

UTOPIAN LITERATURE

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MA course, 2 credits, Winter, 2014

Course description

The course intends to give a comprehensive introduction to the history of utopian literature with a perspective that integrates literary criticism and hermeneutics with the ideas and methods of political science. In the analysis of utopias profit is drawn from the fact that in this genre literature and social sciences overlap. Literary theory will be kept to a necessary minimum within the framework of this course, however students will be acquainted with the basic literary concepts of satires and their interpretation, the understanding of fictional space, the uses and versions of displacement and alternative literary realities. In the second part of the course some outstanding films will also be discussed, however, the full movies cannot be watched during the meetings.

A major issue in interpreting utopias is whether they are to be analysed as alternative sociological statements (cf. Kumar 1991) or as works of fiction (cf. Firchow 2007). This course aims at an intermediate position; utopias and anti-utopias are interpreted as works that negotiate fictional social terrains which often serve as laboratories to discuss alternative options for the workings of society. Most of these works can be seen as indirect anatomies of human freedom; these books usually depict worlds where human liberty is curtailed, which makes human life deformed or meaningless, hence dystopias offer a manifold analysis of the philosophical concept of liberty.

Learning outcome

Students will be able to understand the major traditions of literary utopianism, its relationship with political ideologies and the differences between utopian and dystopian literature. With the methods of literary hermeneutics a complex analysis of such texts will be obtainable. Modern dystopias will be shown to be reactions to and criticism of contemporary social structures and trends, rather than warnings or prophecies, the way they are often interpreted.

Requirements

At least 90 per cent of attendance is compulsory. All students must read the mandatory readings before the meetings. Please note that the reading load of this course is higher than usual, however, the majority of the texts are primary literary material and hence considered to be more easily readable than theoretical or critical papers.

Students are expected to participate actively in the discussions, and will also be asked to present a reading during the semester. These in-class activities will make up 60 per cent of the final grade. 40 per cent of the grade will be made up by a 3000 word final paper. Titles must be pre-approved, academic dishonesty will be severely penalised. Final essays should be both handed in print-out form and e-mailed latest by the last meeting of the seminar.

Week 1

Introducing the genres: utopia, dystopia and satire.

The basic similarities and differences: social criticism, present or future tenses. When a literary work takes place in the future, readers often regard it as a prediction, in case of

dystopia as a 'warning'. It will be demonstrated that a more fruitful analysis can be achieved if we look at utopia as a criticism of the author's own era and relate the work of art to political ideology.

Mandatory readings

Vieira, Fátima (2010), "The concept of utopia" In Claeys, Gregory, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. CUP, (3-27).

Firchow, Peter (2007), "Preface" and "Introduction" In *Modern Utopian Fictions*. Washington: CUAP, (1-17).

Suggested readings

Coleman, Nathaniel (2005), "Introduction: utopias and architectures?" In *Utopias and Architecture*. London and New York: Routledge, (1-7).

Czigányik Zsolt (2004), "Satire and Dystopia: Two Genres?" In *HUSSE Papers 2003 (Literature and Culture)*. University of Debrecen, (305-309).

Frye, Northrop (2011 [1970]), "Varieties of Literary Utopias" In *The Stubborn Structure*. New York: Routledge, (109-134).

Carey, John (1999), "Introduction" In *The Faber Book of Utopias*. London: Faber and Faber, (xi-xxvi).

Week 2

The origins of the genre: Plato's *The Republic* and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*.

How can historically influential books be read today: as mere relics or interesting thought experiments? The consequences of fictionality. Arcadian literature: the myth of the Golden Age. The paradox of (e)utopia. The individual and the collective.

Mandatory readings

Plato (4th c. BC), *The Republic*. Book IV.

More, Thomas (1516), *Utopia*. Book II.

Suggested readings

The full text of the above books.

Pollard, Arthur (1987), *Satire*. London and New York: Methuen.

Davis, J. C. (2010), "Thomas More's *Utopia*: sources, legacy and interpretation" In Claeys, Gregory, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. CUP, (28-50).

Week 3

Short and optimistic: Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*.

The appearance of the narrative within utopia; a development of the earlier, primarily descriptive texts and its consequences. Renaissance scientific optimism confronted by the pessimistic realism of contemporary readers; interpretation as reader's response vs. authorial intentions.

Mandatory reading

Bacon, Francis (1627), *New Atlantis*

Suggested reading

Price, Bronwen, ed. (2002), *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: New interdisciplinary essays*. Manchester University Press.

