

Utopian Literature:  
Delusional Distractions or Essential Revelations /Spring 2009

English 4399-001

Instructor: Dr. Roemer  
T/TH 2-3:20

Office Hrs.: 3:30-4:30 T/TH; MWF by apt; 405 Carlisle

Please schedule all appointments in advance.  
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Nature and Goals of the Course

This is a particular type of selective survey of utopian literature. It begins in a rather traditional way, posing questions about how concepts of “utopia” and “utopian literature” have been defined and used, and by offering a brief historical overview. (See the course packet for a selection of brief and two extended attempts to answer the defining question by modern scholars and a variety of non-scholars as different as Confucius, Dostoyevsky, Mr. Rogers, and Oprah; for the history overview, see Kumar’s selection in the packet). Each major section of the course also uses a traditional organizational device: chronology. This is appropriate. Utopian literature is a literature grounded in dialogue. Authors often respond to earlier writings. Hence to understand the context of a particular work, it is often useful to know what preceded it. Finally, the course’s focus on utopias of the “Western World” is also traditional. What makes this course different from other traditional surveys is its arrangement on a spectrum beginning with forms of expression that were not to be questioned and ending with utopias that question themselves. To be more specific, we begin with visions of better worlds that depend upon divine authority and then move on to utopias (religious and secular) that sometimes do allow alternative viewpoints (e.g., dialogue forms) but clearly imply that one alternative is much better than the others. We next examine satiric works (from light hearted to frighteningly dystopic) that either present their vision of better worlds indirectly or ironically or even as frightening warnings that emphasize the dire extrapolations of the worst in the present. The course concludes with discussion of utopias that offer representations of better worlds that offer “answers” but also pose questions about alternative forms of utopia and even questions about the possibility of imagining utopia, while still maintaining that utopian speculation is a crucial means of understanding the past, present, and future.

Students who successfully engage in class discussions and complete the readings and in- and out-of-class written assignments should have a awareness of the nature and importance of some of the most significant American, British, and European utopian works and should be able to articulate orally and in writing their views on (1) how utopian concepts have been defined, (2) some of the most important issues raised in the utopias (e.g., economic and gender equality, impact of technology, environmentalism, the nature of happiness, individual vs. communal identity and responsibility), and (3) the importance of variety of the utopias suggested by the spectrum indicated above – how this variety suggests different forms of authority for utopian expression and different forms of readers attitudes about and responses to utopian literature.

The degree of success will be gauged according to the criteria indicated in the “Examination” and “Paper” sections below, as well as in the comments on class participation in the “Encouragements” section.

Required Readings in Approximate Order of Discussion  
(all except the handouts available at the UTA Bookstore)

Course Packet (available the UTA Bookstore)  
 Class Handouts (e.g., brief excerpts from Winthrop's "Model of Christian" Charity and  
 Le Guin's "Omelas")  
 Johnson, *Utopian Literature* (selections) [UL]  
 Sargent and Claeys, *The Utopian Reader* (selections) [UR]  
 Bellamy, *Looking Backward*  
 Skinner, *Walden Two*  
 Gilman, *Herland*  
 McCarthy, *The Road*  
 Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*  
 Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*

Tentative Schedule Topics, Readings, Assignments  
 [Except for the UL introductions, the beginning pages are in brackets.]

Introduction to the course and Scholarly Resources	1/20
Defining Nowhere	1/23, 27
Readings: The entire course packet	
First Examination	1/29
Ordained Utopias	1/29; 2/3, 5

Readings: Introductions [3-5; 87-90; 118-20 UL]; Garden of Eden:  
 Genesis (King James) [9, UR]; Golden Age: Hesiod (8<sup>th</sup> C BC),  
 Ovid (43 BC-AD 17?), Vergil (70-19BC) [7, UR]; Islands of the Blest:  
 Horace (65-8 BC); [12, UR]; Prophecies: Isaiah (King James)  
 [90, UL]; My Father's Kingdom: Mathew (King James) [93, UL];  
 Revelation: John (King James [96, UL]; Augustine, *City of God*  
 (413-426) [100 UL]; Winthrop, "City Upon a Hill" [handout]

Second Examination	2/10
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Unambiguous Utopias

Readings:

Introductions [39-40,131-34,220-24]; Plato (427-328 BC), <i>The Republic</i> [41, UL]	2/12
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Campanella, *City of the Sun* (1623) [106, UR]; Bacon,

