James Steen

Response Paper 5: **“How does this exhibit source provide evidence that helps me better understand More’s critique of sixteenth century society and politics?*”***

*The Two Swords: Heresy & Just War* provided a clearer version of More’s beliefs than is available in *Utopia,* which in turn allowed me to better understand *Utopia’s* purpose. It is easy to believe, as J.H. Hexter did, that *Utopia* represents a society that More wishes to implement in real life. *The Two Swords* provides evidence that contradicts this, such as More’s advocating for the use of violence to suppress disruptive heretics. While he presents an argument for the morality of this practice, it seems to contrast with the accepting attitude of Utopia.

While it could be argued that More only advocates execution for non-Catholics with violent tendencies, he often references Luther and Tyndale as “seditious” (281) heretics, although neither employed violent tactics. While he preaches moral piety in Utopia through Raphael Hythloday, the opinions he expresses in *Two Swords* seem almost immature. His main argument for the necessity of violence in religious conflict is that ‘they’re being violent so that means we should too.’ It’s an argument that would be expected from a child on the playground, and one which I would expect an accomplished philosopher such as More to scoff at.

Having shown that More’s beliefs about what’s best for 16th century Europe contrast with the ideology of the Utopians, it can be determined that he did not intend Utopia to be outline for a society he wished to see. The interpretation that seems better suited is the idea that Utopia exists merely to critique the social norms of his society, not to propose a solution. Along with this is the idea of More intending the reader to pick and choose the aspects of Utopia’s society that they find plausible while disregarding the ones deemed ‘outlandish’. For this purpose, More’s character in the novel often challenges Hythloday’s statements but seems to agree with many of his ideals.

A more general way that the source provides evidence that helps to understand Utopia is that it provides context into More’s world and what prompts him to write it. In *Swords,* More references the killing of sixty thousand German citizens killed in 1525 for religious reasons. It is only through such harrowing examples of religious strife that the reader can fully understand More’s motivations for writing Utopia. He is living in a world where dissent from the church goes beyond speaking out- to levels of horrible violence for which More seeks a solution. While he is able to imagine this problem solves peacefully through his theoretical Utopia, the plausible solution he sees is unfortunately execution.

“I pledge that I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.

James David Steen.”