Week 4

The best known utopia: *Gulliver's Travels*.

The description of alternative worlds expresses criticism for the author's own country. Debates of interpretations in case of Book Four: the triumph of an enlightened rational utopia or a cautionary tale with an underlying dystopian irony / sarcasm? Differences between satire and utopia (local / temporal and global / universal interpretations). Dynamic tension of the cosmos of imaginary worlds and the chaos of reality.

Mandatory readings

Swift, Jonathan (1726), *Gulliver's Travels*. Book IV (Houyhnhnms).

Suggested readings

Swift, Jonathan (1726), *Gulliver's Travels*. especially Book I (Lilliput), but also Book II and Book III.

Glendinning, Victoria (1999), *Jonathan Swift*. London: Pimlico Press.

Pohl, Nicole (2010), "Utopianism after More: the Renaissance and Enlightenment" In Claeys, Gregory, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. CUP, (51-78).

Week 5

Future tense appears: *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells

Possible degeneration of the human race and concern for the condition of human beings in the author's own time in the first successful science fiction story. The appearance of the future tense means the diversification of displacement from purely spatial to temporal. Spatial anachronisms and echoes, defamiliarized settings, syntopia and chronotopia.

Mandatory reading

Wells, H. G. (2005 [1895]), *The Time Machine*. London: Penguin Books. Chapters 2-7 and 10.

Suggested readings

The full text of the above book.

Claeys, Gregory (2010), "The origins of dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell" In *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. CUP, (107-134).

Warner, Marina (2005), "Introduction" In Wells, H. G., *The Time Machine*. London: Penguin Books (xiii-xxvii).

Week 6

The logical consequences of a consumer society

Huxley's thought experiment points out the shortcomings and dangerous tendencies in the writer's present by placing them in the future to provide 'laboratory conditions' for the experiment. Signs of a dystopian turn in literature. The irony of the reversal of moral values. Reflection on the social and historical background in Europe and the US (americanization of European culture). The loss of human liberty through conditioning.

Mandatory readings

Huxley, Aldous (1994 [1932]), *Brave New World*. Vintage: London, Chapters 1-3 and 16-17.

Suggested readings

The full text of the above book

Huxley, Aldous (1962), *Island*

Yevgeny Zamyatin (1921), *We*

Adorno, Theodor (1997 [1948]), "Aldous Huxley and Utopia" in *Prisms*. MIT Press, (95-118).

Bradshaw, David (1994), *The Hidden Huxley*. London: Faber and Faber.

Bradshaw, David (1994), „Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)”. In Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. London: Vintage.

Weeks 7-8

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The counterpoint of Huxley's novel became a political banner in the fight against dictatorship and a work of central importance in the interpretation of dystopias. The use of the close future tense fuelled debates on the predictions becoming reality. The role of language and linguistic representation. Changing history: the flexibility of representation through the control of available sources results in the isolation of the individual. The complexity of narrative structure: a dystopian world depicted through the paranoid mind of the protagonist. The totalitarian thesis before Arendt; total control of the state over the individual naturally matched by the blocked and impotent state of mind of the subjects.

Mandatory reading

Orwell, George (1949), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Suggested movie

Redford, Michael (dir., 1984), *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Suggested readings

Orwell, George (1945), *Animal Farm*

Orwell, George (1938), *Homage to Catalonia*

Burgess, Anthony (1978), *1985 Part One*

Orwell, George, 'Review of "WE" by E. I. Zamyatin'

Brannigan, John (2003), *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945–2000*.

Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Week 9

A disturbing vision of crime and punishment

The possibilities of human freedom in a (post)modern world. Linguistic devices to achieve the effect of an isolated fictional space of the dystopian allegory. Popular vs. high culture, cold war fears and generation gaps fuelling the decrease in the cohesion of society and the strengthening of a (fragile) post-national world order. Security of society vs. the freedom of the individual.

Mandatory reading

Burgess, Anthony (1962), *A Clockwork Orange*, Part One, Chapters 1 and 2; Part Two, Chapters 1, 3 and 6; Part Three, Chapters 1 and 2

Suggested movie

Kubrick, Stanley (dir., 1971), *Clockwork Orange*.

Suggested readings

The rest of the above book.

Burgess, Anthony (1962), *The Wanting Seed*.

Biswell, Andrew (2005), *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess*. London: Picador.

