

ENGLISH 731
Spring 2021
Wednesday 3:00-5:30
Bondurant 208C

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UTOPIA THEN AND NOW

Judging by the recent proliferation of dystopian and post-apocalyptic movies, comics, and novels, there seems to be little appetite at the moment for the imaginative construction of idealized worlds. And yet reading utopian thought—both political theory and literary texts—seems more important than ever in our current political climate. We cannot build what we cannot imagine. In this course we will trace the long, rich, and complex history of utopian (and dystopian) thought in literature and political theory. We will begin with Thomas More's *Utopia* and then move to the uptake of utopianism in the last decades of the nineteenth century (when literally hundreds of utopian novels were published) and its further development in the 20th and 21st centuries.

COURSE READINGS

1. Texts

The following books are available at the UM Bookstore (and elsewhere). Please use these editions of the course texts; it makes seminar discussion much easier if we're all (literally) on the same page. You are welcome to use electronic versions as long as the edition and pagination are the same as the paper editions listed here. If you're using electronic versions, please bring an electronic tablet to class to read them rather than a laptop.

More, *Utopia* (Penguin Classics; 9780141442327)
Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (Oxford World's Classics; 9780199554867)
Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (Oxford World's Classics; 9780199552573)
Morris, *News from Nowhere* (Oxford World's Classics; 9780199539192)
Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (Dystopian Classics; 9781544625874)
Trollope, *The Fixed Period* (Penguin Classics; 9780140438499)
Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (Penguin Classics; 9780141441122)
Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (Ingram; 9781597142939)
LeGuin, *The Dispossessed* (Harper's; 9780060512750)
Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (Hachette; 9781538732182)
Robinson, *Pacific Edge: Three Californias* (Orb Books; 9780312890384)
Okorafor, *Lagoon* (S+S; 9781481440882)

2. Other Reading Materials

Critical and other reading materials will be available in the class Box folder (tinyurl.com/UtopiasReadings). Readings will be uploaded at least two weeks before the class in which we will discuss them. Please **bring the readings to class with you in some form** each week, either by bringing an electronic tablet to class, or by printing out and bringing hard copies if you prefer; we will be referring to these texts extensively in class and will need to have them

before us. **Please note:** I may be adding other readings to the syllabus as we go along, depending on class interest. I will notify you of any additions at least two weeks in advance.

3. Further Reading

There is a substantial amount of primary source material and secondary criticism on related topics that we will not have time to discuss during class time. I will provide a selected bibliography for some of this material. You are strongly encouraged to use the bibliography as a starting point for your research papers and, of course, your general edification and interest.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Short Critical Paper

Each course participant will write one short (5-7 page) response paper during the course of the term. This paper will ask you to reflect on the readings for that week in a critical way, and advance an argument (or at least a few ideas of your own) about the readings. You do not have to “cover” all the readings, but your paper should engage with the week’s primary materials and at least briefly mention one critical text (or more, if you choose). This paper will be due on the **Monday before class at 5:00 p.m.**

30% of Grade

2. Critical Paper Presentation and Response

Each week, one participant will present the short critical paper to the rest of the class and respond to it. (Each class member will thus write one short critical paper and prepare one response presentation over the course of the term.) You will briefly summarize the argument of the critical paper, and discuss how it addresses the ideas of the primary and critical readings for the week as well as the overall themes and ideas of the course as they have been developing. This presentation should be about 10 minutes, and no more than 15 minutes maximum.

10% of Grade

3. Deep Reading & Article Summary

Each week (except the weeks in which you write the short critical paper or prepare the response) you will choose one secondary text for your Deep Reading, and prepare a reverse outline and brief summary of that reading. For more details, see the handouts “Grad Seminar Reading Tips & Strategies” and “Critical Article Summary Instructions” on the course Blackboard page. *You should not spend an inordinate amount of time on this assignment!* You should be able to prepare it almost entirely during the course of doing your Deep Reading, by outlining key sentences and notating as you go. The summary at the end should be no more than 2-3 paragraphs, and hopefully you will think of a couple of discussion questions as you read. Your summary will be due, by email to me, **Wednesday morning at 11:00 a.m.** Your document should be in MS Word format, and be named “**Authorlastname-Yourlastname**” (e.g. Jones-Smith, where the author of the reading is named Jones and you are named Smith).

