



Abrahams-Curiel Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics  
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



## UTOPIA

0-132-2-0014

Professor Efraim Sicher

MA SEMINAR (2 pts)

FIRST SEMESTER MONDAYS 16:00 - 18:00

This course is open only to students who have completed a first degree and is taught entirely in English

Introduces utopia as a literary genre from antiquity to modern times in the context of political and social projects for the perfect society. We shall see the historical and ideological development of utopian visions through planned technological societies as well as failed utopias and anti-utopias. Dystopian fiction in the twentieth century in particular has been influential in warning against the totalitarian control and regulation of ideological utopias. Indeed, we will see that a dystopian tendency goes back to More's *Utopia*. Yet counter-utopias, ecoutopias, feminist utopias, and other alternative lifestyles persist.

The course will be taught online with interactive student response based on questions prepared in advance and group reading of texts. Brief excerpts from essays will be distributed in advance via Moodle. Using the technological advances of Zoom, we will view visual material (art, movies etc.), charts, graphs, and maps. We will also work on the writing of seminar papers in Zoom meetings.

### Aims of course

To study the development of utopian thinking in the representation and planning of ideal societies from the early modern period to the present in order to understand how social thinking has changed about the human condition.

**Skills to be acquired**

Advanced research tools, analysis of texts, critical thinking

**Keywords:** utopias, literature; Zionism; social planning; dystopia

**Course requirements**

Active participation in all classes required

Preparation and discussion of questions in class 10%

Personal Project (includes oral presentation) 40% (submitted as a 10 page academic paper due March 31)

Seminar Paper 18-20 pages double-spaced 12 pt Times, including Works Cited or short final paper (10 pp.) 50% (due March 31)

**Required Reading**

*The Faber Book of Utopias*, ed. John Carey (London: Faber, 1999). A limited number of copies are in the BGU library.

Plato, *The Republic* [excerpts]

Thomas More, *Utopia* (the modern translation in the Yale edition is recommended)

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backwards*

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*

Texts will be distributed via Moodle

**Personal Project:**

Each student will choose a topic based on a theoretical approach to **a text not** on the required reading list. A presentation will be given orally in class which will be prepared in consultation with the lecturer. No less than one week before the scheduled presentation the student will distribute to the class photocopies of the excerpts from the text or texts to be discussed with questions as guidelines for discussion. The personal project will be submitted as a written academic paper (not as a transcript of the oral presentation) which is expected to go beyond the presentation and to benefit from the feedback and discussion in class (10 pages double spaced 12pt Times).

For example:

Single-sex or ungendered utopias: Gilman, *Herland*:

Racial utopias: Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*; Hudson, *The Crystal Age*]

Modern Feminist Utopias (Pierce and Atwood)

The technological age: H.G. Wells, *The Machine Stops*; *The Sleeper Awakes*; *The Time Machine*

Russian Dystopias (Chernyshevsky, Bogdanov and early Soviet Utopias; Evgeny Zamiatin, *We*)—Neta Klein

Utopia of Pain – [Sade. Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*.]

Twentieth-century dystopias: Burgess (*Clockwork Orange*)

American utopias: *Walden* and *Walden Two*

Zionist utopias: Herzl's *Altneuland*.

## Sexuality and Reproduction in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction.

**Final/ Seminar Paper**

The final/ seminar paper will discuss one or more texts on the required reading syllabus. You cannot write about a text or topic that is the subject of your personal project. A proposal for the paper must be approved by the instructor by six weeks before the end of first semester. By the end of the semester a first version or draft will be submitted (this is a course requirement).

**Schedule (by week):**

1. Introduction: Eden, Paradise, Arcadia, Utopia
2. Readings from Carey: the ancient world
3. Readings from Carey: classical utopias (Hesiod, Plato, Lucian)
4. More, *Utopia*
5. More, *Utopia*
6. Readings from Carey: Renaissance utopias
7. The Enlightenment and social reform: new worlds and moon landings
8. Nineteenth century utopia projects: building socialism (Owen to F Fourier)
9. Utopia and rebellion: Chernyshevsky to the Underground Man
10. Readings from Carey: Butler, *Erewhon*
11. Bellamy, *Looking Backwards*
12. Morris, *News from Nowhere*
13. Does utopia have a future? Roundtable discussion and summing-up

Conference hours: by appointment [sicher@bgu.ac.il](mailto:sicher@bgu.ac.il)

אוטופיה

פרופ' אפרים זיכר

סמינר מ.א.

ימי ב' 14-16, שנת

2 נ"ז

מילות מפתח: אוטופיה, דיסטופיה, אפלטון, סר תומס מור

תיאור הקורס: הכרת ההתפתחות של אוטופיות חברתיות וספרותיות מהעת העתיקה עד ימנו, תפקידן וגורלן כז'אנר ספרותי, ותרמתן לשיח החברתי והפוליטי.

מטרת הקורס: בחינת מושגים מרכזיים בתרבות המערבית, חשיפה למחשבת התרבות המערבית, הקניית כלים מחקרניים מתקדמים.

דרישות הקורס:

השתתפות פעילה חובה: 10%

עבודה סמינריונית: 50%

פרט (פרויקט אישי): 40%

אין בחינה.

קריאה חובה (באנגלית):

*The Faber Book of Utopias*, ed. John Carey (London: Faber, 1999). Thomas More, *Utopia* (the modern translation in the Yale edition is recommended but the text is available on internet)

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backwards*

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*