



STYLISTIC DEVICES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS IN UTOPIA

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Abstract: This paper examines the stylistic devices used in Utopia by Thomas More and their functions. Particular attention is given to satire, irony, and symbolism, through which the author criticizes sixteenth-century society. The study shows that stylistic devices play an important role in revealing the main idea of the work.

Key word: Thomas More, Utopia, social, criticism, Renaissance, irony, Symbolism, dialogue.

Introduction

The Renaissance period brought significant intellectual changes in Europe. Humanist thinkers began to question traditional authority and social structures. One of the most remarkable works of this period is Utopia (1516) by Thomas More. The book describes an imaginary island where society is organized according to rational and moral principles.

However, Utopia is more than a political fantasy. It is a stylistically rich text that uses literary devices to express criticism indirectly. This research argues that stylistic devices such as satire, irony, symbolism, contrast, and dialogue play a crucial role in conveying the author's social and philosophical message. Through these techniques, More invites readers not only to imagine a perfect society but also to question the imperfections of their own. Scholars have long debated the meaning of Utopia. Quentin Skinner interprets the work as a reflection of Renaissance political thought, emphasizing its humanist background. Stephen Greenblatt focuses on irony and rhetorical complexity in the narrative structure.

Some critics consider Utopia primarily as satire, while others interpret it as a serious political proposal. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the ambiguity of the text is intentional and reflects More's careful rhetorical strategy. Despite extensive research on the political aspects of the book, fewer studies analyze stylistic devices in detail. Therefore, this paper concentrates specifically on literary techniques and their functional significance.



Methodology. This research applies qualitative textual analysis. Selected passages from Utopia are examined in order to identify stylistic devices and interpret their purpose. The study uses concepts from literary criticism, particularly theories of satire and rhetoric. The goal is not simply to list devices but to explain how they function within the ideological framework of the text. [4]

Analysis of Stylistic Devices

Satire as Social Criticism

Satire is the dominant stylistic device in Utopia. In Book I, More strongly criticizes the English legal system, particularly the practice of executing thieves for minor crimes. Through the character of Hythloday, he suggests that social conditions such as poverty and unemployment are the real causes of crime, not moral failure. For instance, Hythloday argues that “it is unjust to take away a man’s life for a small theft,” implying that the legal system is both disproportionate and ineffective. This idea reflects Renaissance humanist concerns with justice and morality. Moreover, satire is used not only to criticize laws but also to expose the hypocrisy of the ruling class. By exaggerating social problems, More forces the reader to question accepted norms. Thus, satire functions as a powerful instrument of ethical reflection and social reform.[2]

Irony and Narrative Ambiguity

Irony in Utopia operates on multiple levels. The title itself is paradoxical, combining the meanings of “no place” and “good place.” This duality creates uncertainty about whether the described society is attainable or purely imaginary. Additionally, the narrative framework introduces another level of irony. More presents himself as a listener rather than a direct authority, which distances the author from the ideas expressed. As a result, readers cannot easily determine whether the author fully supports the Utopian system.

The character Raphael Hythloday further complicates interpretation. His name suggests unreliability, yet his arguments are often logical and persuasive. This contradiction forces readers to engage critically with the text. Therefore, irony functions as a method of intellectual engagement, preventing passive reading and encouraging deeper interpretation.

Symbolism and the Critique of Wealth

Symbolism plays a key role in Book II. One powerful example is the treatment of gold in Utopian society. Gold is used to make chains for slaves and simple household objects. This symbolic degradation of precious metal criticizes European obsession with material wealth. By reducing gold to something shameful, More questions the moral value attached to money and property. The island itself symbolizes an alternative possibility — not



necessarily a perfect model, but a mirror reflecting Europe's flaws.

Symbolism is one of the most effective devices used in Utopia. The treatment of gold is particularly significant. In Utopian society, gold is deliberately devalued and used for making chains for slaves or other low-status objects. This symbolic inversion challenges the European perception of wealth as a marker of status and power. More suggests that value is socially constructed rather than inherently fixed. Another important symbol is the island itself. As an isolated space, Utopia represents both an ideal and an experiment. It allows More to explore alternative systems without directly confronting political authorities. Thus, symbolism functions as a subtle but powerful tool for ideological critique.