<i>New Atlantis</i> (1629) [118, UR]; Cavendish, <i>Inventory</i> (1655) [128, UR]; Harrington, <i>Commonwealth</i> (137, UR)	2/17
Bellamy, <i>Looking Backward</i> (1888); Morris, <i>News from Nowhere</i> (1890)	2/ 19, 24, 26*
Skinner, <i>Walden Two</i> (1948)	3/3, 5
Third Examination	3/10
Satire – Lighthearted to Apocalyptically Dystopian	
Readings:	
Aristophanes (448-380 BC), <i>Ecclesiazusae</i> [56, UR]; Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> (1776) [194 UL]; Johnson, <i>Rasselas</i> , (1759) (201, UL)	3/12
Gilman, <i>Herland</i> (1915)	3/24, 26
Zamiatin, <i>We</i> (1921, 1924) [329, UR]; Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i> (1932) [347 UR]; Orwell, <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> (1949) [398 UR]	3/31, 4/2
McCarthy, <i>The Road</i> (2006)	4/ 7, 9
Ambiguous Utopias	
Readings:	
More, <i>Utopia</i> (1516) [141 UL, 81 UR + handout]	4/14
Butler, <i>Erehwon</i> (1872) [229, UR]	4/16
Piercy, <i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i> (1976)	4/21, 23, [28]
Le Guin, "Omelas" (1973) and <i>The Dispossessed</i> (1974)	4/[28], 30, 5/5, [7]
Review for Fourth Examination	5/7
Research paper Due ( <b>note:</b> 4/21 is the last day to turn in the prospectus)	5/8
Fourth Examination	5/12

### Examinations

The first exam (1/29) will be a combination take-home short essay and half-hour, in-class short-answer test. For the take-home, I will ask students to select one of the attempts to define utopia or utopian literature in the course packet (including the brief definitions in *Omni* magazine). Using our class discussions as models, they will be asked to concisely

define the strengths and weaknesses of the selected definition (two paragraphs). For the second part of the test, I will select twenty identifications or questions from a study-sheet list of 39 derived primarily from Kumar's overview in the packet. (Three are not drawn from Kumar; the "answers" will be provided on the study sheet.) The three other exams will also have two parts: the first will be short answer identifications and questions based on the readings that preceded the exam in that section of the course. The second will be an essay question that will draw upon class discussions and require students to apply the arguments and concepts discussed to several of the readings. The class before these exams I will distribute a detailed study sheet that will either indicate the nature of the question but not which of the readings that I will select or present several essay questions without indicating which one I will select. Part one of these exams will be closed book. Part two will be open-book. (Students can bring books, notes, and outlines to possible questions.) *Grading criteria for the essays:* (1) how well has the student focused directly on the elements of the question; (2) how well has s(he) supported arguments with relevant examples from the readings and discussions.

### Research Paper

Approximate length (12–15 pages, 3000-3750 words, plus notes and works cited page, MLA format). Think of the paper as a conversation which begins in your head and then, possibly with your classmates. Begin jotting note – a possible thesis or at least a definition of a topic. Try to add ideas about which parts of the text or texts might be most useful in clarifying and supporting your viewpoints. Once you have come this far, you are ready to expand the conversation by finding and reading relevant critical articles related to your topic. (See suggestions below). As you read you will probably modify your thesis and even the scope of the paper (broader or narrower). The grading criteria: I will be looking for evidence of the following processes. As you write the initial draft(s) of the paper, you can use the primary and critical sources in many ways – to lend authority to your argument, to clarify your concepts, to demonstrate that you are aware of academic discussions of the topic, to support general or specific points you want to make. Sometimes exact quotes are effective (if you include a long quote [block indented MLA form]), the reader will expect an appropriate discussion of that quote (otherwise long quotes look like padding). Sometimes paraphrasing or referring to a particular critical source will be sufficient. In terms of organization, be sure that all sections of the paper relate directly to the thesis (paragraph and paper coherence are important). In most cases it is also important to use an order of increasing importance so that the paper isn't anti-climactic. The introduction (and title) should inform and engage the readers. Inform them by defining the topic and scope of the paper; engage them with illustrative examples and by clarifying the significance of the topic. The concluding section should of course effectively summarize major points and their significance, but it should also open the conversation suggesting how your paper might illuminate other *related* issues. That type of relevant opening-up can help avoid a dead-end finish to a paper. I will also, of course, expect that the "mechanics" of the paper (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.) to be appropriate for a senior seminar paper. **Note: If you are interested in some of the modern and contemporary works (feminists, environmentalist, dystopias) read ahead to see if you would like to do a paper on one of these texts.)**

