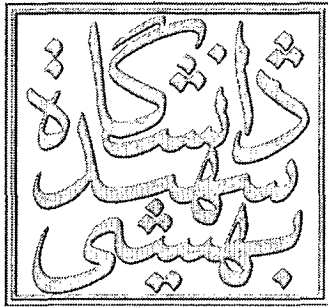


In the Name of God

112341



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# **A Post-colonial Study of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia***

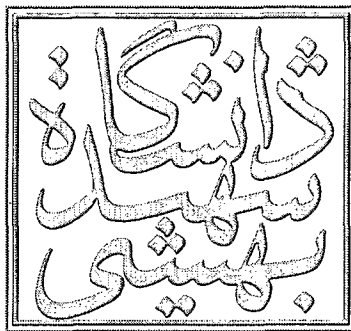
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## «خوانش پسا استعماری از آرمان شهر اثر سر توماس مور»

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I dedicate this thesis to the soul of my deceased mother and the hands of my hardworking father.

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## Abstract

The present thesis is a study of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* from a post-colonial view point. Since this text is a product of Renaissance humanism it also calls for a careful consideration of the humanism as a dominant discourse in different eras after the Renaissance. The consideration of the humanist ideology from an antihumanist perspective along with a post-colonial outlook emanates from the fact that humanism, with its claim to universality of ideas, has been a fine target for the attacks of post-colonial theory. It, therefore, happened to the researcher that a fair study of *Utopia* would be impossible if lines of connections were not drawn between these two movements. To do so, a full chapter is devoted to the study of post-colonialism in general, and Said in specific. This chapter discusses the question and problems that post-colonial study deals with, and then studies the features and specialties of Said's theory, including the worldliness of the text and the critic, Orientalism, and the relations of culture and Imperialism. Another chapter is devoted to the study of humanism from the Renaissance to the present time to demonstrate how the concept of power is shaped and reshaped in the span of time. The purpose of the given chapter is to prove that *Utopia*, as a humanist text, instructs the ruling class how to maintain power, and accordingly sets the model for the future imperialist Britain. It is discussed that the Utopian state, an absolutely totalitarian system, resorts to anything from metaphysical justification of violent practices to the instruction through education and religion in order to support the pillars of the power, and to silence what may cause its fraction. But the practice of power does not limit itself within the boundary of the island; it is applied to the other lands too. This is where the imperialistic nature of the Utopian state, having the totalitarian nature behind,

forms colonies outside. Another full chapter, based on the method Edward Said proposes in his *Culture and Imperialism* as 'contrapuntal reading', exemplifies the imperialist and colonialist nature of such state. This chapter firstly embodies how *Utopia* can be included in the first tradition of novel writing, based on the category Said makes, and how it encompasses the features which are the basis for establishing an empire overseas; notions such as war, slavery, civilizing mission, and self and other are discussed accordingly. The whole point of the thesis can be concretized as *Utopia* is neither a land to hope for or wish for, but it is a totalitarian system of governing which carries imperialistic mission abroad.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### ***General Background***

Sir Thomas More (7 February 1478 – 6 July 1535) was an English lawyer, author, and statesman who is generally known as a reputed and leading figure of Renaissance humanism. He actively participated in many public offices, including Lord Chancellor (1529–1532), in which he had a number of people burned at the stake for heresy. More's education began at a outstanding London school, St. Anthony's. In 1490 More entered the household of Archbishop John Morton, Henry VII's closest adviser through his mother's and father's connections. Service to Morton brought experience of the world. In 1492 More transferred to Oxford, where he first started Greek studies. More, while pursuing his legal career and entering Parliament in 1504, was drawn to the Christian humanist circle. Two years later he returned to London, where his legal and political careers blossomed. More coined the word '*Utopia*', a name he gave to an ideal, imaginary island

nation that was published in 1516; the word now is used for a tradition of writing imagining an ideal state. One of the issues More discusses in *Utopia* is the difficulties of counseling (as a lawyer) princes. This awareness kept him from accepting frequent invitations to serve Henry VIII, whose policies were often quite opposite to the humanists' philosophy. Ironically enough, he finally accepted Henry's fee late in 1517 and had a career in diplomacy (the conduct in dealing with other nations), legal service, and finance. In 1529 he was chosen as the successor to Cardinal Wolsey as chancellor (secretary of the king) of England. More was beheaded in 1535 when he refused to sign the Act of Supremacy that declared Henry VIII Supreme Head of the Church in England. In 1935, four hundred years after his death, Pope Pius XI canonized More in the Roman Catholic Church; More was declared Patron Saint of politicians and statesmen by Pope John Paul II in 1980.