Structural Contrast

The structural division of Utopia into two books is a deliberate stylistic strategy. Book I focuses on real social issues in Europe, including corruption, inequality, and poor governance. Book II, in contrast, describes a carefully organized and seemingly perfect society. This juxtaposition creates a clear contrast that highlights the weaknesses of European society. The reader is encouraged to compare the two systems and recognize the possibility of change.

Furthermore, the contrast is not entirely straightforward. Some aspects of Utopian life may appear overly rigid or unrealistic, which introduces ambiguity. This suggests that More is not simply proposing a perfect model but encouraging critical reflection. Therefore, contrast functions both as a comparative tool and as a means of questioning idealism.

Dialogue and Rhetorical Questions

The dialogic structure of Utopia reflects the humanist tradition of intellectual debate. Instead of presenting a single authoritative voice, More allows different perspectives to interact. This creates a dynamic and open-ended discussion. Rhetorical questions play a significant role in this process. For example, Hythloday questions whether kings truly serve the interests of their people or merely pursue personal power. Such questions challenge political assumptions without directly attacking authority. Dialogue also increases the realism of the text, making philosophical ideas more accessible. It engages the reader as an active participant in the discussion. Thus, dialogue and rhetorical questions function as tools of persuasion and critical inquiry.

The analysis shows that stylistic devices in Utopia are closely connected to its central themes. Satire criticizes injustice; irony introduces complexity; symbolism deepens ideological meaning; contrast clarifies social differences; dialogue stimulates reflection. These devices work together to create a layered



and persuasive narrative. More avoids direct confrontation with authority by using literary strategies. As a result, the text remains intellectually rich and open to interpretation even today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Utopia* by Thomas More stands as a unique combination of political philosophy and literary artistry. This study has demonstrated that stylistic devices such as satire, irony, symbolism, contrast, dialogue, and rhetorical questions are not merely ornamental features of the text but essential components that shape its meaning and influence its interpretation. Through satire, More exposes the deep social and economic inequalities of sixteenth-century Europe, encouraging readers to question the fairness of existing institutions. Irony introduces ambiguity and prevents the reader from accepting the text as a straightforward political proposal. Instead, it invites multiple interpretations and critical thinking. Symbolism, particularly in the treatment of wealth and material values, highlights the constructed nature of social priorities and challenges dominant cultural assumptions. Furthermore, the structural contrast between the flawed European society and the seemingly perfect Utopian system allows readers to engage in comparative reflection. This contrast not only strengthens the critical message but also raises important questions about the practicality of ideal societies. At the same time, the dialogic form and the use of rhetorical questions create an interactive reading experience, where the reader becomes an active participant in philosophical discussion. It is also important to note that *Utopia* does not offer simple solutions. Instead, it presents a complex and sometimes contradictory vision of society. This complexity is achieved largely through the careful use of stylistic devices, which allow More to express controversial ideas in an indirect and intellectually sophisticated manner. Ultimately, the lasting significance of *Utopia* lies in its ability to combine literary technique with philosophical inquiry. The stylistic richness of the text ensures that it remains open to interpretation and relevant across different historical periods. By analyzing these devices, this paper confirms that literary form and content in *Utopia* are inseparable, and that stylistic choices play a decisive role in conveying the author's critical vision. Therefore, the study of stylistic devices not only enhances our understanding of *Utopia* as a literary work but also reveals its enduring importance as a text that continues to inspire reflection on justice, society, and human values.

In conclusion, *Utopia* by Thomas More demonstrates how stylistic devices can shape philosophical meaning. The work is not only a political vision but also a sophisticated literary construction. Through satire, irony, symbolism, contrast, and dialogue, More critiques sixteenth-century society



while encouraging readers to imagine alternative possibilities. The effectiveness of these devices explains why Utopia continues to be studied in literature and political theory. Thus, stylistic elements are fundamental to the text's persuasive and intellectual power.

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