pines* is a text which plays with generic boundaries; modern scholarship has considered it as a travel narrative, arcadia, utopia, robinsonnade, erotic fantasy and political satire amongst other things (Fausett, 1993; Mahlberg 2012b, 4). In considering the question of genre, Daniel Carey draws attention to Wood's classification of *The Isle of Pines* as a sham, noting "the capacity of forged documents to move in an unsettling way between the generic boundaries that separate fiction and history, or fantasy and truth" (Carey, 1993, 23). Like *Utopia*, *The Isle of Pines* is a text which disturbs the clear demarcation of genre and raises questions about the possibility of categorizing and indeed reliably making sense of written texts.

Lennard Davis argued in *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* that the roots of the novel can be separated altogether from the category of fiction, with early

novelists tending to claim that their works were true. In order to avoid the censure accorded to fictional literature, the novel instead affiliates itself with "news", thus committing itself, in Davis's words, to the "inherent doubleness and reflexivity" of "an ambiguous form – a factual fiction which denied its fictionality and produced in its readers a characteristic uncertainty or ambivalence as to whether they were reading something true or false" (Davis, 1983, p. 36). The utopian novel, which has its roots in the seventeenth-century utopian fictions that continued to be strongly influenced by *Utopia* itself, affiliates, like *Utopia*, with travel writing, also a genre which lies on the borders between fact and fiction. This affiliation with travel writing, the consequent "inherent doubleness" of early modern utopian texts, and the uncertainty or ambivalence produced in their readership, are important ways in which these utopian novels, *The Isle of Pines* amongst them, had their origins in *Utopia*, a text which has an "inherent doubleness" at its core. Like other utopian novels, *The Isle of Pines* is a fundamentally unstable text, having in common with *Utopia* its multiple layers of narration and narrative voices, complex paratexts and generic unfixedness, which combine to destabilise a straightforward reading of the text.

*The Isle of Pines* also shares *Utopia*'s interest in the fallibility of representation and the text's capacity to denote anything with accuracy. This implicit critique of representation is present in the description of the island and in the main body of Van Sloetten's narrative, but it comes to the fore in the paratextual material, and especially the text's coda or Post-Script. In this Post-Script, we are told about a mistake made by the Isle of Pines' seventeenth-century inhabitants, who, on hearing the music of bagpipes, are convinced that the musical instrument is a living entity:

> to see the admiration of those naked people concerning them, would have striken you into admiration; long time it was before we could perswade them that it was not

> a living creature, although they were permitted to touch and feel it (Neville, 1668, p. 31).

The inhabitants cannot understand that the music could be a representation, mimesis, rather than an actual being. Further blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, Neville seems to have taken this anecdote from a contemporary travel narrative, *The Golden Coast*, which had been published three years previously, in which native people also confuse bagpipes with a living being (Anonymous, 1665, p. 89; Mahlberg, 2008, p. 136).

Their belief that the music emanates from a creature is in both anecdotes a comment on the naivety of the audience. The response of the inhabitants of the Isle of Pines is born of lack of experience, though not, we are told, of stupidity: "and yet are the people very intelligible, retaining a great part of the Ingenuity and Gallantry of the English Nation, though they have not that happy means to express themselves" (Neville, 1668, p. 31). In Neville's version of this story, the bagpipe-player is an Irishman who is 'un-English'd' by his time abroad and can no longer remember the English language, but has learned the bagpipes in England, remembered the technique and taken the instrument to sea with him. The man himself possesses multiple identities, constituting a mixture of cultural, national, and linguistic characteristics. In retaining part of their English identity, the islanders apparently retain what the text perceives to be their native English intelligence, but they are unable to distinguish between reality and its simulacrum in listening to the bagpipes' music. The naked natives in the Post-Script stand in for the reader of the text, who may, like Henri Justel, naively believe that *The Isle of Pines* is a genuine travel narrative.

## Conclusion

Like many other early modern utopias, including the island of Bensalem in Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Utopia and the Isle of Pines are societies that stand on the brink of being

known. Each text revels in this position as both known and not-known, lying on the borders between the factual and the fictional, and resists simple categorisation. These are undeniably very different utopias, written for different audiences, but they share an interest not only in the nature of the good life but also in more serious political and literary questions: to return to Lilley's formulation, they critique the world as it is, and they also critique representation as it is. Following *Utopia*, political and fictional utopias are distinct in some ways, but continue to be related by this shared interest in critiquing the world within a mode of writing that questions its own capacity for accurate representation. Fictional utopias are still political, in registering to a greater or lesser extent a dissatisfaction with the status quo, even when, like Morus, they are sceptical about plans for improvement.