Despite his busy political career, More was a prolific scholar and literary man. His writing and scholarship earned him great reputation as a Christian Renaissance humanist in continental Europe, and his friend Erasmus of Rotterdam dedicated to him the masterpiece, *In Praise of Folly*. In his communications with other humanists, Erasmus described More as a model Man of Letters and as an *omnium horarum homo*-- a man for all seasons. The humanistic project embraced by Erasmus and More sought re-examination and revitalization of Christian theology by studying the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers in light of classical Greek literary and philosophic tradition. More and Erasmus collaborated on a Latin translation of the works of Lucian, published in Paris in 1506.

Between 1513 and 1518, More worked on a *History of King Richard III*, an unfinished historiography that also greatly influenced William Shakespeare's play *Richard III*. More's work, and that of contemporary historian Polydore Vergil, reflect a move from mundane medieval chronicles to a dramatic writing style, for example, the shadowy King Richard is an outstanding, archetypal tyrant drawn from the pages of Sallust, and should be read as a meditation on power and corruption as well as a history of the reign of Richard III. The *History of King Richard III* was written and published in both English and Latin, each written separately, and with information deleted from the Latin edition to suit a European readership. In 1516 More wrote his most famous and controversial work, *Utopia*, a novel wherein a traveler, Raphael Hythloday (in Greek, his name and surname refers to archangel Raphael, purveyor of truth, and means "speaker of nonsense"), described the political arrangement of the imaginary island country of *Utopia* (Greek for no place). *Utopia* and Machiavelli's *Prince* are the most discourse forming books of the early Renaissance in the area of political thoughts. The importance of these books and other humanist books lie in the fact that they all address the ruling powers; they are designed to give instruction to the ruling class. Machiavelli's *Prince* carries on an overt announcement of what it aims at. It very directly refers to the political and military affairs of the time, and has recourse to the tangible reality. More's *Utopia*, on the other hand, relies on one of the old traditions of pure imagination. It belongs to the tradition of Golden Age and earthly paradise. Another point of difference between these books is the way the ideas are stated. More deals with the concept in a narrative using a fictional character as the sole speaker of the text, and hence, vouchsafes himself from all the dangers involved in criticizing the political condition of the time.

Machiavelli, on the other hand, uses the form of treaties. He does not seem to be as hypocrite as More does, but he is as extremist as More is. The *Prince* was written as a guide for the prince to maintain power. Machiavelli, opposite to More, sticks to the reality. He expresses the ways an aspiring prince can take to acquire the throne, or an existing prince can take to maintain his reign. To Machiavelli the most important issues are the protection of the country, hence, any action to achieve this goal is morally justified. *The Prince*, therefore, scrutinizes the acquisition, perpetuation, and the use of power in the western world. This is where both *Utopia* and *Prince*, hand in hand, build up the discourse of the time and affect a lot of later works. The importance of these two works transcends the area of literature and political thoughts in isolation. They both affect the outer reality of the society. They set the models for later states and the imperialist nations; but one by claiming to the ethics and the other by rejecting that. The history of Europe after these two political figures is full of bloodshed and war. But one cannot find any other exemplary texts which metaphysically justify the waging of wars against others for the reason of cost and benefit. These two texts—having the inauguration of the Renaissance behind, and the reservoir of classical texts—ideologically set the model for the rulers in the most concrete form. Most parts of these two books are concerned with the warfare. There are specific sections in *The Prince* which are devoted to the warfare; there is a similar section in *Utopia* included as well. To Machiavelli, war or the preparation thereof, should be the main concern for a prince,. Most of *Utopia's* concern is with the question of war. Apart from the section devoted to warfare, *Utopia* from the book I deals with this issue in many instances. There are lines of similarities between these two texts. This might have emerged from the realities of the time the

production of these two texts. Felton similarly states that “the world which gave rise to Machiavelli’s *Prince* was the same world which gave rise to *Utopia*” (121). These is this idea that in the time of deep crisis and instability the tradition of utopia flourishes and this is true of the time in which More and Machiavelli lived. The ideological crisis, the religious dissensions, along with the movements such as reformation created a time for the works like *Utopia* and *The Prince* to emerge; one takes a fictional ideal state as the site and the other takes the realistic form. Both texts are at the extreme opposite in the format of representation and both are extremist in the way they argue their assumptions.

