

EN 6987 3.0 A: UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

TERM: Winter 2024

COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Allan Weiss
OFFICE: 622 ATK
PHONE: 416-736-5166 x77318
EMAIL: aweiss@yorku.ca
OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

TIME AND LOCATION:

Seminar W 2:30-5:30

EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course covers the history of modern utopian and dystopian literature, tracing the development of the genre from the Renaissance to the present. The goal of the course is to study changing perspectives on the nature of the ideal or nightmarish society as influenced by historical, cultural, intellectual, and literary developments. We look at the secularization of religious images and concepts such as heaven and hell, the treatment of class relations, labour, education, race and colonialism, and gender relations, and postmodern and feminist challenges to the conventions of utopian fiction. We study the primary texts in the light of modern theories of utopian thought and writing, including the work of Fredric Jameson, Ruth Levitas, Northrop Frye, Tom Moylan, Frances Bartkowski, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marleen S. Barr.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE:

There will be a three-hour seminar each week involving discussion of the utopian/dystopian texts and, where appropriate, theoretical backgrounds to the study of utopian literature. Each seminar will begin with a preliminary survey outlining the political, ideological, historical, and other contexts of the literary text(s) assigned that week.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of the course is to introduce students to the field of fantastic literature, where students are not already familiar with it, and to trace the development of utopian literature from the Renaissance to the postmodern era. Our assumption will be that the genre has undergone profound changes, while retaining various conventions and tropes, throughout its history in response to changing circumstances surrounding its composition. The course will also introduce students to the major theoretical perspectives regarding utopian literature—both utopian and dystopian fiction.

Specific learning objectives:

It is hoped that students will

- become familiar with the major texts in utopian literature;
- gain a facility with the theoretical language used in the study of utopian literature;
- recognize both distinct and common features of texts across periods, subgenres, etc.

COURSE TEXTS:

Thomas More, *Utopia*; Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*; William Morris, *News from Nowhere*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*; Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*; George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*; Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*; Jack Womack, *Random Acts of Senseless Violence*; Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*; Claeys/Sargent, *The Utopia Reader*

In addition, a course kit containing short stories and theoretical material will be available at the Bookstore.