

## SATURDAY

### Session IX 8:15-9:45

#### **9. A. Utopian Themes in Michael Cummings, *Children's Voices in Politics* (Peter Lang, 2020) (Colonial East)**

Robust democracy remains a utopian vision in formally democratic societies, partly because the voices of the youngest third of their people are officially excluded. As adult officials fail to address the most pressing issues of our times—including climate change, gun control, Black Lives Matter, the rights of LBGTQIA+ persons, and the defense of democracy itself—activist children, tweens, teens, and young adults are taking matters into their own hands while gaining adult allies. Adultist disenfranchisement is arbitrary, capricious, and unjust, its rationale mirroring historical reasons for preventing poor people, people of color, and women from voting: alleged political immaturity, irresponsibility, and incapacity. In the meantime, young activists have found creative ways to make their voices heard, as in the cases of Nobel nominee Craig Kielburger (Founder of *Free the Children*), Nobel winner Malala Yousafzai (on girls' rights), Nobel nominee Greta Thunberg (on climate change), and Parkland survivor Emma Gonzalez (on gun control). The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed on to by all the functioning governments in the world, has spawned a generation of child and youth activism, significant policy changes, and an explosion of scholarship on children's rights, voice, engagement, and empowerment. This roundtable will address the intersectionality of marginalization by age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability; youth-elder mentoring and alliances; multiple paths to youth empowerment including media and the arts; and adult “apathy” as a lifelong toxic effect of the official silencing of our voices during the most formative years of our lives.

Chair: Lyman Tower Sargent, University of Missouri, St. Louis

Participants:

Michael Cummings, University of Colorado Denver

Hoda Zaki, Hood College

Philip Wegner, University of Florida

## 9. B. Despair, Hope, and Facing the Darkness (Colonial West)

David Schappert, King's College (PA), "East of Utopia—Philip K Dick's Utopian-Adjacent Spaces"

Although we usually think of dystopian spaces in the work of Dick (San Francisco in *Do Androids Dream* or the depopulated Africa of *Man in the High Castle*, there are clearly also utopias, although they aren't the kinds we usually think of. There aren't utopian societies, but rather empty or sparsely populated utopian spaces. The collapse of society provides for the catalyst for some of these spaces with the hope (but maybe not the desire) for true Utopias. We see a devastated Earth turned into an unspoiled garden, occupied by the privileged few (*The Penultimate Truth*) or just by Robots ["The Defenders,"], in both cases humanity relegated to toiling underground while waiting for a future when the earth would be detoxified. Much of *The Unteleported Man* is an attempt to prove that one-way transport to a new Eden is a scam. Whether or not there is a utopia on the other side of *The Crack in Space* is the mystery this novel needs to solve. See Jeffersonburg, the norm settlement in *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, with a population of one, with a hope that it will expand to 2, even while surrounded by communities of depressives, schizophrenics, paranoids, etc. This is a strange Eden but not as strange as "Strange Eden," a story from 1954 where idyll turns to horror. Finally, although the word utopia doesn't appear the Exegesis, there are references to paradise. We'll briefly consider how this "Ecospheric Park" reaffirms his imagine of a pastoral Utopia.

Tyler Eyster, Miami University, "Spectral Addicts and Storied Future: The Narratology and Ontology of Addiction in the Modern Dystopia"

Whether it be in productions like *Breaking Bad* and *Narcos*, data from world governments and NGOs on ever-growing numbers of substance abuse diagnoses, or media coverage of a national opioid crisis, the specter of addiction looms large in the American consciousness. Given this attention to addiction and the overall popularity of literary dystopias, it seems inevitable that we see scholarship paying dedicated attention to their intersection. And yet, literary analyses of addiction have largely focused on impacts in narrative structure and style, the societal stigmatization of the addict, and/or questions of agency/selfhood (Zieger 2007, Ronell 2004, Melley 2000). Similarly, treatments of addiction within the field of utopian studies overwhelmingly examine addiction in/across a body of work(s) produced by a single author (Harper 2021, Richard 2008, Burling 2005). Thus, there seems to be little to no extant criticism aimed at producing a critical lexicon of addiction within utopian/dystopian narratives. Through close readings of pivotal portraits of addiction in dystopian narratives such as Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and Bong Joon Ho's *Snowpiercer*, this paper/presentation will offer an overview of the narratological and ontological relevance of addiction across utopian sub-genres, highlighting the spectral and precarious dimensions of this key conceptual metaphor. In particular, placing these narratives in conversation with ontologically destabilizing frameworks—namely Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's notion of "precarity," Stacy Alaimo's "transcorporeality," and Jasbir Puar's recent redefinition of the concept of "debility"—will allow for a building towards the aforementioned lexicon.

Diana Palardy, Youngstown State University, “Isolating the Prophet: The Cassandra Curse in Spanish Environmental Apocalyptic Literature”

The figure of Cassandra, cursed by Apollo to become a prophet of doom whose accurate warnings are ignored by all, looms large in environmental discourses. The “prophet” in contemporary Spanish environmental apocalyptic literature is often marginalized in a way that is evocative of the inclination to feminize ecological discourses for the purpose of dismissing them. Regardless of the actual biological gender, the figure of the prophet is subjected to a form of gaslighting by all those who oppose their environmental movement, thus mirroring the psychological phenomenon of the Cassandra Complex. These prophets are often disparaged by their antagonists as hysterical, histrionic, hyperbolic, and, on occasion, duplicitous. Cassandra’s predictions were ignored for several reasons: her prophecies were enigmatic, they required individuals to completely change their world view, the prophet was considered an outsider, and the predictions seemed distant and far off. The purpose of this investigation is to explore the degree to which these reasons factor into the reception of the prophet’s message in Spanish environmental apocalyptic literature. Furthermore, this presentation will examine the extent to which environmental discourses have been feminized in these texts, thus leading to the marginalization and isolation of the prophet.