Lewis, Roger (2002), *Anthony Burgess*. London: Faber and Faber.

Week 10

Feminist nightmare of a dystopian United States

The female point of view in negative utopia. The achievements and program of second and third wave feminism reversed. Vision of a quasi-religious dictatorship in the US as a reflection on the Iranian Islamic revolution. Female and male points of view (feminine and masculine writing). Objectivity of scientific response vs. the subjectivity of an eyewitness. Intertextual resonances.

Mandatory reading

Atwood, Margaret (1985), *The Handmaid's Tale*. Selected chapters and Appendix

Suggested movie

Schlöndorff, Volker (dir., 1990), *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Suggested reading

Harris, Jocelyn (1999), „The Handmaid's Tale as a Re-Visioning of 1984". In George Slusser et al. (ed.), *Transformations of Utopia: Changing Views of the Perfect Society*. New York: AMS Press.

Week 11

The contemporary dystopian and post-apocalyptic scene

Fragmentedness of narrative as a post-postmodern feature: cohesion of text achieved through motivic connections. Contrasting genres: antiutopia, dystopia, dyschronia. Landscape of late-industrial consumer culture. Fictional-empirical referentiality and intermediality.

Mandatory readings

Mitchell, David (2004), *Cloud Atlas*; Sonmi-451 chapters

Suggested movie

Tykwerc, Tom and Andy and Lana Wachowski (dir., 2012), *Cloud Atlas*.

Suggested readings

'At Sloosha's Crossing' (from the above book)

McCarthy, Cormac (2006), *The Road*

Dillon, Sarah, ed (2011), *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*. Canterbury: Gylphi.

Week 12

Conclusions

Utopia became practically extinct by the end of the 19th century and it was replaced by dystopia, another form of the critical spirit. The optimism of earlier times is replaced by a

satirical disillusionment. The 20th century seems to fuel dark thought experiments and gave rise to dystopia, and its sophisticated rhetorical referentiality to the empirical world.

Some additional readings

Barton, Edwin and Glenda Hudson (2003), *A Contemporary Guide to Literary Terms*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Barter, Martha, ed. (2004), *The Utopian Fantastic*. Westport and London: Praeger.

Biesterfeld, Wolfgang (1982), *Die literarische Utopie*. Stuttgart: Metzler.

Bruckman, Denis et al (ed.), *Utopian Literature: A Selective Bibliography*. The New York Public Library. <<http://www.nypl.org/utopia/primarysources.html>>.

Claeys, Gregory and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., (1999), *The Utopia Reader*. New York University Press.

Czigányik Zsolt (2011), *A szabadsághiány anatómiái*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Davison, Peter (1996), *George Orwell: A Literary Life*. London: Macmillan.

Firchow, Peter (1984), *The End of Utopia*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses.

Gordin, Michael et al., eds., (2010), *Utopia / Dystopia. Conditions of Hystorical Possibility*. Princeton University Press.

Jameson, Frederic (2005), *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London & New York: Verso.

Króó Katalin and Bényei Tamás, eds., (2010), *Utópiák és ellenutópiák*. Budapest: L'Harmattan.

Kumar, Krishan (1987), *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. New York: Basil Blackwell.

Kumar, Krishan (1991), *Utopianism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Moylan, Tom (2000), *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Rodden, John ed. (2007), *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*. Cambridge University Press.

Ronen, Ruth (1994), *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Rothstein, Edward et al. (2003), *Visions of Utopia*. Oxford University Press.

Segal, Howard (2012), *Utopias: a brief history from ancient writings to virtual communities*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Wegner, Phillip (2002), *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yoran, Hanan (2010), *Between Utopia and Dystopia*. New York: Lexington Books.

List of Utopian Literature - Famous Utopian Works. Pre-20th century. The Republic (~380 BCE) by Plato, represents one of the first written concepts of the utopia. Tao Hua Yuan (421) is a poem by Tao Yuanming, described the ethereal utopia of Chinese intellectual class, where people lived perfect lives, freed from diastases, death, and in perfect harmony with nature. It spawned several similar beliefs, myths and literary works in China. Recent papers in Utopian and Dystopian Literature. Papers. People. Conference for The Utopian Studies Society 500 Years of Utopias: Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of Thomas More's Utopia, Lisbon, 5-9 July 2016 Closed Panel together with Sara Di Alessandro, Università degli Studi di Milano and more.