Composing a *prospectus* is a good way to approach a research paper. Students will be required to *turn in a required prospectus no later than April 21*. This is the format for the prospectus:

1. Thesis / Significance (one paragraph): indicate the concepts and or text(s) selected for examination; define the primary argument(s) claim(s), or question(s); indicate the significance of your thesis (i.e., address the “So what?” question).
2. Feasibility (short paragraph): Is it possible to address this thesis adequately in an eight-twelve-to-fifteen-page research paper? Does our library or do other Metroplex libraries have the resources you will need?
3. Method (one paragraph): identify the critical approach(es) to interpretation that you will use (e.g., biographical, feminist, New Critical, ethnic studies). Indicate why these are appropriate for your book(s) and your thesis.
4. Tentative Organization (brief paragraph): In a few sentences justify how you will order the paper.
5. Preliminary Bibliography (list): In addition to your primary source(es), the paper requires at least six critical sources in your Works Cited list that will be well integrated into your discussion (i.e., not just tacked on to reach the six minimum).

The UTA Central Library offers excellent online sources for research papers: e.g., Academic Search Premier, JESTOR, Project Muse, Library Resource Center, and the MLA International Bibliography. For American texts, the older bound copies and more recent online versions of the annual American Literary Scholarship is especially valuable. The reference librarians on the second floor are especially helpful. Ms. Rafia Mirza is the Humanities librarian, but any of the reference librarians can help.

The most important reference sources (other than some of the reference works displayed the first day of class) for utopian studies are the journal *Utopian Studies* and the newsletter *Utopus Discovered*. The Society for Utopian Studies Web site ([www.utoronto.ca/utopia](http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia)) offers links to the newsletter’s recent bibliographies and an index to the journal. Another useful Web site is <utopia.nypl.org>, the site for the New York Public Library’s utopias exhibition in 2000.

#### Grades and Course and University Policies and Support

**Approximate Weights:** First Exam (10%); Second Exam (10%); Third Exam (20%); Fourth Exam (25%); Prospectus/Research Paper (35%).

**Constructive Warnings:** (1) Plagiarism will be handled according to University disciplinary procedures. Consult chapter 2 of the *MLA Handbook* if you are confused about plagiarism. (2) If you plan to withdraw, you must follow University procedures. Professors cannot drop students; if they disappear without dropping, they receive F

semester grades. (3) Under normal circumstances, I do not accept late or e-mailed work. (4) For every FIVE unexcused absences the semester grade will be lowered a half grade. I do not have a specific policy for lateness, but I do have an "attitude." Late arrivals disturb students and teacher. If there is a persistent problem with lateness, I will begin to count the tardiness as unexcused absences.

**Encouragement:** (1) Class participation (especially in the assigned group presentations) and improvement can be important factors in elevating the semester grade. (2) I am very willing to accommodate students with disabilities. These students should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester and provide me with authorized documentation from the appropriate University office (e.g., the Office for Students with Disabilities, 817-272-3364). (3) Students needing academic counseling should consult their Undergraduate Advisor; for other types of counseling, contact the Office of Student Success programs (817-272-6107).

#### Contents of Course Packet

##### Brief, General, Traditional and Scholarly Definitions

- 2 *American College Dictionary*
- 2 *Oxford English Dictionary Online*
- 3 Karl Mannheim (1935)
- 3 Ruth Levitas (1990)
- 3 Lyman Tower Sargent (1994)

##### Brief, Scholarly Definitions of Utopian Literature

- 4 Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick (1971)
- 4 Darko Suvin (1979)
- 5 Kenneth Roemer (1981)
- 5 Tom Moylan (1986)
- 5 Tom Moylan (2000)
- 6 Kenneth Roemer (2003)
- 6 Fredric Jameson (2005)
- 6 Wilhelm Vosskamp (2008)

##### Brief, Popular Notions of Utopia Defined by Celebrities, Reformers, & Intellectuals

- 7 "Utopia" section of *Omni* magazine (1988)

##### Article-Length Definitions of Utopia and Utopian Literature

- 20 Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994)
- 40 Roemer, "Readers Defining Utopia" (2003)

##### A (Very) Brief History of Utopian Literature

- 45 Kumar, "The History of Utopia" (1991)

