



# *Utopus Discovered*

## A Most(ly) Informal Newsletter

From the Society for Utopian Studies

April 2010

## Editorial

The time has come for another issue of *Utopus Discovered* to hit the presses, and yet it has been merely three months since the last issue made its way to mailboxes far and wide. This can mean only one thing—our little newsletter is back on its usual schedule.

This issue comes at a time when many of us are nearing the end of another semester, which hopefully means that it will serve as a healthy, welcome diversion from the hectic day-to-day of academia. Should you desire even more distraction, you can now visit *Utopus Discovered* on the World Wide Web at <http://utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com>. There, in blog format, you'll find *Utopus Discovered*-style content, including PDFs of back issues of the newsletter as they are collected. (I'm even thinking of archiving the stack of back issues I have just as soon as I find the time to scan them in.) So far, the website has been dominated by postings in the category of Miscellaneous Utopia as I've stumbled across what seem to me to be topics of interest to our members. These are primarily instances of utopia in popular culture. My intention is to save a space in the print newsletter for a rundown of what's made its way onto the website between issues. Please do stop over and have a look at what's there, and be sure to leave your comments. After all, it never hurts to have another space for utopia.

The website will also serve as a home for any content that is too long for the print newsletter, such as creative pieces, essays, and the like. In such cases as a piece simply cannot be printed in its entirety, I will run an excerpt here, and post the full version on the website. But enough about the website.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who sent along feedback on the "re-inauguration" issue that was mailed out shortly after the new year. Since I am new to this editorship, your comments will help me to iron out the wrinkles as I attempt to streamline the process of compiling content and laying out the newsletter. Keep 'em coming!

Let me also take this opportunity to reprise the Membership Update that appeared in the last issue. The Society has altered the terms of the membership year to bring it in line with its annual conference schedule. Effective immediately, the membership year will now run from October 1st to September 30th. Accordingly, if you joined the society on a one-year membership before October 1, 2009, your membership has now expired, and we encourage you to renew at this time by visiting: <http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/join.html>. However, in order to help smooth this transition, all 2009 members will continue to receive new issues of *Utopian Studies* in 2010 free of charge. (Current two-year memberships will remain active until September 30, 2010.) For questions or concerns, please contact Brian Greenspan at: [brian\\_greenspan@carleton.ca](mailto:brian_greenspan@carleton.ca).

Please also note that the deadline for submission to present at this year's annual meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin October 28-31 is June 1st. The next issue of *Utopus Discovered* will not appear until after the deadline has passed, though I'll likely post another reminder on the *Utopus Discovered* website a couple of weeks beforehand.

Cheers from your editor!

—Alex Hall

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## Society News

### 35th Annual Meeting

This is the second time we're mentioning the upcoming meeting in only two pages, but it bears repeating: the next Annual Meeting of the Society for Utopian Studies will be held October 28th to 31st, 2010 at the Hilton Milwaukee City Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The theme at this the 35th meeting is "Civil Rights, Social Justice, and the Midwest." Peter Sands will serve as the local chair, while Brian Greenspan will serve as program chair.

Over at [utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com](http://utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com), you'll find the text of the call for papers. Please copy and paste it into an email and redistribute widely. The more the merrier, and all.

## Clearing Up "Dystopia"

*After the piece that ran in the last issue of Utopus Discovered in memory of Art Lewis, Dr. Kenneth Roemer wrote in to suggest we run a correction.*

*"The day after Utopus Discovered arrived," Dr. Roemer wrote, "I was reading something by Lyman Tower Sargent and realized that J. Max Patrick's claim to inventing the term 'dystopia' was way off. J. Max Patrick lived a long life and he certainly popularized the term, but he wasn't around in 1742 to invent the term!"*

*I contacted Dr. Sargent to ask if he'd mind if we ran his explanation of the term (which had circulated on the H-Net listserv) here, and he sent along the following, which ought to serve as the "correction" Dr. Roemer asked for—and then some.*