20% of Grade

4. XYZ Thesis

At some point in the semester (your choice), you will prepare an “XYZ Thesis” analysis of your weekly deep reading article in addition to the reverse outline and summary. See the “XYZ Thesis” handout on the course Blackboard page for more information.

5. Class Discussion

Everyone is expected to participate in class discussion. I realize that some folks are chattier than others, but please do your best within the parameters of your personality and comfort level.

6. Final Project

Any student *not* enrolled in the Creative Writing program must write an 18-25 page formal research paper. Creative writing students may instead write a creative/critical project. Parameters for both options will be discussed later in the semester.

40% of Grade

COURSE SCHEDULE

1/19: **Course Introduction**

Vieira, “The Concept of Utopia,” *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*
Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Introduction
Fraser, Intro to *Four Futures: Visions of the World After Capitalism*
Close Reading Guide

1/26: **Theories of Utopia**

Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Chap. 4
da Silva, “Revisiting the Rationales of Utopianism”
Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, Chaps. 1 & 2
XYZ Thesis and Free Indirect Discourse

2/2: **Utopia**

More, Utopia

Pateman, “The Settler Contract”
Purdy, “God’s Avid Gardeners”

2/9: **The Blithedale Romance**

Berlant, “Fantasies of Utopia in *The Blithedale Romance*”
Grossberg, “Coverdale’s Queer Utopia and *The Blithedale Romance*”

2/16: **Looking Backward**

Beaumont, “Socially Empty Space and Dystopian Utopianism”
Antal, “The ‘Spectral Presence’ of the Fantastic in Wells’s and Bellamy’s Fugitive Science Fiction”

2/23: ***News from Nowhere***

Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Chapter 5

Shea, "Production and Reproduction in *News from Nowhere*"

Balasopoulos, "Ghosts of the Future"

3/2: ***A Crystal Age***

Novak, "Dreamers in Dialogue"

[POSSIBLE CATCH-UP DAY]

3/9: ***The Fixed Period***

Garcha, "The Ecologies of Choice in Trollope's *The Fixed Period*"

Blythe, "Euthanasia, Cannibalism, and Colonial Extinction in Trollope's Antipodes"

Reeves, "Euthanasia and (D)evolution in Speculative Fiction"

SPRING BREAK

3/23 ***A Modern Utopia***

Forster, "The Machine Stops"

Decker, "Politicized Dystopia and Biomedical Imaginaries: The Case of 'The Machine Stops'"

Fridell, "The Extractive Logic of Fossil Capital in H. G. Wells's Scientific Prophecy"

Kohlmann, "Slow Politics: H. G. Wells, Reform, and the Idea of the Welfare State"

3/30: ***Ecotopia***

deGeus, "Ecotopia, Sustainability, and Vision"

[POSSIBLE CATCH-UP DAY]

4/6: ***The Dispossessed***

Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"

Heise, "Reduced Ecologies"

Jameson, "Utopia and its Antinomies"

Jaekle, "Embodied Anarchy in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*"

4/13: ***Parable of the Sower***

Warfield, "Reassessing the Utopian Novel"

Fiskio, "Thinking through Enslavement and Climate Futures with Octavia Butler"

4/20: ***Pacific Edge***

Garforth, "Green Utopias: Beyond Apocalypse, Progress, and Pastoral"

Pinkney, "Problems in Utopia from the Thames Valley to the Pacific Edge"

4/27: ***Lagoon***

Hanchey, "Desire and the Politics of Africanfuturism"

Rahn, "The Precarity of Race in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*"