

HL4023
Advanced Studies in American Literature
American Utopias
Professor Christopher Trigg

Seminar: Fridays, 2:30-5:30
HSS-TR+5

Description

The word “Utopia,” coined by Sir Thomas More 500 years ago this year, has two meanings: “good place” and “no-place.” In this class, we’ll explore the significance of both of these definitions for American culture, society, and literature. Over the course of its history, America has been seen as a “no-place,” a blank territory onto which individual dreams and shared aspirations can be projected. It’s also been regarded as fertile ground for the plantation of a variety of actual “good places”—communities designed to redress the injustices of mainstream society.

Our journey will take us to diverse places, both real and imagined: a peaceful, yet elitist, society of women in which reproduction no longer requires men; a religious group in New York state who believe that sharing possessions and sexual partners can make human beings perfect; a future California where green activists fight to preserve the wilderness.

Required Texts

Thomas More, *Utopia* (Dover - 0486295834)
Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Modern Library Classics - 0812971604)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Dover - 0486404293)
B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (Hackett - 978-0-87220-778-3)
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin - 0140436677)
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Ace Charter - 0441478123)
Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge* (Orb - 0312890389)
Ben Marcus, *The Age of Wire and String* (Dalkey Archive - 1564781968)

All other texts (those marked with a *) to be posted online.

Assessment

Preparation, Participation 10%
Presentations 10%
Term Paper 30%
Final Exam 50%

Participation and Preparation

Each Monday, two discussion questions will be posted in a thread on the course website. Students must write brief answers to both of these questions and post their answers on the thread. Answers must be posted online by 12 noon on Thursdays, the day before class. Answering these questions is compulsory.

Late Penalties

Late work submitted without an approved extension will be penalized one half-mark per day late – an A paper submitted one day late would drop to an A-, etc.

Plagiarism

Please see the Division of English’s statement on plagiarism [here](#).

Schedule

1. 12th August

America and Utopia: New Worlds

Thomas More, *Utopia*, part one

2. 19th August

The Meaning of Utopia

Thomas More, *Utopia*, part two

Richard Rorty, “Private Irony and Liberal Hope”*

Unit A: Social Utopias

3. 26th August

“The Race Problem”

Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio*

4. 2nd September

A Feminist Utopia

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

5. 9th September

“A Social System that Really Works”

B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two*

6. 16th September

The American Revolution

Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence.”*

---, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

Unit B: Religious Utopias

7. 23rd September

The Oneida Perfectionists

Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin**

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8. 7th October

In-Class Workshop: Utopian Oregon

Texts provided in class

9. 14th October

Scientology

Lawrence Wright, “The Apostate”*

Paul Thomas Anderson, *The Master* (film screened in class)

Unit C: Science Fiction Utopias

10. 21st October

Beyond Gender

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

11. 28th October

An Ecotopia

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge*

12. 4th November

A Utopia of Things

Ben Marcus, from *The Age of Wire and String*———**term paper due in class.**

13. 11th November

Revision and Exam Preparation