

Q uotes from Primary Literature before 1516

The English Utopias I. seminar
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Hesiod (eighth c. B.C.)

Works and Days

The gods who own Olympus as dwelling-place
deathless, made first of mortals a Golden Race,
(this was the time when Kronos in heaven dwelt)
and they lived like gods and no sorrow of heart they felt.
Nothing for toil or pitiful age they cared,
but in strength of hand and foot still unimpaired
they feasted gaily, undarkened by sufferings.
They died as if falling asleep; and all good things
were theirs, for the fruitful earth unstintingly bore
unforced her plenty, and they, amid their store
enjoyed their landed ease which nothing stirred
loved by the gods and rich in many of herd.
Fifth is the race that I call my own and abhor.
O to die, or be later born, or born before!
This is the Race of Iron. Dark is their plight.
Toil and sorrow is theirs, and by night
The anguish of death and the gods afflict them and kill,
Though there's yet a trifle of good amid manifold ill.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, p. 7.

Ovid (43 B.C. – A.D. 17)

Metamorphoses

In the beginning was the Golden Age, when men of their own accord, without threat of punishment, without laws, maintained good faith and did what was right. There were no penalties to be afraid of, no bronze tablets were erected, carrying threats of legal action, no crowd of wrong-doers, anxious for mercy, trembled before the face of their judge: indeed, there were no judges, men lived securely without them. Never yet had any pine tree, cut down from its home on the mountains been launched on ocean's waves, to visit foreign lands: men knew only their own shores. Their cities were not yet surrounded by sheer moats; they had no straight brass trumpets, no coiling brass helmets and no swords. The peoples of the world, untroubled by any fears, enjoyed a leisurely and peaceful existence, and had no use for soldiers. The earth itself, without compulsion, untouched by the hoe, unfurrowed by any share, produced things spontaneously, and men were content with foods that grew without cultivation.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, p. 8.

Vergil (70 – 19 B.C.)

Fourth Eclogue

Next, when now the strength of years has made thee man, even the trader shall quit the sea, nor shall the ship of pine exchange wares; every land shall bear all fruits. The earth shall not feel the harrow, nor the vine the pruning-hook; the sturdy ploughman, too, shall now loose his oxen from the yoke. Wool shall no more learn to counterfeit varied hues, but of himself the ram in the meadows shall change his fleece, now to sweetly blushing purple, now to saffron yellow; of its own will shall scarlet clothe the grazing lamb.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, pp. 8-9.

Horace (65 – 8 B.C.)

Epode 16

let us seek the fields,
the happy fields and the islands of the blest,
where the earth is not plowed, but yearly it yields the grain,
and the vine is not trimmed, but forever flourishes,
and the branch of the olive never fails to blossom,
and the black fig, ungrafted, adorns its own tree,
honey drips from the hollow oak, from the lofty hills
the light-stepping spring comes splashing down.
There the goats need no orders to come to the milking pails,
and the flock returns gladly with swelling udders,
and the bear does not growl as he circles the sheepfold at evening,
and the earth does not swell up with vipers.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, pp. 12-13.

The Land of Prester John

21. Our land flows with honey and abounds with milk. In some parts of our land, no poisons harm nor garrulous frogs croak, no scorpion is there nor serpent winding through the grass. Poisonous beasts cannot live in that place nor harm anyone.

22. In the country through one of our provinces flows a river called Ydonus. This river, flowing out of Paradise, winds through the whole province at various speeds and there are found in it natural jewels, emeralds, sapphires, carbuncles, topazes, onyx, beryls, amethysts, carnelians, and several other precious stones.

27. This grove is situated near the foot of Mount Olympus, whence a transparent spring arises, possessing every kind of taste. The flavor varies, however, each hour of the day and night, and lasts a three days journey, not far from Paradise from which Adam was expelled.

28. If anyone, even if he has fasted for three days, tastes of that spring, he will suffer no weakness from that day on, and will always be as a man thirty two years old, however long he may live.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, p. 14; without author, referring to “The Letter of Prester John,” quoted in George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), 162.

Plato (427? B.C. – 347 B.C.)

