

GENG 687 Literature and Allied Discourse (3.0 credits, Summer I, 08)

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Centenary College

Office Hours: T: 4-5 pm, R: 4-5 pm

Course Description: We examine, to the extent time permits, a trajectory of utopian literature from Plato's *Republic* to the present. We read these texts through the lens of classic philosophic speculations, past and contemporary, regarding human nature, particularly, our capacity for social cooperation without coercion. Using Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, I articulate what I will call 'Freud's paradox' with regard to the foundation and sustainability of a utopian society. Additionally, we employ Kant's Enlightenment anthropology and philosophy of history as laying the basis for the so-called 'blue-print' utopias of the nineteenth century. We end with the turn to classical twentieth century dystopias and examine possible historical and philosophic reasons for the shift towards anti-utopian and dystopian writing. Throughout, it is borne in mind that the utopian novel is, first and foremost, a literary enterprise, and we ask what social functions the utopian/ dystopian novel has played and may play in the future.

Texts: available at Centenary bookstore

Three Early Modern Utopias: More, Bacon, Neville

Voltaire, *Candide*

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backwards*

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

George Orwell, *1984*

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Plus packet of associated philosophic readings provided by instructor May 20th.

Course Objectives

1. Students should be able to articulate the *history of utopian literature* from its onset in Plato's *Republic* to the present [CGE4];
2. Students should be able to articulate the *social function* utopian literature has played throughout its history [CGE4];
3. Students should be able to identify, articulate and assess, the *philosophic* assumptions and theories within diverse utopian literary works [CGE 4];
4. Students will practice their ability to conduct and present, orally and in writing, independent scholarly research on literary topics [CGE 1];

Evaluation:

10%	Bb Threaded Discussion Participation
20%	Class Participation
15%	“Blueprint Utopia” Presentation
20%	Final Presentation
10%	Final Paper Abstract
25%	Final Paper

Bb Threaded Discussion Participation: Although asynchronous, threaded discussion boards can be a helpful tool for beginning and sustaining discussions outside of the few hours we meet.

I will post a question or two/ week, based on unresolved discussion during our class period. It is expected that students will participate, i.e., post, in at least four discussions during the semester.

Please see me if you need a brief tutorial on using the Discussion Board in Blackboard.

Class Participation

I'll keep this brief as this is a graduate class: class participation means you've completed the readings (both literary and philosophic) and actively discuss them in class.

“Blueprint Utopia” Presentation

The week of June 10-12th, we will be studying two classic ‘blue-print’ utopias of the 19th century: Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* and Morris' *News from Nowhere*. Given time constraints, it is not feasible for every student to read *both* books. To that end, I would

like students to pick one of these books and give a presentation (presentation only, formal paper not necessary) on its contents with respect to the following:

Describe the organizational principles of *one* institution found in the utopian society. Indicate what specific function each institution plays (e.g., distribution of goods, distribution of labor, education of youth, etc.). Indicate how/ why this institution is supposed to mitigate human suffering and/or interpersonal conflict. Discuss whether you think such an institution could succeed in this.

Final Paper:

Here are some suggestions for possible novels/ novellas:

Campanella *City of the Sun*
Henry Neville, *Isle of Pines*
Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* and *Erewhon Revisited*
Aldous Huxley, *Island* or *Ape and Essence*
Ayn Rand, *Anthem*
Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*
H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* or *A Modern Utopia*
Lois Lowry, *The Giver*
Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*
Chernashevsky, *What is To Be Done?*
Doris Lessing, *The Cleft*
Ursula K le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Paper MLA format, min.9 maximum 12 pages (most conference papers are roughly 3000 words) Paper should address the following:

To the extent the novel is a utopian/ dystopian work, there should be at least one easily identifiable social issue and/or philosophic question (from the author's time and/ or our own) that is addressed.

Pick *one* social issue or philosophic question addressed by the novel chosen;

- Detail how specific characters, events, etc. illustrate the dynamic of this social issue/ philosophic question;
- Discuss how, if at all, this social issue/ philosophic question is resolved, or if it remains unresolved—why;
- Be sure, at some point, to indicate the extent to which the views expressed and implied can be taken to be the opinion of the author on that topic;
- Indicate what is at stake in this issue—what difference does it make whether (and how) it is resolved;
- Last—how do you think we should read this novel today? What message, warning, hopes should we carry from it?

Abstract: By T, June 24th, your paper/ thesis should be completed to the extent that you can write an abstract, which, in essence, is a very brief (100-150 word) summary of your paper.

Please make copies of your abstract for every student in the class, as well as a copy to hand in for me.

Final Presentation: Our last class will be held as a symposium in which each student will present his/ her research and field questions from myself and other students.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All students are expected to adhere to Centenary College's policy concerning academic honesty. Any student found cheating, plagiarizing, submitting non-original work, etc., will receive a grade of zero (0) for that work. Flagrant cases of academic dishonesty may result in the student being dismissed from the class and referred to the Academic Review Board for further action or sanction as deemed appropriate, up to and including dismissal from Centenary College.

"PUBLICATION" OF WRITTEN WORK AND ASSIGNMENTS: By your continuation in this course and by submitting written assignments and work, you understand that you are granting me permission under the Federal Education Records Act and a limited license to publish that work for the purposes of grading the work. That limited license extends to my submission, within my sole discretion, to various electronic grading tools (e.g., grading books, cite checkers, etc.) and to other faculty members.

ACADEMIC CODE: Students should be aware that all violations of the Academic Code, which can be found in the College Catalog and the Student Handbook, will be reported by the faculty member to the Academic Review Board for their consideration.

Disability Accommodations

Students with documented disabilities are entitled under the law to reasonable accommodations. If you have a disability and need accommodations, please notify the instructor as early as possible during the semester. You should also contact the Office of Disability Services: 908.852.1400 ext. 2251 or specialsneeds@centenarycollege.edu

Schedule of Topics and Assignments: subject to revision if necessary

- T, May 20: Introduction to the Course: Utopia, Utopianism, Dystopia, Anti-utopia.
watch *Lord of the Flies*
- R, May 22: Plato's *Republic* (selections)
Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (selections)
- T, May 27: Thomas More *Utopia*
Thomas Hobbes/ Adam Smith
- R, May 29: Francis Bacon *New Atlantis*
Selections from Francis Bacon
- T, June 3: Voltaire, *Candide*
Leibniz, *Theodicy* (selections)
- R, June 5: Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," "Idea of a Universal History with
Cosmopolitan Intent," Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor"
- T, June 10: Bellamy, *Looking Backwards*
Bellamy presentations
- R, June 12: William Morris, *News from Nowhere*
Emma Goldman, "What is Anarchism?"
Morris presentations
- T, June 17: Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
B.F. Skinner, selections from *Walden II* and "Freedom and the Control of
Man"
- R, June 19: Orwell *1984*
Richard Rorty, "Orwell on Cruelty"
- T, June 24: Margaret Atwell, *The Handmaid's Tale*
Paper Abstracts due (to be distributed as well to other students)
- R, June 26: **Student presentations/ Symposium**