

a nice mix of delightful, provocative, well researched, and well written reflections on a subject greater than which none can be conceived.

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**Thomas More**

*Utopia.*

Transl. David Wootton.

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing  
Company 1999. Pp. 208.

US\$29.95 (cloth: ISBN 0-87220-377-8);

US\$6.95 (paper: ISBN 0-87220-376-X).

The new edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*, translated by David Wootton, is an accessible, well-organized edition of an important text in western political philosophy. The physical layout of the book, with its wide margins and large typeface, is ideal for people who make extensive marginal notes.

Wootton's introduction provides a detailed account of the historical context in which the book was written and published. He writes of More's relationship with Erasmus, with whom Wootton closely associates *Utopia*. More is also connected to specific political, theological and intellectual issues of the day. A persistent tendency here is to show the distance between More and his modern readers, who may be tempted to read him as a forerunner of contemporary political thought. For Wootton, More is a thinker with a fixed historical position.

One valuable aspect of the introduction is the discussion of problems of translation. Some earlier translations of *Utopia* use words that, even if they meant similar things in More's time, have changed their meaning in the last four centuries. Two examples that Wootton discusses are 'machine' and 'model', both of which suggest that More's account of politics was much more scientific and empiricist than is in fact the case. It is surprising, however, that Wootton passes over the history of the word 'state', which he uses to translate '*reipublicae*'. Other translators have used 'commonwealth' or 'city', which may be more appropriate.

While the detailed historical account offered by Wootton is valuable, the danger is that the reader of *Utopia* will become lost in the people and events outside of the book, and even that the outside will begin to dominate how the book is understood, more by association than by explicit interpretation.

When Wootton turns to what More is trying to say in *Utopia*, he focuses on several basic contradictions or ambiguities that riddle the text, beginning

with the title itself. For this reason, *Utopia* could be a useful text for teaching students to read carefully and closely. Wootton's introduction is a transparent text, and Wootton's introduction helps to clarify the ambiguities in

More's introduction to *Utopia*. According to Wootton, the ambiguities are in More's organization of *Utopia* as a Sileni, a figure from Greek mythology who is ugly or corrupt on the outside but is in fact beautiful on the inside. To illustrate this point, Wootton includes a short passage from Sileni of Alcibiades' at the end of the book. This passage is treated as the key to understanding the text. The text is constructed from two polar opposites: good and evil. For example, the apparent qualities of wealth are in fact a powerlessness of religion is in fact a higher power. In *Utopia*, the island city is not as a combination of opposites or the visible and the invisible. The island city is neither the good nor the evil. Sorting out what More was trying to do with this text is the primary task left to the reader.

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**Christopher New**

*Philosophy of Literature*

New York: Routledge

Cdn\$34.99: US\$21.95

*Philosophy of Literature* is designed as a text for use in the philosophy of literature, though New does not see it as a text for literature as well. Speaking as a literary scholar, New's hope is unlikely to be fulfilled. Cogent and jargon-free, the book is simply too general, too abstract, and too little concerned with the questions to meet the expectations of literary scholars. New has decided not to discuss postmodernist theories of literature, but one that will preclude reaching any level of depth.

As an introduction to philosophical discussion, *Philosophy of Literature* is lucid and thorough. It is organized topically rather than chronologically. There are 8 chapters, the first 4 on the history of literature — followed by a chapter on each of: fiction, theory, readers, imagination, metaphor, interpretation, and evaluation. New does not attempt to give a history of literature, but where and when particular positions about literature