**Dystopia or negative utopia**--a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended

a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived. The first use of this word is sometimes ascribed to Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick's anthology *The Quest for Utopia* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1952), where they say "The *Mundus Alter et Idem* is *utopia* in the sense of *nowhere*; but it is the opposite of *eutopia* the ideal society: it is a *dystopia*, if it is permissible to coin a term" (248), but there were much earlier uses. Deirdre Ni Chuanacháin has noted a 1747 use by Henry Lewis Younger in his *Utopia or Apollo's Golden Days* (Dublin: Ptd. by George Faulkner) spelled as "dustopia" and used as a clear negative contrast to utopia on pages 4, 6, and 21. The poem was reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 18 (September 1748): 399-402 with the word spelled "Dystopia" on pages 400 and 401 and with a footnote on 400 defining the word as "an unhappy country". On the contrast between the two versions, see V[esselin] M. Budakov, "Dystopia: An Earlier Eighteenth-Century Use." *Notes and Queries* 57.1 (March 2010): 86-88. Before this discovery, the earliest usage appeared to be in 1782. See Patricia Köster, "Dystopia: An Eighteenth Century Appearance." *Notes & Queries* 228 (ns 30.1) (February 1983): 65-66 where she says that the first use was in by B[aptist] N[oel] Turner (1739-1826) as dys-topia [first three letters in Greek] in "Letter VIII. On his Disquisition respecting 'Religious Establishments'" of his *Candid Suggestions in Eight Letters to Soame Jenyns, Esq., on the respective Subjects of his Disquisitions, Lately Published, With some remarks on the answerer of his Seventh Disquisition, Respecting the Principles of Mr. Locke* (London: Ptd. W. Harrod, 1782), 161-94 with dys-topia on page 170 [Turner was commenting on Soames Jenys (1704-87), *Disquisitions on Several Subjects*. London: Ptd. for J. Dodsley, 1782]; John Stuart Mill used "dys-topian" in the House of Commons with *Hansard* 12 March 1868, page 1517, column 1) reporting him saying "I may be permitted, as one who, in common with many of my betters, have been subjected to the charge of being Utopian, to congratulate the Government on having joined that goodly company. It is, perhaps, too complimentary

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to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or cacotopians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable, but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable.” Cacotopia as a direct contrast to utopia was first used by Jeremy Bentham in his *Plan of Parliamentary Reform, in the Form of a Catechism*. In *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Ed John Bowring (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), 3: 493.

## At the Water Table: A Utopian Education

*Carrie Hintz is Associate Professor of English at Queens College/CUNY and The Graduate Center/CUNY, where she teaches children's literature, seventeenth-century literature and utopian fiction. She is the author of An Audience of One: Dorothy Osborne's Letters to Sir William Temple, 1652-54 (University of Toronto Press, 2005) and the co-editor (with Elaine Ostry) of Utopian Writing for Children and Young Adults (Routledge, 2005). A former co-editor of Utopus Discovered (with Nicole Pohl and Toby Widdicombe), she also served as the program chair for the Colorado Springs SUS meeting and is in her last year as President of SUS. Here she explains her journey.*

At the corner of my kindergarten classroom there was a long table filled with colored water and variously shaped plastic vessels. We played there, splashing the water, pouring it through funnels and bottles, testing their buoyancy. Wondrously, the water's color changed every day, and I rushed in every morning to see if it was blue or green or red or purple or yellow. Through the years I've asked people if they had a similar experience in kindergarten or elementary school but I've never met anybody who did—although water tables are cited in education scholarship as common in preschools, especially Montessori schools (which my kindergarten was not). Playing at the water table was absorbing but also gleeful. Intensely centered on the physical

task at hand, my mind was free to wander. Recently, when working out complicated problems, I try to imagine myself back at the water table as a way of focusing my mind, while setting it free. I would argue that the freedom to experiment and play early in life was the perfect preparation for my later encounters with utopian speculation and thought.