Republic

- You will admit that the same education which makes a man a good guardian will make a woman a good guardian; for their original nature is the same?
- Yes.
- I should like to ask you a question.
- What is it?
- Would you say that all men are equal in excellence, or is one man better than another?
- The latter.
- And in the commonwealth which we were founding do you conceive the guardians who have been brought up on our model system to be more perfect men, or the cobblers whose education has been cobbling?
- What a ridiculous question!
- You have answered me, I replied: Well, and may we not further say that our guardians are the best of our citizens?
- By far the best.
- And will not their wives be the best women?
- Yes, by far the best.
- And can there be anything better for the interests of the State than that the men and women of a State should be as good as possible?
- There can be nothing better.
- And this is what the arts of music and gymnastic, when present in such manner as we have described, will accomplish?
- Certainly.
- Then we have made an enactment not only possible but in the highest degree beneficial to the State?
- True.
- Then let the wives of our guardians strip, for their virtue will be their robe, and let them share in the toils of war and the defence of their country; only in the distribution of labours the lighter are to be assigned to the women, who are the weaker natures, but in other respects their duties are to be the same. And as for the man who laughs at naked women exercising their bodies from the best of motives, in his laughter he is plucking ‘A fruit of

unripe wisdom,' and he himself is ignorant of what he is laughing at, or what he is about;— for that is, and ever will be, the best of sayings, That the useful is the noble and the hurtful is the base.

- Very true.

- Here, then, is one difficulty in our law about women, which we may say that we have now escaped; the wave has not swallowed us up alive for enacting that the guardians of either sex should have all their pursuits in common; to the utility and also to the possibility of this arrangement the consistency of the argument with itself bears witness.

- Yes, that was a mighty wave which you have escaped.

- Yes, I said, but a greater is coming; you will of this when you see the next.

- Go on; let me see.

- The law, I said, which is the sequel of this and of all that has preceded, is to the following effect,—'that the wives of our guardians are to be common, and their children are to be common, and no parent is to know his own child, nor any child his parent.'

Source: *Utopia Reader*, pp. 31-32.

Aristophanes (448? B.C. – 380 B.C.)

Ecclesiazusae

Praxagora. The rule which I dare to enact and declare, is that all shall be equal, and equally share all wealth and enjoyments, nor longer endure that one should be rich, and another be poor, that one should have acres, far-stretching and wide, and another not even enough to provide himself with a grave: that this at his call should have hundreds of servants, and that none at all. All this I intend to correct and amend: now all of all blessings shall freely partake, one life and one system for all men I make.

Blepyrus. And how will you manage it?

PR. First, I'll provide that the silver, and land, and whatever beside each man shall possess, shall be common and free, one fund for the public; then out of it we will feed and maintain you, like housekeepers true, dispensing, and sparing, and caring for you.

...

BL. But suppose he choose to retain it [his money], and nobody knows; rank perjury doubtless; but what if it be?

PR. I agree. But now 'twill be useless; he'll need it no more.

BL. How mean you?

PR. All pressure from want will be o'er. Now each will have all that a man can desire, cakes, barley-loaves, chestnuts, abundant attire, wine, garlands and fish: then why should he wish the wealth he has gotten by fraud to retain? If you know any reason, I hope you'll explain.

BL. 'Tis those that have most of these goods, I believe, that are always the worst and the keenest to thieve.

PR. I grant you, my friend, in the days that are past, in your old-fashioned system, abolished at last; but what he's to gain, though his wealth he retain, when all things are common, I'd have you explain.

BL. If a youth to a girl his devotion would show, he surely must woo her with presents.

PR. O no. All women and men will be common and free, no marriage or other restraint there will be.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, pp. 56-57.

The Holy Bible

Revelation of St. John (King James Version)

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Source: *Utopia Reader*, p. 67.

The Land of Cokaygne

(anonymous, probably from the early-mid 1300s)

Far out to sea and west of Spain
There is a country named Cokaygne.
No place on earth compares to this
For sheer delightfulness and bliss.
Though Paradise is fair and bright,
Cokaygne is a finer sight.
In Paradise what's to be seen
But grass and flowers and branches green?
Though paradisaic joys are sweet,
There's nothing there but fruit to eat;
No bench, no chamber, and no hall,
No alcoholic drink at all.
Its inhabitants are few,
Elijah, Enoch---just the two;
They must find it boring there
Without more company to share.
But Cokaygne offers better fare,
And without worry, work, or care;
The food is good, the drink flows free
At lunchtime, suppertime, and tea.
It's true without a doubt, I swear,
No earthly country could compare;
Under heaven no land but this
Has such abundant joy and bliss.
There is many a pleasant sight,
It's always day, there is no night.
There are no quarrels and no strife,
There is no death, but always life;
Food and clothing are never short,
You'll never hear a sharp retort,
Or see a snake, or wolf, or fox,
Horse or gelding, cow or ox,
Never a sheep or goat or pig---
And so, of course, no dung to dig---
No stud-farm of any kind;

