Fact and fiction clash and combine in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). In his second letter to Peter Giles dated February 23, 1518, More acknowledges this interaction and, responding to criticism, confronts the absurdities that the fictional character Raphael Hythlodaeus presents. The inconsistencies that characterize Utopia, More contends, exist elsewhere in the world. Further, in continuing his defense of truthful description, he denies any arbitrary appropriation of absurd names, such as Utopia, Anydrus, Amaurotum, and Ademus. Both Giles and Hythlodaeus, he adds, can testify to the accuracy of the account. Empirical reality and imaginary vision, however, become blurred: More and Giles are historical personages and interlocutors in a fictional dialogue; Hythlodaeus is a fictitious character who, according to travelers, is alive and well in Portugal. In spite of these confusions, the truth of philosophical principles and Christian teaching emerges. Less discerning readers, More concedes, may not benefit from these lessons and may relegate More the interlocutor “to [the status of] any recording secretary who merely records the opinions of others.” However, historical veracity blends into envisioned fantasy, thereby evoking for the reader a coherent picture of the reality of ideas that supersedes the twists and turns of historical observation and imaginative insights.

The ambiguities of paradox may lead to competing claims on the congruence of More’s *Utopia*. Certainly, the etymological meaning of Utopia (i.e., “nowhere”) contrasts with Hythlodaeus’s description of a *eutopia*, a happy or fortunate place. Further, the bipartite structure of the text suggests a fracture between observation and perception: the historical interlocutors More and Giles interact through dialogue in the first book with the fictional character Hythlodaeus, who notes the political and economic

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inequities in contemporary England and Europe and details through extended discourse in the second book a plausible but ideal commonwealth. Through a meticulous attention to More's stylistics, Elizabeth McCutcheon has demonstrated the dynamics and a resolution of these apparent contradictions. In spite of these convincing analyses, More's use of paradox and his means to construct a plausible but imaginary vision deserve further exploration. Thus, in examining the conflicting but cohesive picture of Utopian religious practices presented in the second book, this study intends to elucidate More's employment of paradox as an epideictic technique and, then, to review his thoughts on rhetorical principles that enable him to justify the coherence and credibility of his social conception.

Toward the end of his summary of the Utopians' religious beliefs, Hythlodaeus describes the liturgy of holydays. Unlike Christian celebrations, these rites are performed twice per month: the Final-Feast on the last day of the lunar month acknowledges gratitude for prosperity; the First-Feast on the following day offers prayers for continued good fortune. However, although Utopians, like Christians, are monotheistic, each citizen attributes qualities to Mithras whose name recalls the Persian deity. Contrasting with Gothic churches distinguished by light and lightness, Utopian temples are somber. Utopians, moreover, conceive of God freely and individually, and prayers reflect personal concerns and supplications.

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