The institution of kindergarten itself has its historical roots in German Romanticism, and most specifically the work of Friedrich Froebel, the nineteenth-century educational philosopher who emphasized play in early childhood with his “Froebel's gifts”—the blocks, rings, tiles, and paper folding which through tactile play taught both spatial understanding and abstract principles. In his book *Inventing Kindergarten* (Harry N Abrams, 1997), Norman Brosterman argued that Froebel's kindergarten “gifts” in several ways fueled the visual and aesthetic philosophies of modern artists like Paul Klee, Frank Lloyd Wright and Wassily Kandinsky, sometimes quite consciously. Brosterman has been criticized for asserting that Froebel's kindergarten exercises were the “seed bed” of modern art. Yet his book places the products of nineteenth-century children working with Froebel's craft materials beside the artworks of artists like Piet Mondrian, showing deep commonalities in their way of seeing and composing. What we are taught early resonates profoundly throughout our creative and intellectual lives.

I wasn't introduced to the serious play of utopian writing until junior high, through the efforts of a teacher who introduced science fiction as the literature of “what if?” Science fiction, he noted, allows us to ask how human (and non-human) life would change if social and political circumstances shifted, whether through technology or some other means. It was my first exposure to literature as a means of speculating about social and political possibilities. I read a heady mix of classic authors: Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein and (later) Margaret Atwood. Foremost among my idols was Ray Bradbury, whose famous story “A Sound of Th-

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under” imagines hunters of the year 2055 traveling back to the time of the dinosaurs, accidentally killing a butterfly as they stray from the path, forever changing their own time for the worse. I was dazzled by the suggestion that even such a small action could have a huge effect—and the interconnection that implied. Moving into adolescence in the Reagan 1980s, with the looming threat of nuclear war, it felt natural to ask big questions about the fate of humanity and the nature of the future—at a time when the future, both collective and individual, seemed so much in doubt.

Becoming interested in utopian writing and thought in graduate school in the mid-1990s (initially through the study of early modern literature) was in many ways a combination of my early childhood play and the love of speculative fiction that I developed in adolescence. What struck me in utopian works was the combination of a light touch—the fantasy that made the book not at all like work—and the hard work the book was doing. In More’s *Utopia* (1516), for example, the arch ironies of the text (narrated by Raphael Hythlodæus, the “speaker of nonsense”) are passionately twinned with the most urgent arguments about the England of More’s day, roiled with the most gross inequalities and human suffering. And—in a look back at the science fiction that so captured me in junior high—it asked how people’s lives would be different if we could change the way we thought about social structures like money and work. I was also compelled by Margaret Cavendish’s *New Blazing World* (1666), a text that had been newly republished. I was impressed by its mixture of irrepressible personality and opulent fantasy. Coming to my first Society for Utopian Studies meeting in 1994 was literally exhilarating, a combination of heart and mind I hadn’t witnessed in another academic gatherings. I was struck, as many people who attend SUS are, by the ways in which disparate papers revolved around shared questions and concerns. In my second year attending SUS meetings, I began to move into the study of childhood and children’s literature, presenting a paper on *Charlie and the*

*Chocolate Factory*’s utopian/ dystopian structures in a “Youthopias” panel co-organized with Elaine Ostry. I was becoming aware of the enormous and growing corpus of utopian and dystopian writing for children and adolescents, hearing these books as invitations to play and speculation, but also places where social values are transmitted. In this phase of my career I want to consider the attempts of adults to shape and control children’s reading and culture, ultimately shifting the focus to children’s own cultural productions and utopian speculations. The utopian works I most value are ones that set your head spinning, but in a good way. This is in some way the legacy of my earliest education at the water table: fluid, calming, challenging, but above all open to possibilities we haven’t dreamed of yet.

## “The Road”

*Kenneth Roemer sent in this poem in response to the call for creative writing in the last issue of Utopus Discovered. Dr. Roemer says, “the poem was inspired by my reaction to reading [Cormac McCarthy’s] The Road.”*

*The Road*  
is a  
threadbare-bones scare tale  
told in stripped-down diction, syntax, image  
and  
formed in  
stop-start fragments  
running  
out of time.

## Microfiction

*Patrick Seth Williams, who wrote the wonderful piece entitled “Graduate Student Commitment” in our last issue, reported a contest held by HiLo Brow, which asked for Radi-*



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*um-Age Apocalypse Stories” of less than 250 words — hence the term “microfiction.” You can see many of the submissions over at hilobrow.com, but Patrick volunteered to have his submission printed here.*

## **News Reel**

Cynthia reached into the bag of popcorn that Orville held in his trembling hands. She thought his nervousness cute on their first date.

