

Gender & Sociopolitical Activism in 20th Century Feminist Utopias

WGS 310/ENGL352 S. Sarker Spring 2006

Class: OM 10
Office: OM 317/Mailbox OM 409
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Hours: TTH 1:00—2:30 p.m.
Office Hours: TTH 2:30—3:30 p.m. & by appt.
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THE COURSE:

'U-topia' means 'a place (topos) that doesn't exist' and 'Eu-topia' means 'a good place.' Implicit as well as explicit in much of the 20th century's feminist critical analysis of the state of society and its politics is a desire for a better state yet-to-be (utopia) as well as a fear of catastrophe or nightmare (dystopia). This course investigates how women's literary writing from different parts of the world (Bangladeshi, British, African-American, Canadian, to name a few) produce visions of the present and the future, of the real and the imagined, beliefs about masculinity and femininity, socialist and capitalist philosophies, modernity, the environment (ecotopia), and various technologies including cybergenetics. Writers included are Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, and Marge Piercy. Literary, political, and philosophical theories—such as those of Seyla Benhabib, Donna Haraway, Thomas Hobbes, Thomas More, Paula Moya, Gayatri Spivak, Virginia Woolf—will inform our readings. The collection of texts is intended also to provide us with genealogies to construct as well as analyze our own fantasies and realities of sociopolitical change.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Doubleday & Co.: 1998.
Butler, Octavia. *Adulthood Rites*. Warner Books Incorp, 1997.
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. Dover, 1998.
Hossain, Rokeya Sakhawat. *Sultana's Dream*. The Feminist Press, 1988.
Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Fawcett Book Group, 1990.

REQUIRED ARTICLES (reserve):

Carrillo Rowe, Aimee. "Bridge Inscriptions: Transracial Feminist Alliances, Possibilities, and Foreclosures." In *Intercultural Alliances*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Press, 2003, pp. 49-80.
Crowfoot, James and Mark Chesler. "White Men's Roles in Multicultural Coalitions." In *Privilege*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003, pp. 349-380.
Connell, R.W. "Masculinity Politics" (pp. 204-224), "Practice and Utopia" (pp. 225-243). In *Masculinities*. Los Angeles: UC Press, 1995.
Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific in *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 683-717(reserve).
Habermas, Jurgen. "Three Normative Models of Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference*.
Haraway, Donna. "Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.
----- "Situated Knowledges" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.
Hill Collins, Patricia. "Toward a New Vision." In *Privilege*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003, pp. 331-348.
Hobbes, Thomas. Extracts from *Leviathan*.
Laduke, Winona. *All our Relations*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999. Introduction (pp. 1-6), "Native Sun: Determining a Future" (187-193), "The Seventh Generation" (197-200).
Lykke, Nina. "Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science." From a book of the same name. London: Zed Books, 1996, pp. 13-29.
Maciunas, Billie. "Feminist Epistemology in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*".
More, Thomas. Extracts from *Utopia*.
Silbergleid, Robin. "Women, Utopia and Narrative: Toward a Postmodern Feminist Citizenship." *Hypatia*, Fall 1997, v. 12 no. 4, pp. 156-173.
Slicer, Deborah. "Towards an Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory: Bodies as Grounds." In *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1998, pp. 49-62, 70-73.
Spivak, Gayatri. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography."
St. Louis, Brett. "Post-race/post-politics? Activist-intellectualism and the reification of race." In *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, July 2002, pp. 652-675.
Tomc, Sandra. "The Missionary Position: Feminism and Nationalism in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*."
Woolf, Virginia. Extract from *Three Guineas*.
Zaki, Hoda. "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler."

REQUIREMENTS:

Nothing is more important than careful reflection on what you and others are saying, and on communicating your different opinions with both respect and precision. This class relies quite heavily on your participation in discussions. Our ways to reach each other are:

- A) Forum
- B) 2 papers
- C) Oral presentations

A) FORUM: The class will be divided into two or three groups. Each group will take turns posting an online communication, through the class email list. This will require that each of the people in the group must post **BY MONDAY MIDNIGHT AT THE VERY LATEST (beginning 2/6)**, ONE question involving any TWO texts assigned for the Tuesday of the upcoming week or the Thursday of the past week; if you choose the latter, avoid ideas/themes addressed in class discussions. The question should be followed by a short comment (maximum 200 words) on the relationship of your query to a theme or topic in a discipline/s of your interest. You may refer briefly to other readings from the syllabus or prior familiarity from other courses but make sure that the connection of ideas to the texts under discussion is made clear.

