

Shapes of Utopia

Fall 2007

English 6333-001

Dr. Roemer

T: 6-9 p.m.; Preston 304

Office Hrs.: Th.-after class; T/TH 2-3:30: 405 or 203 CH

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Nature and Goals of the Course

Shapes of Utopia examines relationships between concepts of radically better (or worse) imaginary worlds and forms of expression. "Very Selective Exploratory Investigations" would be an appropriate subtitle for the course. I make no pretense of offering an overview of utopian literature. (See the course packet for definitions of utopian literature.) Our study of utopian expressions is limited: (1) by my emphasis on American literature and culture, and (2) by the focus of the course: I selected print or electronic texts -- or experiences in the cases of historic intentional communities, museum exhibits, World Fairs, Disney World, Celebration City, Ave Maria, and our possible visits to White Hawk and the Gaylord Texas Resort -- that suggest various forms of utopian expression rather than a "representative" survey of utopian literature. Despite the focus on America, we do study British, European, Middle Eastern, and Classical texts, though (unless you count my comments about Tokyo Disneyland) no Asian and no African or South American texts are included.

To some degree the course has a chronological organization. We begin with ancient oral narratives and conclude with the Internet. The more fundamental organizing principles relate to genre, authority, "intent" and degree of self-reflexivity. We move from texts that were often viewed as sacred and not to be questioned, to texts and experiences that offer clear divisions and choices between much better and much worse worlds, to satiric and ironic visions and critiques, to ambiguous and even multi-genre utopias before we reach the Internet.

Students will leave the course with an increased knowledge of utopian expressions, of how form shapes meaning, and of how readers, viewers, and participants shape form and meaning. They will also become acquainted with major research and critical resources. Since 1975, *Utopus Discovered*, the newsletter of the Society for Utopian Studies, has provided current bibliographies. It is currently available online at <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/utopus/newsletter.shtml>. (Select "scholarship.") Since 1990, the Society's journal, *Utopian Studies*, has offered articles, bibliographies, and a substantial book-review section. The articles include retrospective evaluations of the scholarship. The Society hosts an annual conference. Information about the conference, the publications (with a searchable index of the journal), and student membership rates is available at the Society's Web site: <http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia>. This site is also has an excellent list of other Web sites related to utopian studies, as does a New York Public Library Web site: <http://utopia.nypl.org>.

Required Readings (in the order in which we will read them)

A packet of short readings (SR) – See the table of contents, p. 6 of this syllabus.
 Selections from *Utopian Literature* (ed. Johnson, designated as UL)
Looking Backward, Bellamy
Walden Two, Skinner
A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Twain
Herland, Gilman
The Giver, Lowrey
Children of Men (video or DVD; at Blockbuster, Hollywood, Premier in Dallas, or
www.net.flix.com)
Utopia, More
The Tempest, Shakespeare
Woman on the Edge of Time, Piercy
Always Coming Home, Le Guin

Tentative Schedule, Topics, Reading, Assignments

(Note: With many of the texts I will suggest optional article and/or book readings.)

Introduction to the Course & to Resources in Utopian Studies	8/30
Readings: See the “Definitions” section of SR Table of Contents attached to this syllabus, p. 6.	
Utopia in Sacred Myth and Vision	8/30,9/6
Readings: Epic of Gilgamesh (SR), Genesis (UL), Exodus (SR), Isaiah (UL), Matthew (UL), John's Revelations (UL), St. Augustine (UL), Black Elk's Great Vision (SR), Ghost Dance Visions (SR)	
"Unambiguous" Utopian Fictions and Realities	
Readings: Plato's Monologic Dialoging: Plato (UL)	9/6
The Bellamy Phenomenon: <i>Looking Backward</i>	9/13
Pastoral Behaviorism: <i>Walden Two</i>	9/20
Historical and Contemporary Experiments: Shakers, Amana, Oneida (SR), Worlds Fairs (slides), Disney World Celebration City (SR), Louis Marin's Chapter from <i>Utopics</i> (SR) Ave Marie (town) www.thepolyphonicspree.com	
	9/27
Take-Home Examination Distributed (Due Tues. , Oct. 2 by 5 PM)	9/27

No Class: Read “Satire” section & contemplate the paper with care 10/4

A Hinge Between Unambiguous and Ambiguous: Museum Exhibits

Readings: Fitting, "Representing Utopia" (SR) 10/11

Satiric Eutopias and Dystopias

Readings: Classic & British Pre-20th Century: Aristophanes (SR),
 Johnson (UL), Swift (UL), Butler (SR) 10/11
 Satire & Raw Ambivalence: *Connecticut Yankee* 10/11
 Feminist Satire, Masculine Order: *Herland* 10/11,18
 [Classic 20th-Century, SR: Dystopias: Zamiatin, Huxley,
 Orwell ; *Handmaid’s Tale* opera (handout) 10/18
 Dystopian Fables for (young &) Adults: *The Giver*,
 "Omelas," and *Children of Men* (film; see
 www.netflix.com or a video store) 10/25

Ambiguous & Self-Reflective Utopias

Readings: Renaissance & Elizabethan Antecedents:
Utopia and *The Tempest* 11/1
 Feminist Utopias: *Woman on the Edge of Time* 11/8
 Multi-Genre-Culture-Voice: *Always Coming Home* 11/8,15,29

Utopia Online Presentations due (see assignment below)

Visit www.utoronto.ca/utopia and www.nypl.org/utopia to begin your search for the site you will examine.