Here there are better things to find.
There's no fly or flea or louse
In clothes, in village, bed, or house;
There's no thunder, sleet, or hail,
Or any nasty worm or snail,
No storm, wind, rain of any kind.
No man or woman there is blind,
But all is pleasure, joy, and bliss.
Happy the man who has all this!
There are rivers great and fine
Of oil and milk, honey and wine;
Water's uses there are few---
For washing in, and for the view.
The fruit is fine beyond all measure---
Everything is joy and pleasure.
An abbey's there, a handsome sight,
Of monks with habits grey and white.
The house has many rooms and halls;
Pies and pasties form the walls,
Made with rich fillings, fish and meat,
The tastiest a man could eat.
Flour-cakes are the shingles all
Of cloister, chamber, church, and hall.
The nails are puddings, rich and fat---
Kings and princes might dine on that.
There you can come and eat your fill,
And not be blamed for your self-will.
All is common to young and old,
To strong and stern, to meek and bold.
There is a cloister, fine and light,
Broad and long, a pleasant sight;
The pillars in that cloister found
Are made of crystal, smooth and round,
And at their foot and at their head
Are jasper green and coral red.

In its garden is a tree,
A very pleasant sight to see:
Ginger and galingale the roots,
And zedoary all the shoots,
The flowers are mace, quite excellent,
Cinnamon gives the bark its scent,
Cloves are the fruit, whose taste is rare.
There's no lack of cubebs there.
There are roses red of hue,
And lilies lovely to the view;
They never fade by day or night.
This must be a pleasant sight!
In this abbey are four well-springs
For ointment and for medicines,
For balm, and spiced and sweetened wine,
Always flowing, rich and fine.
All the ground these streams run on
Is of gold and precious stone,
There are pearls and sapphires blue,
Astriums and rubies too,
Emeralds, gemstones, and prasine,
Onyx, beryl, and topazine,
Amethyst and chrysolite,
Chalcedony and hepatite.
Many birds there tell their tale,
Throstle, thrush, and nightingale,
Skylark and golden oriole,
And other birds, an endless roll,
That never cease by day or night
Sweetly to sing with all their might.
And still I've more to tell of it;
The geese when roasted on the spit
Fly to the abbey (believe it or not)
And cry out 'Geese, all hot, all hot!
With garlic in great quantity,
The best-dressed geese a man could see.
The larks are known to do the same---
Land in your mouth, well-cooked and
tame,
Freshly stewed and nicely done,

Sprinkled with cloves and cinnamon.
Drinking there needs no request;
You simply take what you like best.
When the monks go in to Mass,
All the windows made of glass
Are turned into a crystal bright
To give the monks some extra light.
When the Masses have been said,
And the service has been read,
The crystal turns to glass once more
In the state it was before.
There the young monks every day
After their meal go out to play;
No hawk or other bird could fly
Faster or better through the sky
Than the monks in sporting mood,
With their fluttering sleeves and hood.
When the abbot sees them fly,
Their antics make his spirits high;
But still he calls the busy throng
Down from the sky for Evensong.
The monks, reluctant to obey,
In headlong flight swoop far away.
When the abbot sees this sight,
His monks refusing to alight,
He takes a maiden standing near,
And upon her snow-white rear
Beats a tattoo with open hand
To make his monks come down to land.
When his young monks see that sight,
By the maiden they alight,
Round about her they career,
And each one pats her snow-white rear,
And then, with all their labour done,
Soberly they walk, each one,
Home for a drink at their collation,
In file according to their station.
Another abbey is nearby---
For sure, a fine big nunnery,
Upon a river of sweet milk,

With a generous store of silk.
When the summer's day is hot,
The young nuns take a boat
And go out on the river here;
Some will row and others steer.
Once the abbey is far away,
They strip stark-naked for their play,
And leap in from the river's brim,
Showing how skillfully they swim.
When the young monks see that sight,
They all take off in rapid flight;
Each monk, descending on a nun,
Takes for himself his chosen one,
And swiftly carries off his prey
To the mighty abbey grey,
And teaches the nuns an orison
With country dancing up and down.
The monk who wants to be a stud,
A rakish angle to his hood,
Shall have, without reproof or fear
A dozen wives for every year,

Not through grace but as a right,
Purely for his own delight.
And that monk who sleeps the best
And gives himself a thorough rest,
May, if he cultivates the habit,
Hope to end up as Father Abbot.
Whoever wants to reach this place,
Heavy penance he must face;
The man who hopes to share its bliss
For seven years---be sure of this---
Must wade through pigshit to his chin,
The pleasures of Cockayne to win.
Gentlemen, well-bred and kind,
May you not leave the world behind
Till you take on this enterprise
And serve the penance for the prize;
That you may see that land at last,
Turning your back on all the past,
Let us pray God, so may it be!
Amen, for holy charity.

Source: *The Golden Dream website.*

Sources

Gregory Claeys – Lyman Tower Sargent eds. *The Utopia Reader*. New York and London: New York University Press ,1999. Referred to as '*Utopia Reader*'.

The Golden Dream website. Address:

<http://www.thegoldendream.com/landofcokaygne.htm>, date of access: 14 Feb 2010.