Please imagine questions that elicit responses about the implications of textual content, rather than ‘yes’/‘no’ or factual research.

Everyone in the class must check her/his email to read the entries posted and look for correlations to her/his own opinions, even if you were not assigned to post that week. I will check the entries by 9 a.m. at the latest, every Tuesday, monitor them for the grade allocation, and bring them to class for discussion. Any entry arriving after I have checked and collected from the Forum will not be considered for a grade. The forum presenters will open classroom discussion, based on their entries.

B) PAPERS:

There are 2 papers, of an average length of 6 pages. Detailed instructions appear on the respective assignment sheet but, generally, all papers must be typed, double-spaced with prescribed margins.

The draft: It is a 2-page, single-spaced detailed outline of the entire paper—the full first paragraph with the main argument, based on the texts you are using, followed by a sequence of the aspects you want to develop, along with quotes from the texts you want to discuss. A list of quotes without the point it supports is not sufficient. **NOTE:** please choose your topic carefully and commit to it. Once you have submitted a draft, you may not change the essential topic, although you may make modifications to it.

For the final version, please consult a Chicago or MLA style handbook for this purpose. Find out how to incorporate quotations, construct paragraphs and many other facts from this book. If you have any questions that remain unanswered, please feel free to ask me. **The draft before the final version must be attached when submitting it. I also will accept only paper copies of both drafts and final versions.**

Late Papers: Since papers are announced much in advance of the due date, and the date and place of submission is clearly indicated on the syllabus, **I will not accept late submissions.** If you need an extension, please let me know a week before the deadline at the latest. Papers submitted after the respective deadline, even with an extension, will be considered “late” and will be penalized one full grade. Papers submitted after two days following the deadline will not be accepted—this means that extensions are granted only for two days after the announced deadline, and only under unusual circumstances. This also means—do not leave work till the very last minute.

One Revision Allowed: the last two weeks of the course offer the chance to revise one of your two papers. You are most welcome to discuss which one, and how you plan the revision. By ‘revision’, I mean a substantial reworking and development of the central argument and analysis, not just a rewording of the previous version. The result will be either the same grade or a higher one. The last version MUST be attached to the final submission.

PLAGIARISM is defined as the use of another’s ideas without acknowledgement. Since this is considered a serious matter, please consult a style handbook on the correct way to record another person’s opinions; ask me if you are still confused.

C) ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Since the class is based in exploration, sharing thoughts and leading discussion will be the basis of our interaction. It will make the class a personally enjoyable experience, strengthen your confidence and enable you to tackle responses that either support or counter your opinions.

This is a graded requirement, based on individual presentation, that is conducted for the same reasons as class discussion. **They begin from Week 3**, in order to allow you to build a solid foundation, and some confidence, in handling new material.

Advantages: Your moment in the spotlight! You may grasp this opportunity to display your individuality in ideas.

Disadvantages: None.

What do you do? Outline the particular aspects/themes/ideas of the texts assigned for that day

Compare/contrast these texts and previous/outside readings

Pose a couple of questions based on the themes so that they elicit discussion.

Time allotted: **10 minutes each (please observe time-limit)**. You are most welcome to consult me beforehand about the presentation, if you have any questions about organization and format. My suggestion is that the presentation be uninterrupted and that general discussion follow afterwards.

Reminder: For your convenience, oral presentations are scheduled **only till Week 12** so that work does not pile up for you at the end, and so that we have time to discuss your papers within your group and submit revisions.

Participation in class discussion is extremely important. One suggestion that might help you put your thoughts in order is to write comments and questions in your notebook or journal while reading, and consult your log-book. Class participation is also allotted a percentage of the overall grade.

CONFERENCES: I value individual conferences highly and encourage them since, for all of the above, frequent communication is necessary. My office hours are printed at the head of this information sheet and at the top of the syllabus sheet. Leave a note, with your telephone number, in my mailbox (or slip it under my office door), or e-mail me, or talk with me after class if you wish to make an appointment other than the times indicated. I urge you to take advantage of this practice, especially because I take great pride in knowing you individually.

If you have scheduled conferences already, and/or are unable to meet with me at all, and wish to show me a first/later draft, here are the instructions -- 1) let me know you are dropping it off; 2) put it in my mailbox (OM 409) or slip it under my door (OM 317); 3) pick it up from either OM 317 the following day. This way, a response from me is guaranteed.

You are welcome to e-mail me any time. Please time your appointments and your questions so that you avoid e-mailing me the day before a draft or a paper is due. I will not be able to respond to any queries the entire day before submissions are due.