## **Session X 10:00-11:30**

### **10. A. African American Literature and Cultural Remaking (Colonial East)**

Edward K. Chan, Waseda University, and Patricia Ventura, Spelman College, “Black Lives Matter Utopian Literature”

Recent scholarship has opened up discussions of race in utopian studies, but it is perhaps in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) era that race becomes a more common focus for utopian frameworks of analysis of race-conscious literary texts and for the growth of utopian and dystopian literature to center race. In this paper, we discuss a wave of literature explicitly challenging white supremacy that blossomed in the BLM era as the movement reshaped the popular discourse around white supremacy. If BLM formed in 2013 as a hashtag and statement against American law enforcement and the judicial system that effectively endorses the killing of Black people, it quickly grew into a central organizing force and its impact has rewritten the discourse around white supremacy and culture. We use the imbrication of BLM and utopia as a framework and organizing principle to examine selections from texts such as *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (2015), Ta-Nehisi Coates’ memoir/letter to his son *Between the World and Me* (2015), Matt Ruff’s novel *Lovecraft Country* (2016), and the post-Trump short story collections *Global Dystopias* (2017), *A People’s Future of the United States* (2019), and *The Dystopian States of America* (2020). Through this analysis we hope to take seriously the conference theme of remaking utopian studies to more consistently center issues of race in ways that will make the field speak to the profound cultural struggles of our current moment.

John Mark Robison, University of Florida, “Money, Utopia, and the Politics of Disgust in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*”

This paper considers the function of money in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* as an object of utopian desire and disgust. Throughout the novel, characters take differing positions on the role of money in black liberation. Michael Street, the young white socialist, promotes an escape from white exploitation and the money economy through a return to barter. In contrast, Son, the novel's black protagonist, romanticizes currency in his fixation on his “original dime.” He presents his all-black hometown, Eloë, as a utopian space of unalienated labor and exchange. Jadine, Son's love interest, condemns this view as naïve, as she embraces both the monetary economy and whiteness. The novel thus centers on two discourses of disgust: Son's disgust for the coprophilic impulses of capitalism and Jadine's disgust at the misogynistic traditions of Eloë. The inability to span the gap between these two forms of disgust dooms their love. While that love initially manifests a utopian impulse, this break leaves the novel without a clear image of what an alternate future might look like. I read this break not as the novel's failure but rather as Morrison's diagnosis of the political paralysis on the left which enables the emerging neoliberal order, figured in the novel's discussion of welfare.

## **10. B. Global Neoliberalism and the British Dystopia I (Colonial West)**

Chair: Richard Bodek, College of Charleston

Richard Bodek, College of Charleston, “James Bond & the Post-War Tory Anti-Utopia”

Emerging victorious from WWII, seemingly with its great-power status intact, the United Kingdom quickly encountered a series of setbacks that radically altered its global position. Indian Independence effectively ended the empire's existence. Food rationing and relative poverty would continue until 1954. Many if not most studies of utopianism at this moment focus on the emergence of the welfare state in Great Britain, a kind of “building from the ashes” that was designed to reorient Britain for a future very different from the previous half century. Often ignored is the welfare state's contemporary counter-utopia, a counter-utopia that rejected cooperation for ruthlessness, individualism, and masculinity that could make a virtue of Britain's relative poverty, one that could look at the ashes with cool disdain. Perhaps the preeminent example of this kind of thinking is Ian Fleming's agent 007, James Bond. This paper will examine the first four Bond novels. In these works, Fleming developed a character who modeled the cynical, calculating, almost bloodless traits necessary for Britain's rebirth in a new, seemingly bipolar world. The paper's emphasis will not be on the plots but on the semi-fictional world in which they occur and the very conservative characteristics necessary for Britain to survive, if not thrive, in it.

Amanda Rose, University of Florida, “Relational Space as a Means to Collectivity: The Critical Dystopia of J.G. Ballard’s *The Day of Creation*”

My paper examines the ways J.G. Ballard’s *The Day of Creation* (1987) calls attention to the original spatial challenges and possibilities that arise in the 1980s. If Ballard’s fictions in the 1960s and 1970s use surrealist techniques to project an inner schizophrenic psyche onto an external landscape, *The Day of Creation*, in both its form and content, turns attention to manner in which individuals shape external space and that space in turn impacts on an individual’s inner reality. The novel thereby provides readers with a richer representation of the complex entanglements across time and space of humans with their environments. *The Day of Creation* is a post-disaster dystopia that explores the individual’s relationships to an imminent environmental crisis. Through his narrative, Ballard unveils the complex dynamics which result in the real-world emergence of the new historical era we now call the Anthropocene. While on first glance it appears as if Ballard’s earlier optimism for a world-yet-to-come has vanished, I ultimately argue that *The Day of Creation* is a form of what Tom Moylan calls a “critical dystopia,” revealing utopian possibilities available to contemporary readers in their seemingly dystopian present situation.

## **10. C. Teaching Utopia (Citadel North)**

Chair: Claire Curtis

Peter Sands, UW-Milwaukee, “Slowtopia”

Discussion of the relationships between and among the Slow Movement and utopia, particularly in the classroom.

Briana McGinnis, College of Charleston, Teaching Radical Possibility in Hopeless Times

This paper discusses the experience of teaching a course on anarchism in 2021, during a time heavily marked by anxiety and an uncertain future. It focuses particularly on the tensions between two recurring themes in student writing and discussion: hope and a skeptical fixation on infeasibility. I discuss strategies for exploring and challenging both of these themes, and the role of the instructor in facilitating intellectual risk-taking.