

FRANCIS BACON'S *NEW ATLANTIS*

In his *New Atlantis*, Bacon presents the first model society based on empirical science and on Machiavelli's critique of classical utopias. As such, he does not present a utopia ("no place") as More did, but Bacon sets forth what he considers to be a realizable city of peace and prosperity founded on a scientifically inductive study of nature and of "humanity."

To appreciate the issues at stake in the difference between Thomas More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*, you might consider books three and four of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as well as Swift's "Battle of the Books." In this battle between the "ancients" and the "moderns," Swift sides with Thomas More while satirizing such enterprises as Bacon's *New Atlantis* in the voyage to Laputa and in the "pure reason" of the Houyhnhnms. In book three, Swift also praises More as one of the six great defenders of freedom of all time.

What is the difference between an "ancient" utopia and a "modern" model of society? To help reflection on this issue, see the questions that follow, as well as CTMS Study Questions on [Utopia](#).

STUDY QUESTIONS

Introduction (pages 3-6)

1. Upon what is our attention focused as we and the travelers are introduced to Bensalem?
2. What contrast is presented between paragraph one and the six that follow? What is the significance of Bensalem's name (which is Hebrew for "son of peace")?

Part 1: The Strangers' House and the History of Bensalem (pages 6-23)

1. What characterizes the Strangers' House and how do the European strangers respond to it? What advice does the European leader give to his fellow travelers?
2. What are the most striking attributes of the Governor of the Strangers' House?
3. What is the first question asked by the strangers and how does the Governor receive that question (11)?
4. Why would Bacon choose *Renfusa* ("sheep-natured"; "sheeplike") for the name of this city on page 12?
5. What is your reaction to the Governor's answer? What do you find most surprising about this account?
6. What is the strangers' second question and why do you think the Governor says they "did well to ask pardon" for phrasing that question as they did (15)?
7. Given the Governor's answer, what lessons does he want to impart about Bensalem? Why would he volunteer to give the information in his "digression" (20-22)?
8. How do the strangers react to the Governor's suggestion that they could remain in Bensalem?
9. Why do you think the Governor does not let the strangers kiss his tippet (22), yet the Father of Salomon's House does (32)?

Part 2: Marriage Laws and Customs in Bensalem (pages 23-30)

1. What effect is achieved by having the narrator and Joabin describe Bensalem's marriage laws and customs?
2. What does this society seem to value most highly, as seen in these laws and customs? How does it compare and contrast with the Utopian practices?

Part 3: On the House of Salomon (pages 31-45)

1. What distinguishes this Father of the House of Salomon?
2. What is the subject of his private conference with the narrator?
3. What does this account reveal about life in Bensalem? What do the "hermits" do (33)? Who are honored with statues (42)?
4. Why end this story with the Father's giving a very large "tip" or largess (43) when such gifts offered by the strangers were repeatedly refused?

Overall

1. Who is the narrator, and what effect has his stay in Bensalem had upon him?
2. What is most valued in Bensalem by the rulers, the priests, and the people?
3. Why the title "New Atlantis" when that term is never used in the story, since the island is called "Bensalem"?

Compare and Contrast with Thomas More's Utopia

1. How does Bacon's *New Atlantis* differ from More's *Utopia*? How do the objectives of each differ?
2. Would you prefer to live in Bensalem or in Utopia? Why?