

Gallatin: School of Individualized Study  
Writing Seminar I: Utopias and Dystopias (K10.0359)  
Fall 2008  
Monday & Wednesday, 11:00-12:15 (Room 601)  
Instructor: Beata Potocki  
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Office hours: Monday, 12:30—1:30 pm  
Wednesday, 10:00—11:00 am  
715 Broadway, Room 617  
212-992-7764 (during office  
hours only)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In search of perfection, philosophers, political theorists, and fiction writers have imagined ideal societies located in distant places and times, and their writings have inspired numerous efforts to create idyllic communities. In *Utopia*, Thomas More presents a vision of a harmonious and tolerant society without private property. The theory of passionate attraction, developed by Charles Fourier, spurred the founding of the North American Phalanx community. Yet in our modern world, we are also surrounded by tales of undesirable societies or dystopias. For example, in *Children of Men*, P.D. James paints a bleak world in which humans can no longer procreate. Through writing a series of essays that culminate in an argumentative essay, we will consider such questions as: What do utopias and dystopias tell us about individual and collective fantasies and fears? How do they engage in and try to solve concrete socio-political problems? How do they deal with desire and difference in their search for equality, justice, or happiness? We will read excerpts from Plato, Thomas More, Marx and Engels, Charles Fourier, H.G. Wells, George Orwell, Ursula le Guin, Octavia Butler, Fredric Jameson, among others, and watch selected episodes from films, including *Metropolis*, *Children of Men*, *Brazil*, *Blade Runner*, and *Grizzly Man*.

As the first-semester seminar is meant to help you discover the powerful writer within, we will focus on writing as a *process*, elucidating the different stages of the writing process (including freewriting, drafting, revising and polishing) to show you that writing is a *craft* to be cultivated. In this course you will explore various rhetorical strategies used by writers to get their point across, and the writing assignments, ranging from descriptive exercises to literary-critical and argumentative essays, will give you an opportunity to use these techniques in development of your own essays.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Students will need to bring in drafts of essays in progress for workshops. As successful workshops depend on each student having a draft to share, it is imperative that each student bring in his or her draft for workshops on the days indicated on the syllabus.

Final drafts of your papers are due in class (see the syllabus for exact dates). These final drafts must be double-spaced, with one-inch margin on each side. Please edit and proofread your papers!

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

Writing Seminar I focuses on class discussion and analysis of assigned readings and on regularly scheduled writing workshops; therefore, your attendance and participation is of uttermost importance. If you cannot attend class, due to emergency or illness, please contact me so that I can let you know what you have missed and tell you how to prepare for the next class. Your participation and timely submission of papers is vital both to your individual progress and to the success of the class. Excessive absence (more than two unexcused absences) can jeopardize your course grade.

Grades are based on the quality of submitted work, including essays and shorter assignments, as well as your class participation. I will also take into consideration your development over the course of the semester.

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

*The Utopia Reader*. Edited by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent. New York: New York University Press, 1999.

Ursula le Guin. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Walker and Company, 1994 (preferred edition).

Most readings, unless indicated otherwise, are to be found in the *Utopia Reader*. Occasionally, I will supplement the readings from the reader with additional essays and articles (see the syllabus).

You are also encouraged to consult a writer's handbook of your choice (e.g. *Elements of Style* or *Keys for Writers*).

Texts are available at the NYU Bookstore.

## SYLLABUS

### Week 1

September 3

- Introduction to the class; in-class writing
- Reading: A.O. Scott, "Metropolis Now" (handout)
- Film clips: *Metropolis*, *Blade Runner*, *Code 46*.

### Week 2

September 8 & 10

- Discussion of description
- Readings: Fourier, pg. 192; G. MacLeod and K. Ward "Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: Landscaping the Contemporary City" (JSTOR, Blackboard); Le Corbusier (handout)
- Descriptive exercises due

Week 3

September 15 & 17

- Discussion of description and exemplification
- Discussion of descriptive exercises
- Reading: “Der Satz” from *Trouble on Triton* by S. Delany (handout)
- Writing workshop on descriptive essay (with examples)

Week 4

September 22 & 24

- Descriptive essay due
- Discussion of analytical essay
- Readings: Plato, pgs. 27-42; T. More, pg. 77; L. Marin “Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present” (JSTOR and Blackboard); Marx and Engels, pg. 227, plus handout.

Week 5

September 29 & October 1

- Continued discussion of analysis and comparison
- Readings: W. Goodwin, pg. 163; Mercier, pg. 152; Restif de la Bretonne pg. 170; H. G. Wells, pg. 312.
- Writing exercises due (passage analysis)

Week 6

October 6 & 8

- Discussion of writing exercises
- Reading: Zamiatin, pg. 329.
- Writing workshop on analytical essay

Week 7

October 15

(Please note: NO CLASS on Monday)

- Analytical essay due
- Discussion of literary-critical essay
- Reading: Orwell, pg. 398, Le Guin, “A Response, by Ansible, from Tau Ceti” (handout);
- Film clips: *Brazil*, *Solaris*

Week 8

October 20 & 22

- Quote/passage analysis exercises
- Readings: Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*; F. Jameson (handout)

Week 9

October 27 & 29

- Passage analysis due
- Continued discussion of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and literary critical essay

Week 10

November 3 & 5

- Additional readings: O. Butler, “Bloodchild” and “Positive Obsession” (both handout); Huxley, pg. 347.
- Film clip: *Children of Men*
- Writing workshop on literary-critical analysis

Week 11

November 10 & 12

- Final draft of literary-critical essay due
- Introduction to library research; library visit
- Research exercises

Week 12

November 17 & 19

- Introduction to writing an argument
- Readings: D. Pinder “In Defense of Utopian Urbanism: Imagining Cities After the ‘End of Utopia’” (JSTOR); Foucault on heterotopia (handout); E. Grosz on embodiment (handout).

Week 13

November 24 & 26

- Continued discussion of argumentative essay
- Readings: Rousseau (handout); Bacon, pg. 118; Condorcet, pg. 176; Montaigne, pg. 99.
- Film clips: *Grizzly Man*, *Encounters at the End of the World*
- Passage analysis due

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Week 14

December 1 & 3

- Continued discussion of argumentative essay
- Readings: Freud (handout); Swift, pg. 141; Jameson (handout).
- Writing workshop on argumentative essay

Week 15

December 8 & 10

- Final essay due
- Discussion of final essay
- Summary and review of the course