

QUEER UTOPIANISM

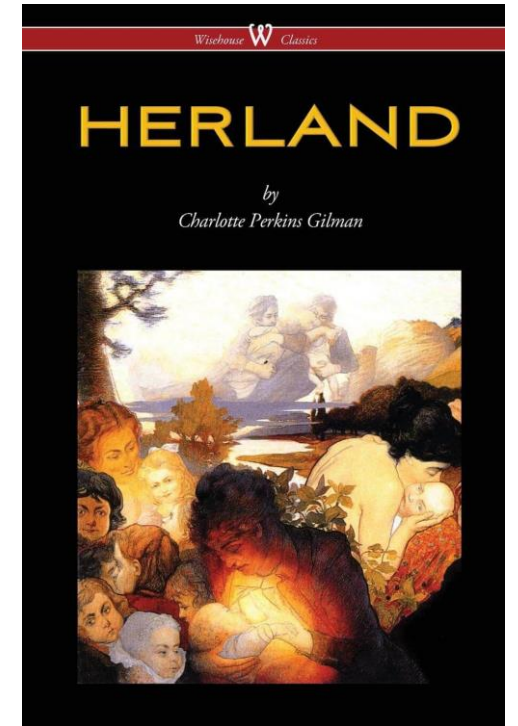
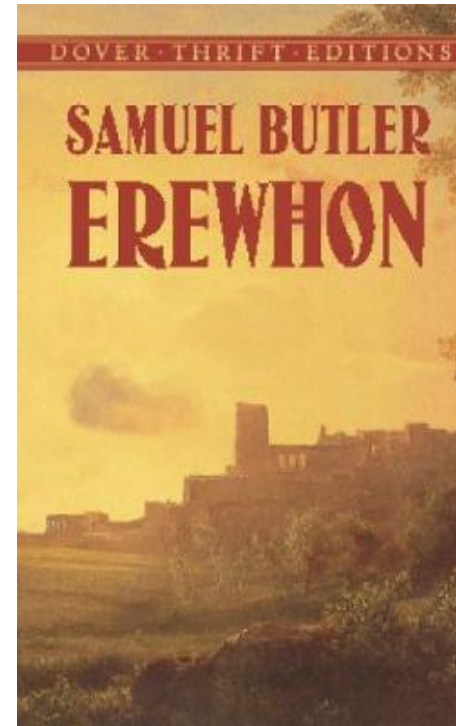
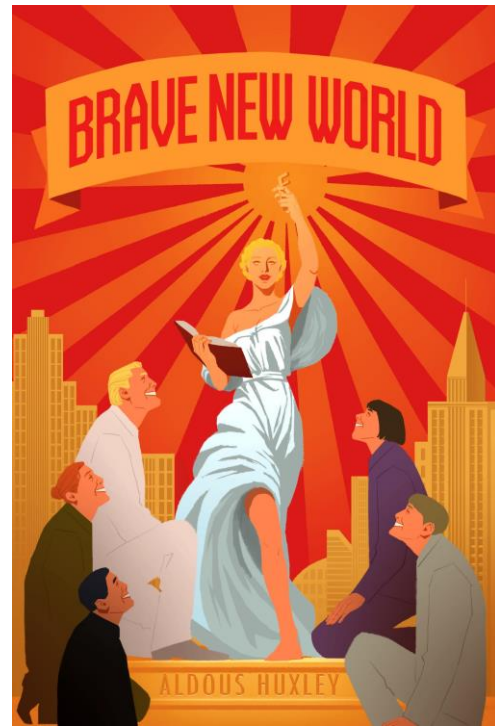
DR SARAH REYNOLDS

