

# Utopian and Dystopian Narratives

## *Course Syllabus*

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### **Course description and course objectives**

This course provides an introduction to utopian and dystopian ideas in various narratives, mainly in literary works, as well as political ideas related to utopian thinking, represented in the selected texts. The development of the endeavours for creating a perfect society is considered and discussed. Literary works that have raised questions about achieving equality, justice, peace, prosperity, fighting pollution and global warming are analysed; as well as works that examine how the desires for an ideal society have turned into fear from it. In this context, both the positive and the negative consequences that have resulted from various views of improving society are discussed.

The objectives of the course include advancing students' knowledge and understanding of the utopian and dystopian narratives, and developing their skills for analysing, assessing and presenting information, ideas and concepts about utopias through class discussions. The course is also aimed at raising students' awareness of the role of literature in human history, culture and progress.

Since utopian literature is very closely connected to improving society in practice, students are encouraged to think about and share their ideas on feasible activities that all of us together can perform to contribute to improving some aspect of everyday life.

### **Materials for the course:**

John Carey. *The Faber Book of Utopias*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000.

George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty Four*. London: Penguin, 1998.

Margaret Atwood. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Emblem, 2017.

Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

### **Additional readings:**

Gregory Claeys, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Amitav Ghosh. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Penguin Books, 2016.

Kalina Maleska. "500 Years since Thomas More's *Utopia*: Transformation of Utopian Ideas". *Blesok* 110, October-November 2016.

## Weekly Plan

Week (1x2 classes)	Theme
1 (2/10/19)	
2 (9/10/19)	Introduction to the notions that will be discussed in the course
3 (16/10/19)	T. More, selection from <i>Utopia</i> . T. Campanella, selection from <i>The City of the Sun</i> .
4 (23/10/19)	L.-S. Mercier, selection from <i>The Year 2440</i> . E. Bellamy, selection from <i>Looking Backwards</i> . W. Morris, selection from <i>News from Nowhere</i> .
5 (30/10/19)	E. B. Corbett, from <i>New Amazonia</i> . H. G. Wells, selection from <i>Anticipations</i> . A. Huxley, selection from <i>Brave New World</i> .
6 (6/11/19)	George Orwell, <i>Nineteen Eighty Four</i> .
7 (13/11/19)	George Orwell, <i>Nineteen Eighty Four</i> .
8 (20/11/19)	U. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”.
9 (27/11/19)	Margaret Atwood, <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> .
10 (4/12/19)	Margaret Atwood, <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> .
11 (11/12/19)	Environmental issues: global perspectives. N. Klein, selection from <i>This Changes Everything: Climate vs. Capitalism</i> R. Emmerich, director. <i>The Day after Tomorrow</i> . Presentations.
12 (18/12/19)	Environmental issues: local perspectives – pollution. Presentations.
13 (25/12/19)	Aspects of utopian/dystopian narratives. Contemporary issues (George Saunders, “Escape from Spiderhead”; <i>Black Mirror</i> : “Nosedive”) Revision.
14 (1/1/20)	
15 (8/1/20)	Exam (for students who do not have more than three absences. The other students will be able to take the test during the exam session.)

## ❖ Grading

### **Class participation, homework and activities – 20 points**

This portion of your grade will be based on active participation in class. Participation means active involvement, not only attendance. Class participation includes coming to class prepared: having read the assigned texts, completing your homework, and discussing the issues that are envisaged in the syllabus for each class. Students are encouraged to provide thoughtful and insightful critical analysis of texts, which is only possible if you dedicate time to thinking about the texts after having read them.

### **Presentation – 10 points**

As part of the course, you will be required to give oral presentation (3-4 minutes) on a topic regarding an environmental issue, taking into consideration that it is increasingly in focus in utopian and dystopian narratives in the last few years. Topics will be agreed upon in class.

Plagiarism is not permitted.

### **Final exam – 70 points**

The final exam will include two sections: Section A with several questions in which you will be asked to think about the material covered in classes, make comparisons and use the obtained knowledge in new situations; and Section B that includes an essay topic.

## ❖ Class Rules

We all have responsibility to maintain safe and pleasant learning environment. We all have responsibility to treat each other with understanding, dignity and respect. Therefore, I encourage you to contribute to achieving the following goals: behaving respectfully with everyone, and providing support to fellow-students, which leads to improvement of everyone's work. That means that all discussions should be carried out with respect of other people's opinions; when someone else speaks, let us try not to interrupt them; on the other hand, when speaking, it is good to be aware that speaking for too long would take up the time from the other students' opportunity to speak. Respect for others also includes: not making fun of them, not insulting them, not whispering while they are speaking, no side conversations. Disagreements with someone else's opinions should not be directed against the person expressing them; instead, oppose specific arguments or positions that a person maintains at a given moment. Always provide reasons and arguments for your views. Feel free to express any opinions you have on the topics that will be discussed, no matter how different they are from other peoples' opinions, unless they are offensive. In other words, I will always encourage you to consider respectfully one another's perspectives and open-mindedness.

It is also important not to discriminate on the basis of nationality, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, place of living or any other basis.

The class is also an excellent opportunity to take a break from cell phone use. Laptop or cell phone can be used when we agree there is something to search on them (for example,

words from an online dictionary, or anything similar to that). Using laptop and cell phone privately during class is not in accordance with the principle of respecting others.

Please come to class on time, not simply because it is a rule, but because there is an important reason behind it – in order not to interrupt the class and not to distract other students in their discussions. If you come into class more than 15 minute late, it will be counted as absence. I will not stop anyone who wishes to leave earlier, but please consider the fact that it is unfair to others who stay by the end of the class, because it creates an impression that some students may feel privileged to leave earlier. In order to avoid that, leaving earlier will be counted as absence. If, on one or two occasions you have the need to leave earlier, please let me know before class, in which case it will not be counted as absence.

I am available for questions related to the course not only in class, but also during office hours, and via email communication.

Before leaving the classroom, please leave a clean environment for the next class.

You are also welcome to contribute with your own ideas (any time during the semester) on how to improve good class atmosphere.

Thank you for respecting the Class Rules.