More’s position in the history of political thought and culture is consequently of a more complex nature than Machiavelli. This comes from at least two important origins; one is the nature of *Utopia* as book which survives at the state of ambivalence in his long life. Some reads it as a pure imaginative work of literature; some as a political instruction; some believe that more wrote *Utopia* to warn us against the presence of such a state. Socialists admire More, while the church believes that More has been ironic in proposing his ideas in *Utopia*. Marxists believe *Utopia* to be an early text announcing the beginning of a movement toward communism. There are as well several other controversial ideas regarding More’s *Utopia*. The second important reason which makes the position of More of a more complex nature comes from his tragic death; his being beheaded by Henry VIII. More himself had been prosecuting the heretics and burned some at the stake. His dogmatic practice of religious decrees absolutely contrasts the religious freedom and tolerance he suggests in his *Utopia*. This heroic picture of him as a ‘Man for all Seasons’ definitely affects the reading of *Utopia*.

Interestingly enough, the name of a style of writing which deals with an imaginary land, and the way the affairs are sorted out, has been named after Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. There has of course been a tradition of utopian writing since ancient times, but More gave it a strong impetus. Glenn Negley and J. max Patric, as two figures who have worked massively on the tradition of utopias, regard three characteristics for all utopias: one is that they are fictional; secondly they describe a particular state or community, and thirdly their theme is the political structure of the fictional state or community (cited in J. C. Davis 12). Levin also generalize the concept of utopia but from a socio-historical view arguing that:

[A] comparative study of these unrealized projects, which we may call utopiology, would tell us much about the cultures and periods that endangered them. It would form a critical commentary upon the administration of justice, the ownership of land, production and exchange, employment and leisure, the relation of sexes, the education of children, religion, science, and art ... and the most important issue would involve the holding of property. (189)

Levin forwards his argument by focusing on utopia as a product of the Renaissance humanism he states that "Utopia, as a historical manifestation, has been the expression of certain times rather than others. To the Middle Ages, with their feudal hierarchies and their ultimate trust in an otherworldly City of God, [utopia] would have been inconceivable" (190). Levin reads the Renaissance humanist utopia as "the secular quest for good life" that is "abetted by few classical recollections" (190). The tradition, of course, goes back to the ancient Greek and the classical text. Some of them devote parts



to the imaginary land of perfection and some are specifically about them. We can find the origins of utopian ideas in images of perfection and imagined ideal societies from classical and biblical literature. A tension between the ideal and the real can be felt in all of the sources of utopian nature. Many of these worlds are set outside the history in a golden age, before time began or in a mythical time governed by its own rules there is this tradition of utopia in mythology too. The ideal lands in mythology are placed beyond time outside history or beyond death. The biblical story of creation seems to be one of the most important utopias. It has a high resonance in the history of thoughts; image of the Garden of Eden is a powerful image which has almost inspired most of the Occidental literature. Other ancient examples include Hesiod, Virgil's Messianic Eclogue. The Greek poet Hesiod, around the 8th century BC, in his compilation of the mythological tradition (the poem *Works and Days*), explained that, prior to the present era, there were other four progressively more perfect ones, the oldest of which was the Golden age. This is the time when nothing has felt the touch of history. But with Renaissance the locus of the utopian tradition "shifted from the temporal to the spatial" (Levin 59). This originates from the fact that the Renaissance experienced the exploration of the new lands and the New World. The interesting fact about this discovery is the ambivalent tendency of the explorers toward the event. While they invaded and dominated those lands, along with the bloodshed and wars, they call their exploration as the rediscovery of the golden age. Peter Martyre the Italian chronicler of the Columbia expeditions and earliest decades of discovery wrote about the natives of Hispaniol: "they lyve without any certain dwelling places, and without tillage or cultureyng of the grounde, as wee reade of them whiche in olde tyme lyved in the golden age" (cited in Levin 60), and he writes of the Cuba that

“these natives enjoy a golden age, for they know neither *meum* nor *tuum*” (cited in Levin 60). Levin mentions that “what struck the European eye most perceptibly, of course was the absence of European paraphernalia” (Levin 60)