SPECULATIVE FICTION: HPEN5041/6041

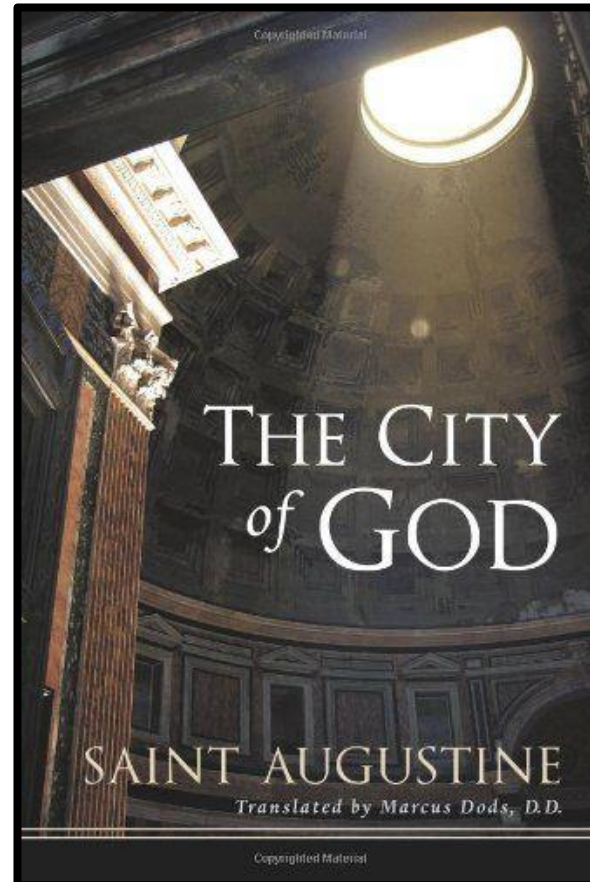
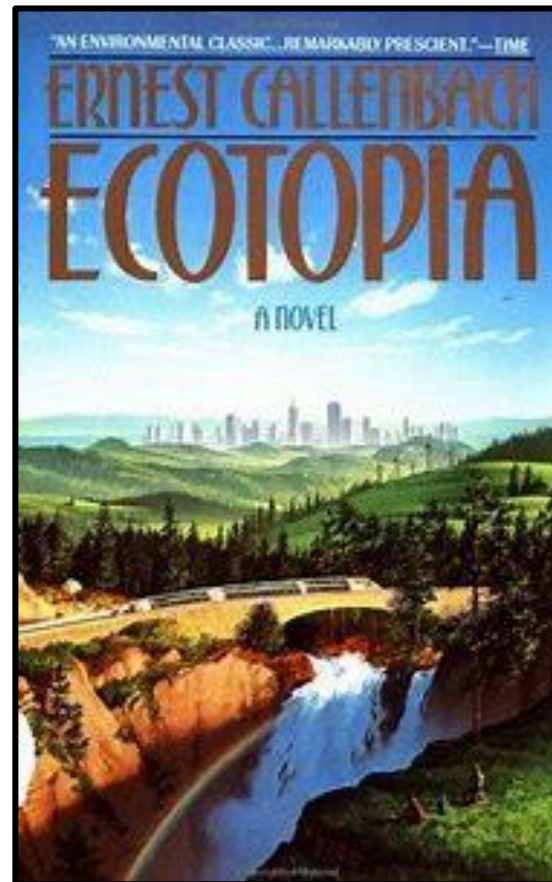
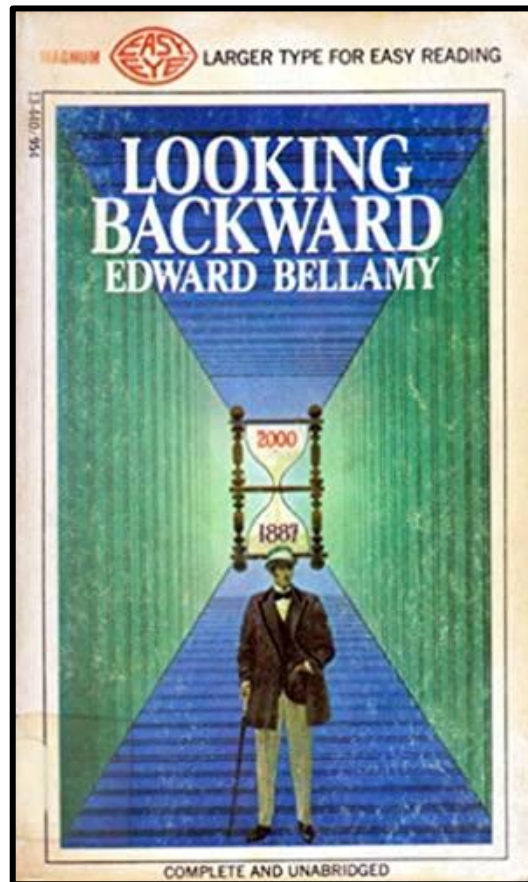