Regular attendance is the basis of good performance on your part, and is an inspiration for me to work harder. I will make a record of your attendance. Remember, attendance also means punctuality — I take that aspect very seriously. **Please see the attached grade-guides.**

P.S. This is an exciting and rigorous course. You must meet all the requirements outlined above, consistently and productively, so that you may reap the maximum benefit. Inability to write reports or papers, to participate in an alert manner, or to present one's honest opinions in oral reports, will result in great disappointment for you and for me. It will defeat the purpose of exploration.

Having said all this, **I WELCOME YOU AND I HOPE YOU ENJOY THIS COURSE !!**

S. Sarker

Criteria for grading papers

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What makes an excellent paper:

- 1) Clearly states a strong and sophisticated thesis that directly involves the texts
 - 2) Uses a descriptive title that captures the central point of the thesis
 - 3) Somewhere in the first paragraph, mentions the texts that are to be analyzed!
 - 4) Cites general observations only briefly and uses only ones that are relevant
 - 5) Keeps argument on track, i.e. no digressions into other peripheral aspects or generalities once the analysis has begun, unless it is an idea related to the thesis that must be re-stated
 - 6) Transitions well from one para to another
 - 7) Analyses texts in a detailed way, displaying the nuances of selected extracts, and sticks to the main theme
 - 8) Refers to connections of one text with the other, especially when comparing or contrasting.
 - 9) Chooses quotes (ranging from a word to a phrase) that illustrate the particular point in the particular context, and incorporates them smoothly (structurally and grammatically) into the respective sentences
 - 10) Uses longer quotes that are chosen to fit the specific context
 - 11) Constructs a thoughtful conclusion that extends the issue being discussed. Writing a summary of the paper in the conclusion is an option, but a very basic approach.
 - 12) Keeps track of verb tenses. Suggestion—it is best to start in the present tense
 - 13) Checks paper for spelling and typographical errors, such as misplaced punctuation
 - 14) Checks paper for grammatical errors
 - 15) Is meticulous about general presentation
 - names, date, class (in the top right or left-hand corner of first page)
 - puts numbers to pages (paginates) in typescript, as opposed to handwritten numerals
 - cites references correctly, in footnotes, endnotes or parentheses in the body of the essay.
- Suggestion: the MLA or Chicago style handbook cites bibliography in an acceptable format.

- A Fulfills all of the above.
- A- Has an especially strong thesis, fulfills criteria 2 thru 7, does moderately well with criteria 8 through 10, and erratically observes criteria 11 through 15 (four out of five).
- B+ Has a good thesis that could be developed further, fulfills criteria 2 through 6, does unevenly with criteria 7 through 10, and erratically observes criteria 11 through 15 (three out of five).
- B Has a well-stated but fairly simple thesis, is uneven with criteria 2 thru 6, is sketchy on criteria 7 through 10, and is uneven on criteria 11 through 15 (two out of five).
- B- Has the elements of a thesis scattered throughout the essay, is highly erratic on criteria 2 through 6, is unable on criteria 7 through 10, and does not observe any of criteria 11 through 15.
- C+ Has the elements of a thesis scattered throughout the essay, is unable on criteria 2 through 6, does unevenly with criteria 7 through 10, and does not observe any of criteria 11 through 15.
- C Has the elements of a thesis scattered throughout the essay, is unable on criteria 2 through 9, and extremely negligent of criteria 10 through 15.
- C- Does not have a thesis, is unable on criteria 2 through 11, and careless with criteria 13 thru 15.
- D Does not have a thesis, is unable on criteria 2 through 12, and negligent of criteria 11 thru 15.
- F Does not have a thesis, is unable on all criteria 1 through 15.

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WGS 310/ENG 352
Guide to Grading

TTH 1:00—2:30 p.m.

In the perennially unpredictable world of grades, everyone needs some stability to assess themselves. Here's a guide to the meaning of the numbers and letters that you will come across:

A+	100 - 97
A	96 - 94
A-	93 - 91
A-/B+	90
B+	89 - 87
B	86 - 84
B-	83 - 81
B-/C+	80
C+	79 - 77
C	76 - 74
C-	71 - 73
C-/D+	70
D+	69 - 67
D	66 - 64
D-	63 - 61
F	60 and below

When averaging final grades, any number at the upper limit that carries a +0.5 value will be rounded to the next highest number at the discretion of the instructor—for instance, a final average of 89.5 could become 90, meaning a final grade of A-/B+ rather than a B+ (which is not bad in itself). That will enhance the value of your attendance, participation and journal assessment, give you some advantage and a lot of credit!

