In 1968 Ursula Le Guin wrote the *Wizard of Earthsea* for me. I knew it, as I am sure thousands of other children also knew. I felt my imagination grow and my horizons expand. I saw myself in her story. Utopia is about imagination, how hard it is to imagine, but what imagination can achieve. So place Thomas More’s story between the words of two living fiction writers and you imagine something new.

“Utopianism isn’t hope, still less optimism: it is need, and it is desire” declares China Miéville in the opening essay of Verso’s quincentenary edition of Utopia. Then, with little hope, and even less optimism he begins a second essay title ‘the limits to Utopia’ with the recent report (part-funded by NASA, no less) that warned of the imminent collapse of global civilization resulting from the climate change that is coming; an immanent collapse that our unleashing of corporate monsters will make ‘difficult to avoid’.
This December marks 500 years since Thomas More’s wonder. An idea sparked in his mind by the voyages of the The Santa María, Niña and Pinta – tiny ships, no bigger than modern spaceship capsules, and named after saints and a girl. Five hundred years separate’s those voyages from the Apollo missions and the doomed Schiaparelli Mars Lander that crashed into the dust of the red planet on the anniversary of the first publication of More’s utopian dreams.

Today, in vessels named after ancient Greek (and Roman) gods and Victorian (Italian) astronomers, we no longer discover new worlds, but crash into dead red ones, as if desperately seeking an escape from the planet we are currently destroying.

Utopia can be toxic. We live in a profit-maximizing world in which it is rational “…for the institutions of our status quo to do what they do”. Profit-maximization was once someone’s utopian dream, someone Euclidean rationality. Many now dream of a better world, but often only after the apocalypse to come, and there are as many versions of that apocalypse to choose between as there are Utopias.

Thomas More’s Utopia consisted of magnificent houses that were three stories high, with glazed glass windows for all. People living in them wear “the same sort of clothes, without any distinction except what is necessary to distinguish the two sexes...”. We are living in that particular Utopia today. Our parents did not. They, and all their forebears back at least to More’s time, had stricter uniforms and traditions.
Look at our clothes today, look at our homes today, read the words from half a millennia ago and wonder how, in less than half a century, we have changed so much that what was More’s utopian vision is now, for many, reality. People today have many trades, they have some democracy and yet we are still burning up our planet and have unleashed the suited and booted corporate mad men upon ourselves. Where did they come from?

“Utopia has been Euclidean, it has been European, and it has been masculine”, concludes Ursula Le Guin in the essay that follows More’s story in this 500-year reappraisal. And she is right. The utopia that is now home to so much of humanity, living in multi-story dwellings, all wearing the same sort of clothes, is of Europe spread worldwide, it is of world of straight lines and perfect solids.

For Ursula Le Guin the many century voyage to Utopia passes by Copernicus learning that the earth is not the centre, through Darwin’s realisation that man is not either, to some place new. Imagination, she says, is our escape route. “It has no place in the vocabulary of profit making”. Earthsea was a children’s story set in an imaginary archipelagos of islands, a place of many possibilities. Reprinting Utopia between contempory stories succeeds because its stretches our imaginations to further shores, in search of the farthest shore.

Danny Dorling’s latest book, “A Better Politics” is available for free online and to buy on paper: http://www.dannydorling.org/books/betterpolitics/