

# **English 397 (N): Victorian Utopias**

A Departmental Honors Seminar

Prof. Eleanor Courtemanche

Fall 2013: T 10:00-11:50, 309 EB

Office Hours: TTh 3:30-4:30 264 EB

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One of the most surprising things about Victorian utopias is that so many of them actually came to pass. After the wars and genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics have internalized the assumption that utopia is merely a proto-totalitarian delusion; but in making that leap prematurely, we elide the real transformative effects of Victorian social fantasy. From the link between urban hub and suburban idyll made possible by mass transit, to universal consumerism, the socialist welfare state, international communism, and the solution of the “Jewish problem” through the creation of the state of Israel, many of the most far-fetched dreams of Victorian radicals became everyday realities in the following centuries. In this class, we will consider the British tradition of neo-medieval futurism (Thomas Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, John Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice*, William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*), social planning through architecture (Emile Zola’s *The Ladies’ Paradise*, Walter Benjamin’s arcades, Robert Owen’s co-operative factories, and Charles Fourier’s phalansteries), technocracy (Theodor Herzl’s *Old-New Land*, Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, and H. G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia*), class struggle (Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* and Marx’s and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto*), and the neo-Victorian genre of steampunk (William Gibson’s *The Difference Engine*).

In this class, we will be using Compass to post discussions online before class. Your grades will be based on the following assignments:

- 1) At least ten one-paragraph-long contributions to the online Compass discussion forum, posted at least two hours before class (20%);
- 2) One class presentation to start off class discussion (15%);
- 3) One six-page close-reading paper (20%);
- 4) One ten-page research paper (30%);
- 5) General class participation (15%).

The online discussion board is meant for you to circulate ideas before the class about what you think is most confusing or interesting in that week’s reading. Your comments can be fairly spontaneous, and thoughtful but not too long. If you’re registered for the class, you can click on the course page at

<https://compass2g.illinois.edu>. Click on the “Discussion Board” link to access the discussion. Please post your comments at least two hours before class. If you can’t get to the web, you can type out your comments and bring them to class.

**O**nce this semester, I’d like you to come prepared to start the class with a brief (10 or 15-minute) class presentation. You can write this out if you wish, but an outline or list of topics should be sufficient. Three ways to approach this, which you can combine at your discretion: 1) brief biographical or historical background; 2) important and surprising points in the text; and 3) critical controversies about the text, of which you can sometimes find summaries while investigating (1). The introductions to our volumes are good places to start.

**C**lass participation entails things like doing the reading and being able to answer questions about it, completing informal writing assignments thoroughly and thoughtfully, doing well on pop quizzes (should there be any), inventing clever and pertinent discussion questions, responding to your classmates’ opinions, being able to articulate the sites of and reasons for your confusion (if any), and scrutinizing professor’s hidden agendas (if any).

**A**ttendance also counts as part of your participation grade. Missing more than 3 classes will make it difficult to get a good participation grade. If you miss more than 5 classes, you will probably fail the class. If you have to be absent because of a religious holiday, athletic conflict, or medical emergency, please get some written documentation of the conflict and let me know about it. On the other hand, if you are just sick in the ordinary way I don’t need to get a note from McKinley. In fact, I don’t really need to know why you’re absent unless you’re out for more than 3 classes. (This also means there are no real excused absences, except for those mentioned above.) If you attend class regularly and participate occasionally, your class participation grade will be good (some sort of B).

**P**apers will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for every day late. (That is, a B will become a B-minus.) If you have a conflict with the due date, please hand your paper in early. If you are experiencing a personal emergency that needs to remain private, please seek assistance from the Dean of Students’ office; they can help you notify your instructors. Only the second of our papers is officially a research paper, but if you choose to cite a source in any paper, even from the internet, you must use quotation marks to indicate borrowed ideas or phrases. Cite your sources using MLA style. I will also give you handouts explaining writing strategies and grading standards. You are of course familiar with the University guidelines posted on the web at [http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1\\_part4\\_1-402.html](http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article1_part4_1-402.html). See also the guide at <http://www.library.illinois.edu/learn/research/academicintegrity.html>. English professors are required to report

every suspected case of plagiarism to the Director of Undergraduate Studies before beginning investigative procedures. Consequences for plagiarism can include failing the class or dismissal from the university.

**P**aper due dates and reading assignments are subject to change in response to unforeseen eventualities. I will be available for regular office hours, and I encourage you to drop by 264 to discuss anything about the class or your writing. You can e-mail me if there's an emergency, but please don't e-mail papers or major assignments unless you clear it with me first (printer ink is expensive!). If your paper is late, on the other hand, please do e-mail it to me so I know when you finished it, and then print out a copy to hand in for my comments.

## **Required Reading**

Please purchase the following books, which are available at the U of I Bookstore or TIS Books. Essays from Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* are available through HathiTrust.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Penguin)  
Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Penguin)  
John Ruskin, *Unto this Last* (Penguin)  
William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (Penguin)  
Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (Broadview)  
Emile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise* (Oxford)  
H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (Broadview)  
H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (Penguin)  
William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, *The Difference Engine* (Spectra)

## **Schedule of Readings**

### Week 1: Utopia: what went wrong?

T Aug. 27 Introduction to the history of utopia

### Week 2: Revolution

T Sept 3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848): 218-258. Also read "Preface": 3-13.

### Week 3: The Shock of Industrial Culture

T Sept 10 Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1854): 7-189.

Week 4: Class Struggle and Paternalism

T Sept 17 Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*: 190-425.

Week 5: Neo-Feudalism

T Sept 24 Thomas Carlyle, from *Past and Present* (1843). Reading available on HathiTrust.

Week 6: Beautiful Architecture

T Oct 1 John Ruskin, from *Unto this Last* (1860) and *The Stones of Venice* (1853).  
Six-page paper due.

Week 7: Phalansteries and Planned Communities

T Oct 8 Readings from Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Walter Benjamin:  
available on e-reserve.

Week 8: Socialist Anarchy

T Oct 15 William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1890)

Week 9: The Year 2000

T Oct 22 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1887)

Week 10: The Department Store

T Oct 29 Emile Zola, *The Ladies Paradise* (1883) (warning, long!)

Week 11: Evolution and Devolution

T Nov 5 H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)

Week 12: Technocratic Planning

T Nov 12 H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (1905)

Week 13: Feminism

T Nov 19 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1915): available as a free Gutenberg  
e-book: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32/32-h/32-h.htm>

**Thanksgiving Break**

Week 14: Proto-Zionism

T Dec 3 Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land* (1902)

Week 15: Neo-Victorianism

T Dec 10 William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, *The Difference Engine* (1990)

Final paper due:

T Dec 17, 5 pm