OUTLINE FOR THE SESSION

- Lecture
- Teams breakout rooms: a discussion of three extracts from the novel (extracts provided on Moodle)
- Creative writing exercise



A BRIEF HISTORY OF UTOPIA





CHANA PORTER

“Chana is a queer Jewish genderfluid alien grateful to be embodied in human form.”



“Trina Goldberg-Oneka is a fifty-year-old trans woman whose life is irreversibly altered in the wake of a gentle—but nonetheless world-changing—invasion by an alien entity called The Seep. Through The Seep, everything is connected. Capitalism falls, hierarchies and barriers are broken down; if something can be imagined, it is possible.

Trina and her wife, Deeba, live blissfully under The Seep’s utopian influence—until Deeba begins to imagine what it might be like to be reborn as a baby, which will give her the chance at an even better life. Using Seeptech to make this dream a reality, Deeba moves on to a new existence, leaving Trina devastated.”

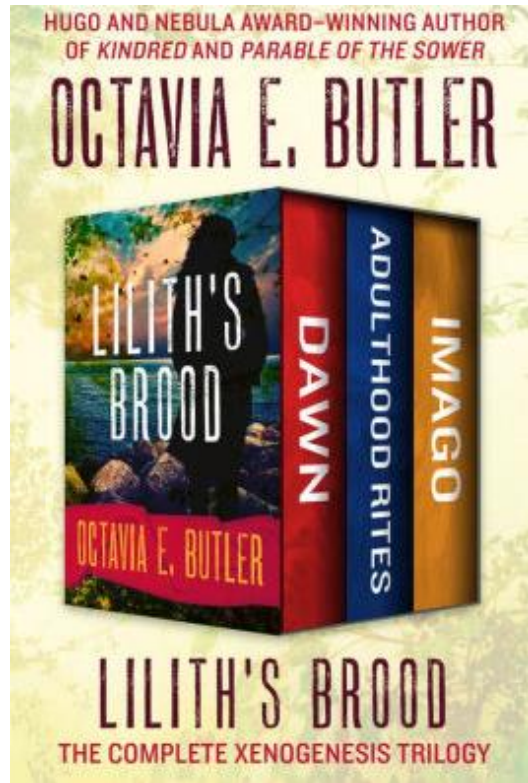
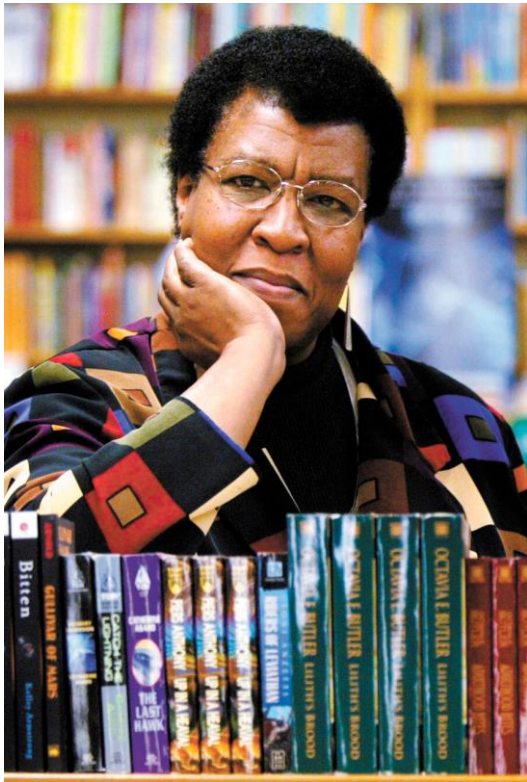
(Dust jacket blurb)