With Plato's *Republic*, there happens a shift in the way the utopian tradition pictures its ideal state. Plato bases the ideal state on the political theory. *Utopia* is, undoubtedly, indebted to Plato's *Republic*; More refers frequently to Plato, and borrows several concepts from his *Republic*. There are points for military practices in both works although *Republic* is essentially a military aristocracy. The concept of a philosopher serving the state is inherent to both texts; however, More does not come to a clear conclusion about it. There is this satiric discussion about the king and his party concerning the presence of a philosopher in the state; moreover, nowhere in *Utopia* there is a clear reference to the prince or high rank officials. The importance of learning, however, is highlighted in *Utopia* too. Either book supports the idea of communism and common property. Levin elaborates on the existence of communal property formulating that “communism had been a recessive trait of the classical golden age, introduced by Ovid into *topos* when he was explaining the subdivision of the soil during the iron age” (89). This notion is one of the points which differentiate the ancient tradition of utopias from Plato's and later utopian works. More's being indebted to Plato is part of the humanists' tendency toward the classics. Plato ignores the role of family in the society, while the whole structure of *Utopia* reside over the presence of a well-established family; family is the political unit of the society. Moreover, Cotteril, in his introduction to *Utopia*, notes that More tries to apply the Epicurean philosophy to the society rather than Platonic Moral Philosophy (xxxvi).

As previously mentioned, *Utopia* has been read differently by critics through different approaches, but it is with the advent of the second half of the twentieth century that a discipline called cultural studies came into being. It is possible to view this book from the scope of cultural studies and its sub-discipline post-colonialism. Before arguing how it is possible to read the text through the postcolonial perspective, it is quite necessary to have an overview of what cultural studies are. Cultural studies, as an academic discipline encompasses political economy, social theory, literary theory, cultural anthropology, philosophy, movie studies, etc. These disciplines are all autonomous by nature; what brings them to the realm of cultural studies is the effort on the part of a researcher to relate the presence of particular phenomenon to the forms of ideology, power, nationality, ethnicity, social class, and gender. Cultural studies emerged as a particular project within a given social formation with an emphasis on the relationship between culture and politics. In later years, it became a thoroughly institutionalized practice, moving away from its original political emphasis.

From the 1970s onward, Stuart Hall's pioneering work, along with his colleagues Paul Willis, Dick Hebdige, Tony Jefferson, and Angela McRobbie, created an international intellectual movement. Many cultural studies scholars employed Marxist methods of analysis, exploring the relationships between cultural forms (the superstructure) and that of the political economy (the base). Cultural studies are indebted to the works of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's theory of maintaining hegemonic power through consent appealed to many critics and researcher to study the cultural forms based on this theory. Hence, the key point for the cultural studies is that of the cultural hegemony.

Edward Said is regarded as a leading figure in the area of cultural studies with the emergence of his highly acclaimed work, *Orientalism*. *Orientalism* focuses on the way Westerners occupy Orientals and maintain hegemonic power in these lands. Said's argument, having Foucault's idea of knowledge and power, has recourse to Gramsci's theory of hegemony; the idea that power endures itself through public consent. Said's *Orientalism* is an interdisciplinary work; it covers the study of the several disciplines including ethnography, anthropology, politics, etc. In his *Culture and Imperialism*, once more, Said deals with the relation of cultural forms with politics, this time dealing with a literary phenomenon—novel. Said's position as a figure who emphasizes on the worldliness of the critic and text brings him closer to the area of cultural studies. Said, as will be discussed in the next chapter, does not isolate the text from its relation to other cultural and political forms. He views the text as something which is *there*, and the context for him is not merely an abstract realm.

Cultural studies affect postcolonial studies, or in other words, since postcolonial studies deal with the questions such as the presence of hegemonic power, they naturally locate themselves in the realm of cultural studies. Post-colonialism does not only include literary studies; now it covers a wide range of films, paintings, museum pieces, music and so on. All these cultural phenomena are in one way or another related to the question of power and cultural hegemony. What makes it possible for a researcher to study a Renaissance text such as *Utopia* in the realm of cultural studies emanates from the fact that *Utopia*, firstly, is all concern with the question of power more than how to live a perfect life; and second, this text can be read based on the method Said takes in *Culture*