The news reel before the film started. The announcer’s voice booming about the glorious fighting of the country’s soldiers in the face of such a brave enemy as images of smartly dressed uniformed men marching synchronously and tanks loading onto cargo ships flitted across the screen.

Cynthia looked at Orville. The images reflected in his eyes. The bag of popcorn had stopped trembling. She imagined him wearing a uniform. Still too young to enlist, Orville had another year.

“You’re going to make a fine soldier,” Cynthia leaned over and whispered in his ear. She kissed him on the cheek and giggled as he blushed. “I will be proud of you.”

“And now for the national anthem,” the announcer’s voice boomed through the theater over a black still frame with white letters that read Everyone Please Stand. Cynthia and Orville mouthed the words to an image of an unfurled flag.

“Cynthia,” Orville’s voice boomed like the announcer’s across the theater. “Cynthia, wake up. I brought back food.”

Cynthia opened her eyes to Orville holding a rabbit with blood still dripping from its slit throat. She stood up from the broken chair in the the burnout theater that she and Orville had made their shelter for the night.

She touched him on the arm and kissed his cheek, “I’m proud of you.”

*After his initial submission to the HiLo Brow contest, Patrick became enamored with the form of microfiction, and wrote another piece, which is also included here.*

## **Lottery Ticket**

Branton placed the grooved edge of a quarter on the unscratched slot of an instant lottery ticket. The first two slots had cherries in them.

“Damn,” Branton muttered, “Bar.”

Branton tossed the lottery ticket over his shoulder. It made the latest marker in a trail stretching back to the gas station he and Zack had scavenged.

“What are you talking about?” Several feet in front of Branton, Zach stopped and turned back.

“These damn lottery tickets,” Branton answered. “Always get your hopes up and then give you crap. Just like a real slot machine.”

“Why did you take those things anyway?”

“Need something to pass the time. Not like the gas station had anything. Not even beer or cigarettes.”

Zack nodded. They had been walking the highway for days. The cars and houses and businesses they found had all been stripped of everything but gnawed and scattered bones.

“You don’t think...”

“Think what?” Branton tore another a ticket off its bundle.

“Oh, never mind.”

Zach turned and started walking again. Branton

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watched the rhythmic thumping of Zach's slung rifle against his pack before looking down at the ticket. He scratched off three 7's. Without saying anything, he put the ticket in his pocket and tore off another.

## Teacher's Corner

Thank you all for sharing your "utopian" syllabi and assignments with us! This collection of resources is an ongoing project, and we ask folks to continue sending contributions to [sus.teaching@gmail.com](mailto:sus.teaching@gmail.com) (see <http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/teaching.html> for more details about this initiative). These materials will be archived and available to the public on the SUS teaching blog, a digital space dedicated to both resources for and conversations about "teaching" utopia. Please visit us online (<http://teachingutopia.wordpress.com/>) and become a subscriber/contributor.

As of April 1st, the Kenneth M. Roemer Innovative Course Design Competition is no longer accepting submissions. We are excited to have received so many wonderful proposals!

The Teaching Committee will be sponsoring a number of panels at this fall's annual SUS conference in Milwaukee, including a round table (led by Ken Roemer) on teaching Ursula K. Le Guin's short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." Of course, we encourage you to submit additional "teaching" or "education"-related panel proposals directly to the conference chairs.

## CFPs

### SUS Annual Meeting: Utopian Animals

In H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905), the narrator holds a remarkable conversation between the narrator and a dog-loving botanist who declares that

the stated purposes of purging contagious diseases would never, for him, justify the mass extermination of pet dogs. The botanist staunchly concludes, "I do not like your utopia, if there are to be no dogs."

As evidenced by the March 2009 PMLA's special section and the October 2009 *Chronicle of Higher Education's* coverage on the emerging field of animal studies, the question of the animal has risen to mainstream prominence as scholars increasingly heed Claude Levi-Strauss's advice to think with the animal. I am putting together a panel exploring the figure of the animal in English and American utopian literature for the 2010 Society for Utopian Studies Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 28-31, 2010. What function do non-human animals play in these imagined communities? How do animal metaphors serve to establish—or unravel—a utopia? What do utopian texts teach us about human-animal relationships?