Reading: "Utopian Rulers . . . Online" (SR) 11/29,12/6

Review for Final 12/6

Research Paper Due Before Monday, 12/10, 5 PM

Examination 12/13

Examinations

The take-home exam will cover through the "unambiguous" utopias readings; the final will cover the rest of the course with the exception of the Internet section. Students will have three hours for the final exam. The take-home question(s) will be distributed on 9/27; the exam due date 10/2. A week before the final exam, I will distribute study sheets that indicate the nature of the question(s). The final is open book -- notes, books, and

outlines are allowed. Grading criteria: thoughtful arguments consistently related to the questions and supported with appropriate examples from the readings and discussions.

Research Paper

Due 12/10; approximate length 12-18 pages; MLA format. I would prefer that you focus your argument on the relationships between form and utopian expression; however, I am not requiring that. I can be more helpful if you select a text (or texts) from our readings, especially one of the American texts; you may, however, want to focus on a utopian text not assigned. Please consult with me about such a selection early in the semester. Your topic can range beyond print culture to include intentional communities, town plans, resorts, theme parks, exhibitions, films, and music (e.g., the Polyphonic Spree or the opera version of *The Handmaid's Tale*). Besides the usual print and electronic guides to research (e.g., the PMLA Bibliographies, *American Literary Scholarship*, *Jestor*, etc.), the tables of contents, book-review sections, and index (in Volume 10.2) to the *Journal Utopian Studies* should be helpful (the index is searchable at www.utoronto.ca/utopia). Past issues of *Utopus Discovered* and the current online version (select "scholarship") are also useful (www.cornellcollege.edu/utopus/newsletter.shtml). If you are interested in contemporary intentional communities, a good place to start research is the online communities directory at <http://directory.ic.org/>. Select "communities list." Besides articles and chapters on the text(s) you select, there are useful general studies that explore the forms of utopian expression. Besides the books and articles excerpted in the "Definitions" section of the course packet, two other important studies are Robert C. Elliott's *The Shape of Utopia* [I shamelessly borrowed his title for this course] and Gary Saul Morson's, *The Boundaries of a Genre*.

Grading Criteria: As you construct your arguments, I will expect you to support your claims with relevant references to the "primary" texts and to be able to integrate your interpretations and claims with relevant critical discussions of the text(s). Even though past students in this class have had revised versions of their papers accepted for publication, I'm not expecting "publishable papers." I do, however, expect the organization, coherence, and mechanics of the paper to be on a graduate level.

Internet Presentation

Due: 11/29, 12/6, e-create lab or a "smart" room; **no longer than 5-7 minutes (handouts are part of the presentation, handouts keyed to the three areas mentioned below.)** Begin your search for a Web site using the Society for Utopian Studies and New York Public library Web sites mentioned above (the links sections). Select one site; let me know which one you have selected by 11/15 so that we can avoid duplication in the presentations and so that I can enter the URL into the e-create lab computer. Your presentation should include: (1) a description of the site (e.g., what type of information is displayed? What is the "source" of the site? Is the site interactive? Does it have links to other sources?). (2) Indicate how this site is similar to or different from other types of utopian expressions we have examined during the semester. Some of the issues relevant to these comparisons include: Are there differences in the types of topics and issues

covered? How is the style of presentation different or similar? What are the similarities and differences in access, interaction, and implied audience? Are there similarities and differences in the "authority" for the claims or viewpoints of the site? (3) What are some of the aesthetic, cultural, or ideological implications of the differences? (e.g., to what degree can Internet utopia replace other forms of utopian expression? In comparison to a print media utopia does an Internet utopia lead to or away from more thinking about or implementation of utopian ideas?)

Field Trips to Contrasting Alternative Realities

I hope to arrange optional Saturday morning November tours of the Whitehawk community north of Denton and the Gaylord Texas Resort complex in Grapevine.

Approximate Grading Weights, Admonitions, and Encouragements

Grading Weights:

Internet Presentation	10%
First Exam	20%
Second exam	30%
Research paper	40%

Admonitions

(1) For each three unexcused absences there will be a half-grade reduction in the semester grade. (2) I have never encountered problems with plagiarism on the graduate level. If I do, the situation will be handled according to University procedures.

Encouragements

(1) If grades improve, especially for the second exam and on the paper, I will weigh the latter, better grades heavier than I have indicated above. (2) I am very willing to work with students with disabilities. These students should present the appropriate University documentation to me early in the semester. (3) Academic, personal, and social counseling is available through the Office of Student Success Programs (817-272-6107).

SHAPES OF UTOPIA
English 6333 Course Packet

Definitions of the Topic and Field

Negley and Patrick, <i>Quest for Utopia</i> (1971)	i
Suvin, <i>Metamorphoses of SF</i> (1979)	vi
Roemer, <i>America as Utopia</i> (1981)	xvi
Levitas, <i>The Concept of Utopia</i> (1990)	xxii
Sargeant, "Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994)	xxvii
Roemer, <i>Utopian Audiences</i> (2003)	xlvii
Jameson, <i>Archaeologies of the Future</i> (2005)	lii
Moylan, <i>Utopia Method Vision</i> (2007)	lvii

Texts

<i>Epic of Gilgamesh</i>	lviv
Exodus	1
Ghost Dance Songs	2
Neihardt, <i>Black Elk Speaks</i>	3
The Shakers	17
Amana	19
Oneida	20a
Marin, "Utopic Degeneration: Disneyland"	21
Aristophanes, <i>Ecclesiazusae</i>	32
Butler, <i>Erewhon</i>	34
Zamiatin, <i>We</i>	41
Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i>	50
Orwell, <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>	59
Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"	63a
"Utopia Rulers . . . Online"	64
"Disney Discovers Real Life"	66
"Is This Tomorrow? Nah, Yesterday"	80
Fitting, "Representing Utopia"	82
O'Brien, "Hail Mary, USA"	96