Bibliography

The place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

Anonymous, *The Golden Coast, or, A description of Guinney* (1665)

Baker-Smith, Dominic, *More's* Utopia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000)

Barlow, William, *A defence of the articles of the Protestants religion in aunsweare to a libell lately cast abroad, intituled Certaine articles, or forcible reasons, discouering the palpable absurdities, and most intricate errours of the Protestantes religion* (1601)

Boesky, Amy, *Founding Fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996)

Brathwait, Richard, "To the Pious Memory of Sir Richard Hutton Knight", in *Astraea's Teares: An Elegie Vpon the death of that Reverend, Learned and Honest Judge, Sir Richard Hutton, Knight* (1641)

Browne, Thomas, *Pseudodoxia epidemica, or, Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths* (1646)

Bruce, Susan, ed., *Three Early Modern Utopias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Burton, Robert, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Carey, Daniel, "Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines*: Travel, Forgery, and the Problem of Genre," *Angelaki* 1: 2 (1993), 23-29

Carey, Daniel, "Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines*: from Sexual Utopia to Political Dystopia", in *New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Chloë Houston (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 203-218

Chordas, Nina, *Forms in Early Modern Utopia: The Ethnography of Perfection* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)

Csaba, Maczelka, "The Uses of Paratextuality and Dialogicity in Early Modern English Utopias", PhD thesis, Szegedi Tudományegyetem, 2013

Davis, Lennard J., *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983)

Denbo, Seth, "Generating Regenerated Generations: Race, Kinship and Sexuality on Henry Neville's *Isle of Pines* (1668)", in *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*, ed. by Brenda Tooley and Nicole Pohl (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 147-61

Fausett, David, *Writing the New World: Imaginary Voyages and Utopias of the Great Southern Land* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993)

Foxe, John, *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church with an vniuersall history of the same*, 2 vols (1583), vol. 2 (1)

Hartlib, Samuel, *Considerations Tending to the Happy Accomplishment of Englands Reformation in Church and State* (1647)

Hartlib, Samuel, *Ephemerides* (1649, Part 2), in the Hartlib Papers [https://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/]

Hartlib, Samuel, *Ephemerides* (1640, Part 3), in the Hartlib Papers [https://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/]

Hartlib, Samuel, Undated Note on London University, in the Hartlib Papers [https://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/]

Hexter, J. H., *The Biography of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952)

Houston, Chloë, ed., *New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010)

Houston, Chloë, *The Renaissance Utopia: Dialogue, Travel and the Ideal Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013)

Jameson, Frederic, "Of Islands and Trenches: Naturalization and the Production of Utopian Discourse", *Diacritics* 7:2 (1977), 2-21

Ladani, Zahra Jannessari, "Henry Neville's The Isle of Pines and the Emergence of Racial and Colonial Discourses in the Genre of Utopia in Britain", *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* (2014) 34, 33-44

Lilley, Kate, "Seventeenth-Century Women's Utopian Writing", in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, ed. by Clare Brent and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992)

Lucian, *The True History*, in *Lucian: Satirical Sketches*, trans. by Paul Turner (London: Penguin, 1961; repr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)

Lupton, Thomas, *Sivqila, or Too Good to be True* (1580)

Mahlberg, Gaby, “Historical and Political Contexts of The Isle of Pines”, *Utopian Studies* 17:1 (2006), 111-29

Mahlberg, Gaby, “The Critical Reception of *The Isle of Pines*”, *Utopian Studies* 17.1 (2006), 133-142

Mahlberg, Gaby, “Republicanism as Anti-patriarchalism in Henry Neville’s *The Isle of Pines* (1668)”, in John Morrow and Jonathan Scott, ed., *Liberty, Authority, Formality: Political Ideas and Culture 1600-1900: Essays in Honour of Colin Davis* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2008), pp. 131-152

Mahlberg, Gaby, “An Island with Potential: Henry Neville’s *Isle of Pines*”, in *Utopian Moments: Reading Utopian Texts*, ed. by Miguel A. Ramiro Avilès and J. C Davis (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 60-66

Mahlberg, Gaby, “Authors Losing Control: The European Transformations of Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668)”, *Book History*, 15 (2012), 1-25

More, Thomas, *Utopia*, ed. by George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; repr. 1996)

[Neville, Henry], *The Isle of Pines, or, A late Discovery of a fourth ISLAND near Terra Australis, Incognita BY Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten* (1668)

Nicholls, Thomas, *A pleasant Dialogue between a Lady called Listra, and a Pilgrim. Concerning the gouernement and common weale of the great province of Crangalor* (1579)

Purchas, Samuel, *Purchas his Pilgrimage: or Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages and Places discovered, from the Creation unto this Present* (1613)

Ralegh, Walter, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautifull Empire of Guiana*, in Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The principal nauigations, voyages, traffiques and discoueries of the English nation*, 3 vols (1599-1600), vol. 2

Scheckter, John, The Isle of Pines, *1668: Henry Neville's Uncertain Utopia* (Farnham, Ashgate: 2011)

Taylor, John, "A brood of Cormorants", in *All the workes of Iohn Taylor the Water-Poet* (1630)

Vieira, Fatima, "The concept of utopia", in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia*, ed. by Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3-27

Webster, Charles, *Utopian Planning and the Puritan Revolution: Gabriel Plattes, Samuel Hartlib, and* Macaria (Oxford: Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, 1979)