Any papers in any time period relating to animals in English and American utopian literature will be most welcome, with special preference for 19th- and 20th-century texts. Please send a 300-word abstract and a brief bio to [kerychez@gmail.com](mailto:kerychez@gmail.com) by May 1, 2010.

### SUS Annual Meeting: Punishment in Utopia

"Voted Off the Island: Reintegration, Exile, and Death and in Twentieth-Century Utopian Fiction"

Utopian scholars have often commented on the troubling presence of transgressions, even in societies that are reputed to have solved criminal and bad behavior through social planning. Exploring the role of punishment in utopian imaginings, we invite papers on all aspects of legal and non-legal punishment in utopian and dystopian literature and communities. Please send email submissions of 100-200 word abstracts by May 1, 2010 to Kate Broad ([kbroad@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:kbroad@gc.cuny.edu)) or Carrie Hintz ([carrie.hintz@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:carrie.hintz@qc.cuny.edu)). As you submit your abstract, please indicate if

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you have any scheduling restrictions, audiovisual needs (overhead projector; DVD/VHS player), special needs, or need a written letter of acceptance of your proposal.

## **Conference of the Communal Studies Association**

Architecture, in the fullest sense of the word, will be the theme of this conference, including not only the physical structures used by communitarians, but also the social, religious, and political organization of their communities. Held at the Southern Indiana site of two prominent intentional communities, one founded by the German Pietist Harmony Society and the other by the social reformer Robert Owen, the site of the conference will give attendees examples of various types of architecture. Tours of the New Harmony site will be included in the program. Papers, panel discussions, and audio-visual presentations are solicited, both on the theme and on the broader aspects of communal life. The deadline for Submission of Paper & Session Proposals is May 1, 2010. Please send your presentation title, a 150-word maximum abstract, and a brief (100 word) biography and contact information to: Matthew J. Grow, Center for Communal Studies, University of Southern Indiana, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, IN 47712. Email: mjgrow@usi.edu.

## **Miscellaneotopia**

### **Within Temptation's "Utopia"**

Corina Kesler, a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, wrote me recently to tell me about a song called "Utopia" by Dutch goth rockers Within Temptation. The lyrics are very interesting indeed, and the somber tone of the music matches the lyrical lament that seems to amount to a kind of utopian longing.

### **Miscellaneotopia Online Round-Up**

If you hadn't heard about [utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com](http://utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com) until you read this issue of the print newsletter, here's what you've missed in Miscellaneotopia:

**Booze-topia #1: Bacardi's "Island"** - This is one of two commercials I've seen lately that seems to equate an abundance of alcohol with utopia. Essentially, a bunch of young hipsters meet on their boats to throw rocks into the ocean, creating their own island, which quickly becomes a giant party where everyone is drinking Bacardi beverages.

**Booze-topia #2: Bud Light's "Stranded"** - In this booze-topia, a parody of the ABC series *Lost*, the Kate Austen character suggests she knows how to get a group of people off an island their airplane has crashed upon. The rest of the survivors, however, are much more interested in what's in the plane's beverage cart.

**Ultimate Utopia: Playdom's *SocialCity*** - A new gaming application has appeared on the social networking website facebook. The game is called *SocialCity*, but in ads it was billed as the "Ultimate Utopia," so, as you can imagine, it caught my eye.

The really nice thing about the *Utopus Discovered* website is that now you can comment on the cultural artifacts that end up there. If, for instance, you are addicted to *SocialCity*, you can tell your fellow utopians about it. Stop over to the website and subscribe so you can see what gets posted when, and please don't be afraid to send me your suggestions for postings!

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Our next issue of *Utopus Discovered* will appear in the fall, in advance of the SUS Annual Meeting in Milwaukee. Please keep a lookout for anything you think would be good for that issue and send it to [acohall26@gmail.com](mailto:acohall26@gmail.com). We'd love to have more pictures, for one thing, as well as reports on miscellaneotopia, and, really anything in which you think our readers may be interested. Until the fall, we'll see you in cyberspace!