Shapes of Utopia
Fall 2010

English 6333-001
Dr. Roemer
T: 6-9 p.m.; Preston 100

Office Hrs.: T-after class; T/TH 11-1: 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, film, 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 -- that suggest various forms of utopian expression rather than a "representative" survey of utopian literature. (For the most recent surveys see Gregory Claeys, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature [Cambridge 2010] and Lyman Tower Sargent’s Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction [Oxford 2010]). 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 relevant scholarly and pop culture “news” and current bibliographies. It is currently available online at <utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com> (see Utopian Bibliography Returns for recent 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 *The Utopia Reader* edited by Claey and Sargent (designated as UR)
*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](http://www.net.flix.com))
*Utopia*, More
*The Tempest*, Shakespeare, in graphic novel form
*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  8/31

Readings: See the “Definitions” section of SR Table of Contents attached to this syllabus, p. 6.

Utopia in Sacred Myth and Vision

Readings: *Epic of Gilgamesh* (SR), *Genesis* (UR), *Exodus* (SR),
*Isaiah* (UR), *Revelations of St. John* (UR)  8/31
*Black Elk's Great Vision* (SR),
*Ghost Dance Visions* (SR)  9/7

"Unambiguous" Utopian Fictions and Realities

Readings:  *Plato's Monologic Dialoging: Plato* (UR)  9/7
*The Bellamy Phenomenon: Looking Backward*  9/14
*Pastoral Behaviorism: Walden Two*  9/21
*Historical and Contemporary Experiments: Shakers, Amana, Oneida* (SR),
*Worlds Fairs* (slides), *Disney World Celebration City* (SR),
*Louis Marin's Chapter from Utopics* (SR)
*Ave Marie* (town)
[www.thepolyphonicspree.com](http://www.thepolyphonicspree.com)  9/28

Take-Home Examination Distributed (Due Tues., Oct. 5)  9/28
A Hinge Between Unambiguous and Ambiguous: Museum Exhibits

Readings: Fitting, "Representing Utopia" (SR) 10/5

Satiric Eutopias and Dystopias

Readings: Classic & British Pre-20th Century: Aristophanes (SR), Swift (UL), Butler (SR) 10/5
Satire & Raw Ambivalence: Connecticut Yankee 10/12
Feminist Satire, Masculine Order: Herland 10/19
[Classic 20th-Century, SR: Dystopias: Zamiatin, Huxley, Orwell; Handmaid's Tale opera (handout) 10/19
Dystopian Fables for (young &) Adults: The Giver, "Omelas," and Children of Men (film; see www.netflix.com or a video store) 10/26

Ambiguous & Self-Reflective Utopias

Readings: Renaissance & Elizabethan Antecedents:
A text Utopia and a graphic Tempest 11/2
Feminist Utopias: Woman on the Edge of Time 11/9
Multi-Genre-Culture-Voice: Always Coming Home 11/9, 16, 23

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) 11/30, 12/7

Review for Final 12/7

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

Examination 12/14

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 9/28; the exam due date 10/5. 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 Utopian Bibliography Returns) are also useful (utopusdiscovered.wordpress.com). 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], Gary Saul Morson’s, The Boundaries of a Genre and the two new previously mentioned books: Claey's Cambridge Companion and Sargent’s Utopianism.

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: 11/30, 12/7, 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 11/19 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?)

Possible Field Trip

I hope to arrange an optional Saturday morning November tour of the Whitehawk community north of Denton.

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, I will weigh the later, better grades more heavily than I have indicated above. (2) Because of the emphasis on group presentations, consistent quality class participation can raise semester grades. (3) I am very willing to work with students with disabilities. These students should present the appropriate University documentation to me early in the semester. (4) Academic, personal, and social counseling is available through the Office of Student Success Programs (817-272-6107).
Definitions of the Topic and Field

Negley and Patrick, *Quest for Utopia* (1971) i
Roemer, *America as Utopia* (1981) xvi
Sargent, “Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited” (1994) xxvii

Texts

*Epic of Gilgamesh* lviv
Exodus 1
Ghost Dance Songs 2
Neihardt, Black *Elk Speaks* 3
The Shakers 17
Amana 19
Oneida 20a
Marin, "Utopic Degeneration: Disneyland" 21-32
[Pages 33-63 are quite appropriately utopian: nowhere to be found.]
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