



The Role of the Parerga in *Utopia*: What are “parerga”? The etymology of the word suggests that “parerga” serve as entry points into a work. *Utopia* is rich in such rhetorical ornamentation, in the form of letters from More’s fellow humanists and friends. The parerga serve to raise, sometimes quite playfully, the major interpretive concerns of *Utopia*. It’s useful to return to the parerga after reading *Utopia* as well, and to consider them afresh.

The Letter from Erasmus to John Froben

1. In this first letter, Erasmus claims that More possesses a “superhuman genius”? What is “genius” exactly? What are some of its characteristics? Does More’s book display it?
2. What does Erasmus lament about More’s education, background, and “overwhelming” activities? Do you agree or disagree with Erasmus’ judgments about these “distractions”?

The Letter of William Budé to Thomas Lupset ¹

The Map of Utopia by Ambrosius Holbein, the Utopian Poem, and the Literal Translation into Latin

1. What details about the map intrigue you? After reading *Utopia*, do any new details strike you? Why?
2. What are the chief characteristics of Utopia, its founding, its character, and its purposes, according to the poem?

The Six Lines on the Island of Utopia by Anemolius, Poet Laureate

1. How are we to understand Utopia as a “rival” or even “victor” over Plato’s great book? The poem claims the reason is that Utopia exists in reality, not merely in words. What is your assessment of this?
2. Are there other ways in which More’s book engages with or surpasses Plato’s *Republic*, one of the most famous philosophical texts on the soul, virtue, education, philosophy, tyranny, and politics?

The Letter of Peter Giles to Jerome Busleyden

1. Like Anemolius, the poet laureate of Utopia, Giles claims that *Utopia* is superior to Plato’s *Republic*. Are his reasons the same? What role does “eloquence” play in More’s book? What is the classical understanding of eloquence?
2. What does Giles admire about Raphael’s speech and why? How do the writings of “More’s brush” and “almost divine genius” compare?
3. Giles claims that he thinks he can “see far more” from More’s account than he did from Raphael’s own, and that More’s account reveals “the sources [*fontes*]” from which “all evils actually arise in the commonwealth or from which all blessings could arise, all quite unknown to ordinary folk.” What could Giles mean here?
4. Giles mentions that he has added “brief annotations” in the margins of *Utopia*. What is the rhetorical function of the side notes in the text?
5. What are the reports about Raphael’s possible death or further travels? After reading *Utopia*, which do you judge more likely to be true?
6. At the end of the letter, Giles raises a question about the credibility of Raphael’s account. How do issues of credibility figure into *Utopia*? What makes a speaker credible, or incredible? In what way is credibility established or questioned in *Utopia*? Why does Busleyden recommend *Utopia* to the world, according to Giles?

The Letter of Thomas More to Peter Giles

1. How does More describe Raphael’s language and style?
2. How do you judge More’s claim that “accuracy” or truth [*veritati*] is the aim of *Utopia*?
3. How does More present his daily life as an author? How does his choice of life compare to Raphael’s?
4. What question does More’s assistant, John Clement, raise about Utopia? How does More respond to this question?
5. Why might More include the story of the theologian who begs to become bishop of the Utopians?
6. What are the perils of publishing, according to More? What are the vices of certain audiences and readers?
7. More’s habit of addressing Giles as “my dear Peter” and “my dearest Peter” creates a warm sense of friendship in the letter. How does the rest of *Utopia* address the subject of friendship? How do you assess the various human relationships described in books one and two of *Utopia*? How does More present himself as an author?

¹ See the separate, detailed study guide to the Letter of Budé.