CHANA PORTER

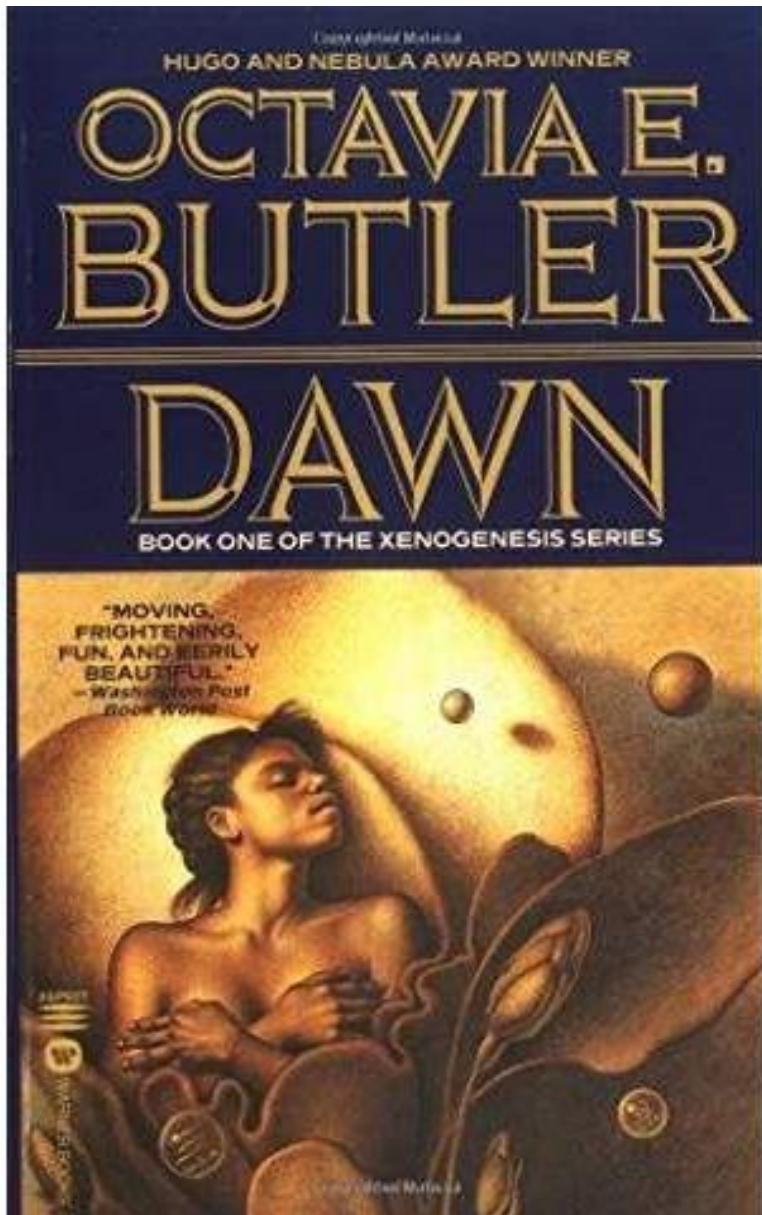
“We must witness and value past trauma. We also must acknowledge and celebrate what was here before and is still here.”

