

MODULE CODE: CSEN7029
TITLE: Utopias, Dystopias and the functions of fictions
DATED: 27/02/2012

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LEVEL: 7
CREDITS: 20

TEACHING METHODS: Seminars 10%
Directed Learning 90%

JACS CODE: Q320

AIM(S)

To gain a detailed, theorised understanding of the narration of utopia and its relation to its dystopian alter ego within the political and cultural contexts of 19th and 20th century Anglophone literature.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this module students should be able to:

- demonstrate advanced and sustained knowledge and understanding of the cultural responses to the utopian impulse;
- demonstrate a detailed and theorised understanding of a wide range of utopian and /or dystopian texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;
- show a sophisticated understanding of the emergence of the utopian and dystopian genres in their historical and cultural contexts;
- explore and account for the relationship of utopian and dystopian fictions to developments within the novel as a form.

CONTENT

This module will encourage students to critically engage with the contention that the utopian impulse for a better world is a narrative mode concerned not with the individual but the construction and organisation of society. It will locate this impulse in a range of historical, philosophical and literary contexts; and focus this broader enquiry in a theoretically informed exploration of the (re)emergence of the utopia as a specific literary mode during its heyday in the 19th century, tracing its relation to the dystopia that dominates the 20th century, and examining its relation to the novel in both periods.

As the novel changes in form and focus under the influence of first, postmodern ideas of self, narrative and society, and the relativizing impact of globalisation, there has been increasing critical and popular interest in utopian fiction and its dystopian alter ego.

Topics we will consider will include some or all of the following:

- Philosophical debate and social engineering;
- Relation of place and narrative voice in the construction of the utopia/dystopia
- Philosophical debate: the ideal and the practical political state;
- Questions of perspective: outside looking in/inside looking out;
- Reason and the dissipation of desire
- Exploration, colonisation and the question of gender;
- Science, Anti-science and technology
- Linguistic degeneration and the loss of reason;
- Questions of perspective: outside looking in or inside looking out;
- The significance of stories

ASSESSMENT

Course work (100%)

One Assignment 5000 words (100%)

The topic of the assignment is chosen by the student in consultation with the module tutor but must be related to the content of the module

[Sample assignment: ‘“By conservative critics, Utopia has been characterized as a mode of thought at best naïve, at worst totalitarian.” (Naomi Jacobs) Discuss.]

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Essential

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Le Guin, U. (1974) *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* London: Harper 1994

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Sargent, L.T. *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP, 2010

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