

SPRING 2023

CL 48R: Utopia: Fabulation, Fiction, Vision<sup>1</sup>

Burcu Kayışcı Akkoyun



**Course Schedule:** Tuesday 10.00-11.50, Thursday 11.00-11.50

**Classrooms:** TB 415 | TB 415 | EF 07

**Office no:** TB 529

**Office hours:** Tuesday 13.00-14.30<sup>2</sup>

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## Course Description and Objectives

Welcome to CL 48R! As hinted by the full title of this course, the word “utopia” has various connotations, and expressions of utopianism could be traced in disciplines as diverse as theology, philosophy, politics, sociology, and literature. For our purposes, we will read examples of utopian fiction and visit imaginary worlds to explore the ways in which literary utopias may be understood as aesthetic responses to socio-political and cultural issues of their time. Particularly focusing on the relationship between utopian content and literary form, we will examine how they may function (or not) as alternatives to the present and as thought experiments about the future.

After we familiarize ourselves with the tradition, we will start discussing the *ur-text* of literary utopias, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). Throughout the semester, we will examine the key elements of utopian literature and look at the issues of social justice, gender equality, technological progress, and environment. Our reading list loosely follows a chronological order, and I have endeavoured to create diversity in the authors and formal features of the texts as well as in the

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<sup>1</sup> The syllabus is tentative and subject to change with prior notice.

<sup>2</sup> We can always arrange appointments by email as well.

themes to be discussed. We will read both short and longer texts as primary sources, and consult critical texts that focus on different definitions and aspects of utopianism.

Here are some questions that may guide your reading process and our discussions: Why have “no places” and “good places” occupied writers as well as philosophers, sociologists, political thinkers, and literary scholars since ancient times? How can utopianism operate as a critical tool in literature? Is there any value in imagining and formulating alternatives, or is it a naïve, if not futile, effort? Is it possible to imagine a utopia in this contemporary moment? I do not expect you to arrive at definitive answers but to open up discussion that welcomes different and sometimes opposing viewpoints.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completing this course, you will develop a conceptual and theoretical framework of utopia as a literary genre by interpreting and situating the texts within broader historical, political, and cultural contexts. You should also be able to demonstrate an understanding of the links and nuances between utopia, anti-utopia, and dystopia.

## **Course Structure and Requirements**

- **This will be a reading and discussion intensive course**, and YOU MUST READ THE ASSIGNED TEXTS BEFORE COMING TO CLASS. Your attendance and active participation is very important to maintain a healthy, consistent learning environment.
- Absences more than five (including those with medical reports) will impact your participation grade negatively.
- There will be two exams and three announced reading quizzes, and **no makeup for quizzes unless you have a medical report**.
- You will have a chance to approach utopianism from an original perspective in your project assignment. You are free to choose any medium you want as long as it relates to our texts and class discussions, and you discuss your ideas with me in advance. Options are many, but here are some suggestions: imagining your own utopia, developing a social awareness campaign, recording a podcast about a relevant topic, creating social media or visual/video content, rewriting certain parts of the texts we will read or writing new parts for them...I am looking forward to hearing your ideas!
- The articles and the novels will be available at the library and the photocopy shop. I may share additional readings on Moodle.
- The reading list or schedule may change with prior notice depending on the circumstances and our in-class pace.

## **Class Policies**

### **One word to rule us all: Respect**

- Respect is about following the classroom etiquette and contributing to not only a productive but also a safe and positive learning environment. We must listen to each other attentively even when we disagree.
- We must maintain clear and transparent communication: I will make sure that I respond to your emails as soon as I can, but only within reasonable working hours. Please ask/ tell me

whenever you have any issues/concerns rather than worry over hearsay. We can always arrange office hours.

- If you are a student with learning or other disabilities (or any other issues), please inform me in person or via email during the first week of the class so that necessary arrangements can be made.

## **Required Texts**

### **Primary sources:\***

*Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More

*Erewhon* (1872) by Samuel Butler

“Sultana’s Dream” (1905) by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (commonly known as Begum Rokeya)

*Herland* (1915) by Catherine Perkins Gilman

“A Weary Man’s Utopia” (1970) by Jorge Luis Borges

“The Ones Who Walked away from Omelas” (1973) by Ursula K. Le Guin

“The Ones Who Stay and Fight” (2018) by N.K. Jemisin

*Pacific Edge* (1990) by Kim Stanley Robinson

### **Critical texts:**

Excerpt from “The Soul of Man under Socialism” by Oscar Wilde

“What is a Utopia?” by Lyman Tower Sargent

“Utopia Matters?” by Ruth Levitas in *Utopia Matters: Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts*  
Ed. by Reis and da Silva

“The Politics of Utopia” by Fredric Jameson

“The Literary Utopia” in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*  
by Tom Moylan

### **Suggested readings (among many others):**

*Utopian Thought in the Western World* by Frank and Fritzie Manuel

*The Principle of Hope* by Ernst Bloch

*Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* by Krishan Kumar

“The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited” by Lyman Tower Sargent

*The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* Ed. by Gregory Claeys

*The Concept of Utopia* by Ruth Levitas

*Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* by Lucy Sargisson

*Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming* Ed. By Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini

“Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” by Michel Foucault

*Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* by Fredric Jameson

### Final Grade Breakdown

A. Reading Quizzes	20 %
B. Midterm Exam	35 %
C. Final Exam	35 %
D. Active Class Participation	5 %
E. Creative project	5 %

### Grading Scale:

<b>AA (100-90), BA (89-85), BB (84-80), CB (79- 75), CC (74-70), DC (69-65), DD (64-60), (fail) F (59-0)</b>
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**PLAGIARISM IS UNACCEPTABLE.** Any instance of academic dishonesty (i.e. presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own, submitting papers or work for other courses, buying papers online or having others write papers for you) will be subject to appropriate sanctions. For more on plagiarism and how to avoid it, see the department’s website: [http://westlanglit.boun.edu.tr/?page\\_id=5987](http://westlanglit.boun.edu.tr/?page_id=5987)

### Weekly Reading Schedule (subject to change on notice)

**Week 1: Feb 14-** Course introduction

**Feb 16:** Introduction to utopia: history, definitions, and the excerpt from “The Soul of Man under Socialism”

**Week 2: Feb 21:** Introduction to utopia (continued.) and More’s *Utopia*

**Feb 23:** *Utopia* cont.

**Week 3: Feb 28:** *Utopia* cont.

**March 2:** “A Weary Man’s Utopia” by Borges

**Week 4: March 7:** Critical Grounds: “What’s a Utopia?” & “Utopia Matters?”

**March 9:** “The Politics of Utopia”

**Week 5: March 14:** “The Literary Utopia”

**March 16:** *Erewhon* by Butler

**Week 6: March 21:** *Erewhon* cont.

**March 23:** *Erewhon* cont.

**Week 7: March 28:** *Erewhon* cont.

**March 30:** *Erewhon* cont.

**Week 8: Apr 4:** “Sultana’s Dream” by Hossain

**Apr 6:** *Herland* by Gilman

**Week 9: Apr 11:** *Herland* cont.

**Apr. 13:** *Herland* cont

**Week 10- Spring Break**

**Week 11: Apr 25:** Le Guin & Jemisin

**Apr 27:** *Pacific Edge* by Robinson

**Week 12: May 2:** *Pacific Edge* cont.

**May 4:** *Pacific Edge* cont.

**Week 13: May 9:** *Pacific Edge* cont.

**May 11:** *Pacific Edge* cont.

**Week 14: May 16:** *Pacific Edge* cont.

**May 18:** Overall review

**Final Exam Date:** TBA