GRADE DISTRIBUTION FOR THE COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Paper #1	15%
Paper #2	30%
Oral Presentation	15%
Forum	20%
Attendance and Participation	20%

If you have any questions or suggestions, feel free to talk to me.

GENDER & SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTIVISM In 20th CENTURY FEMINIST UTOPIAS

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Week 1

Tu 1/24

Introduction; readings from Manu, Plato, and Margaret Fuller.

Th 1/26

Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*, xi-18, 37-57; extracts from Thomas More's *Utopia* (reserve).

Week 2

Tu 1/31

Sultana's Dream, 19-36, 58-85; Hobbes's *Leviathan*, "Of Reason and Science" (reserve).

Th 2/2

Hossain review; Gilman's *Herland*, Introduction and chapters 1-4; Engels (reserve).
What must you have? What action must you take? AKA The Exercise.

Week 3

Tu 2/7

Herland, chapters 5-8; Engels (contd.).

PAPER #1 ASSIGNED. Oral presentations begin.

Th 2/9

Herland, chapters 9-12; Slicer (reserve).

Week 4

Tu 2/14

Gilman review; Woolf's *Three Guineas*, 129-152 (reserve); Connell, pp. 204-224 (reserve).

Th 2/16

Woolf, 152-198 (reserve); Connell, pp. 225-243 (reserve); The Exercise.

Week 5

Monday, 2/20: Draft of Paper #1 due by 5 p.m. in Old Main 317 (my office); slip under door.

Tu 2/21

Woolf, 198-220 (reserve); Laduke (reserve); Spivak (reserve).

Th 2/23

Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, chapters 1-5; Spivak (contd.).

Week 6

Tu 2/28

Woman on the Edge of Time, chapters 6-13; Spivak (contd.).

Th 3/2

Woman on the Edge of Time, chapters 13-16; Maciunas (reserve); The Exercise.

Week 7

Monday, 3/6: Paper #1 due by 5 p.m. in Old Main 317 (my office); slip under door.

Tu 3/7

Woman on the Edge of Time, chapters 17-20; St. Louis (reserve).

Th 3/9

Hobbes's *Leviathan*, "Of the Ends or Resolutions of Discourse" (Chapter VII) (reserve); Habermas (reserve);
Piercy review.

PAPER #2 ASSIGNED.

SPRING BREAK

Saturday, March 11—Sunday, March 19

Week 8

Tu 3/21

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, chapters 1-10; Hobbes and Habermas (contd.).

Th 3/23

The Handmaid's Tale, chapters 11-15; The Exercise.

Week 9

Monday, 3/27: Draft of Paper #2 due by 5 p.m. in Old Main 317 (my office); slip under door.

Tu 3/28 *The Handmaid's Tale*, chapters 16-25; Tomc (reserve).

Th 3/30 *The Handmaid's Tale*, chapters 26-30; Tomc (contd.); Carillo Rowe (reserve).

Week 10

Tu 4/4 *The Handmaid's Tale*, chapters 31-46 and Historical Notes & interview; Carrillo Rowe (contd.).

Th 4/6 Atwood review; Butler's *Adulthood Rites*, Part I; Crowfoot and Chesler (reserve).

Week 11

Tu 4/11 *Adulthood Rites*, Part II, chapters 1-10; Crowfoot and Chesler (contd.); "Situated Knowledges" (Haraway, reserve).

Th 4/13 *Adulthood Rites*, Part II, chapters 10-23; Haraway (contd.); The Exercise.

Week 12

Monday, 4/17: Paper #2 due by 5 p.m. in Old Main 317 (my office); slip under door.

Tu 4/18 *Adulthood Rites*, Part III; Lykke (reserve).

Th 4/20 *Adulthood Rites*, Part IV; Lykke (contd.); Zaki (reserve). **Oral presentations end.**

Week 13

Tu 4/25 Butler review; "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies" (Haraway, reserve).

Th 4/27 Haraway (contd.); Silbergleid (reserve); Hill Collins (reserve); The Exercise.

Week 14

Tu 5/2 Review.

FRIDAY 5/5: OPTIONAL REVISED PAPER DUE (Attach previous graded version).

MOVIES OF RELATED INTEREST:

Antonia's Line (available at Mac)
Born in Flames (available at Mac)
The Bridge of Time
Children of the Setting Suns
Die Uhr tickt total
El Entusiasmo
Gandahar
Grosse Freiheit/Kleine Freiheit
La Jetee
Liquid Sky
Lost Horizon (available at Mac)
Metropolis (available at Mac)
One Inch from Victory
Tigerstreifenbaby wartet auf Tarzan
Vacancy