OCTAVIA BUTLER



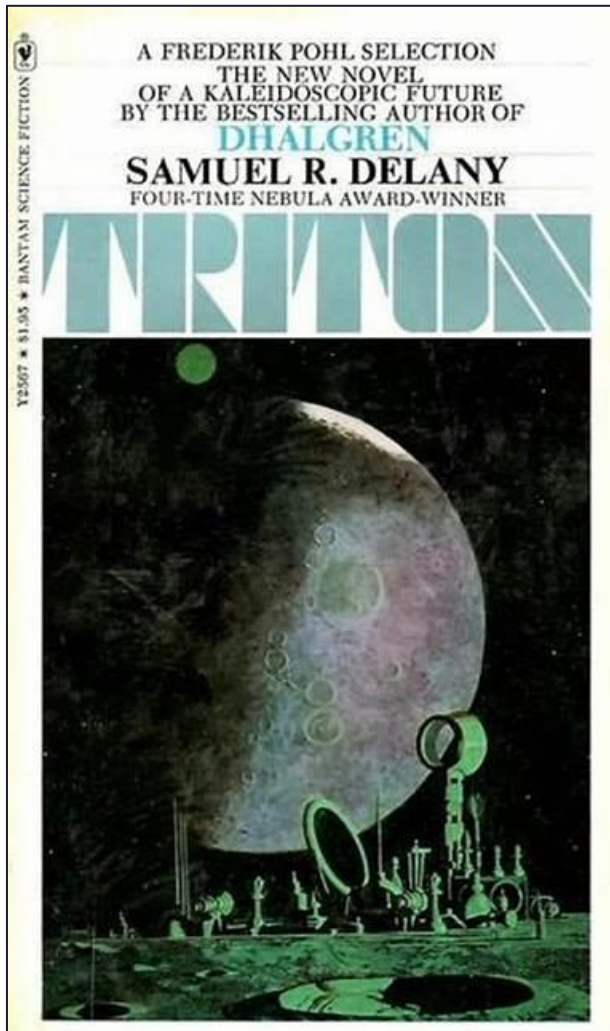
“I find utopias ridiculous. We’re not going to have a perfect society until we get a few perfect humans... Besides any true utopia would probably be incredibly boring, and it would probably be so over-specialised that any change ... would probably destroy the whole system.”

‘An Interview with Octavia Butler’ in Larry McCaffery, ed. *Across Wounded Galaxies: Interview with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) pp. 54-70 (p.69)



“I offer a one-ness that your people strive for [...] but can’t truly achieve alone.”

Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (New York: Warner Books, 1987) p. 189



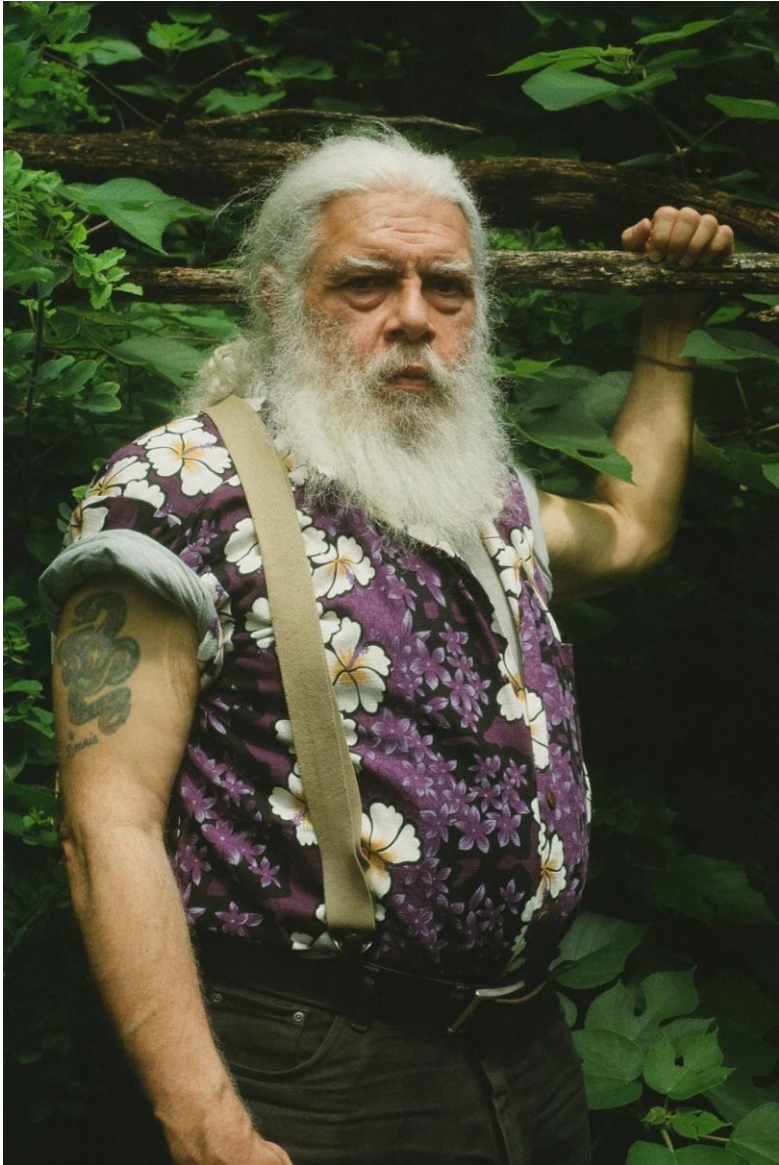
“So, you want to be a woman.” The man cocked his head. “What kind of a woman do you want to be? Or rather, how much of a woman?”

Bron frowned.

“Do you simply want what essentially could be called cosmetic surgery—we can do quite a fine job; and quite a functional one. We can give you a functional vagina, functional clitoris, even a functional womb in which you can bear a baby to term and deliver it, and functional breasts with which you can suckle the infant once it is born. More than that, however, and we have to leave the realm of the cosmetic and enter the radical.”

Bron’s frown deepened.

“What is there beyond that you can do?”



Science fiction doesn't try to predict the future, but rather offers a significant distortion of the present...We sit around and look at what we see around us and we say how can the world be different?

Samuel R. Delany, *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984) p.185.



“When connected with the aliens... it was impossible to feel anything except expansive joy, peace, tenderness and love. But were humans still human without their worries?”

Chana Porter, *The Seep* (New York: Soho Press, 2020) p. 11

PART 2: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

GROUP 1 : LOOKING AT EXTRACT 1

- What changes do the aliens enforce and how?
- How are romantic relationships envisioned in this utopia?
- How do the aliens affect humans' relationship with their own bodies?
- How has immortality affected societal values?
- Is there a place for art in utopia?
- What might 'The Compound' represent?
- To what extent is *The Seep* a comment on present day society?

GROUP 2: LOOKING AT EXTRACT 2

- What changes do the aliens enforce and how?
- What has happened to religion in this new utopia?
- How has sexuality been affected by *The Seep*?
- Why does Treena get so upset with Horizon Line?
- How is race and gender re-imagined in *The Seep*'s utopia?
- To what extent is *The Seep* a comment on present day society?

GROUP 3: LOOKING AT EXTRACT 3

- What changes do the aliens enforce and how?
- What is the boy looking for?
- What might the 'Yellow Meeks' represent?
- Is there room for free will in Utopia?
- To what extent is *The Seep* a comment on present day society?
- How might a reading of Lee Edelman's essay, 'The Future is kids' stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification and the Death Drive', inform your reading of Chana Porter's novel *The Seep*?



PART 3: CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISE

- Work in groups to come up with ideas for your own utopian planet.
- Write an advert for a holiday to your utopia.