

Fall 8-15-2008

# ENG 4300-4390-003-097: Senior Seminar: Ecotopias

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English 4300.003 and 4390.097  
Senior Seminar: Ecotopias  
Tues. and Thurs. 9:30 to 10:45, 3159 CH  
Fall 2008

4300-003/  
4390-097

Professor Carol Stevens  
Office: 3861 CH  
Phone: 581-6970  
Hours 1-3:00 M, 2-4 T, Th and by appointment except as otherwise announced.

Definitions:

Ecotopian literature is a subgenre of utopian literature, which is named for Sir Thomas More's work *Utopia*. This work describes the society, government, and customs, among other things, of the inhabitants of an imaginary island, providing some alternatives to and commenting on conditions in England of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in which it was written. Utopian fiction is a genre which creates or describes societies that comment upon conditions in the world around them, usually by presenting alternative society alternatives. Conversely, dystopian literature extrapolates (projects) from current circumstances worst-case scenarios and nightmare conditions such as those, for instance, in Orwell's *1984*.

Ecotopian fiction takes its name from Ernst Callenbach's novel *Ecotopia*, which deals specifically with environmental concerns such as climate change, waste, and declining resources by creating a future in which environmentalists in the Pacific Northwest have seceded from the U.S. and created a state run exclusively on environmental principles. Ecotopian writers posit utopian or dystopian worlds (and sometimes, both in the same work!) revolving most usually around environmental conservation or destruction but often also reflecting strong concern with the theory, and pragmatics, including the political, of appropriate technology, social justice, and feminism among other themes.

That's what we learn if we Google the terms. During the semester, seminar members will develop their own understanding of ecotopian literature and its significance.

Texts:

Barnes, *England, England*.  
Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*.  
Butler, *Kindred*.  
Gilman, *Herland*.  
Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*  
Callenbach, *Ecotopia, A Novel*.  
Robinson, *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias*  
Handouts, films, and other materials as assigned

Goals:

By the end of the semester, students will have gained familiarity with a number of ecotopian works through reading of the works on the primary reading list. They will have considered in depth the themes, intents, influences, and philosophies of these works. Students will have completed an ecotopian thought experiment and practical project involving the entire class and the EIU campus, with an approximately 5-page written summary of the purpose, methodology, and results of the study and incorporating suggestions for expanding the project. They will have written a number of responses to the works and to class discussions. They will have produced a research/critical paper of approximately 10 pages on at least one ecotopian work on the secondary reading list. And they will have conducted a mini-symposium on these papers which will take place during the exam period and serve as a final oral exam. They will also have enjoyed (I hope) many frank discussions and disagreements, sometimes heated, but always civil, with respect for difference and willingness to consider all *informed* points of view.

#### Class:

The word “seminar” in the title says it. Our primary means of conducting class will be discussion and student presentation. While I will lecture briefly in many class meetings, your thoughts and commentaries on the reading and other work will form most of the basis for what you take from this class. Attending class is, therefore, a requirement, not an option. The structure of the course requires not only attendance, but assignments turned in on time, since they are designed and sequenced in ways that will affect the entire group.

#### Attendance and deadlines:

When class meets, you are expected to be here, both physically and mentally. Absences will be considered only for serious personal illnesses and emergencies over which you have no control. More than two absences and you can expect your grade to suffer. Late work is unacceptable and will be refused or heavily penalized. Keep the lines of communication open. If you’re having difficulty with anything, including this policy, the sooner I know about it the sooner we can work out a plan for dealing with it.

#### Academic Accommodation:

Students who have documented disabilities and wish to receive academic accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. Please notify me as well.

#### Grading:

Ecotopian group project and paper 20%

Research/critical paper with intermediate assignments and presentation at mini-symposium during final exam period. 40%

Other written work, including responses 20% (will ONLY be counted if they are turned in on time)

Participation 20%

#### Papers:

MLA format; see handouts for individual assignment requirements, and supplementary reading list for topic suggestions for the research/critical paper.

#### Academic Honesty:

The ethics of academic honesty dictate that students do their own work—always. Taking someone else’s words or thoughts, including from the internet, and using them in your own writing without giving credit is plagiarism as is cheating on exams etc. If I catch you doing any of it, you will fail the course and be reported to Judicial Affairs.

#### Schedule:

You will be given a week-by-week schedule and assignment sheets with due dates. Please stick to those dates, including intermediate dates for multi-part assignments.

**Please Note: Any policy statement or syllabus is by its very nature a tentative document. Changes in any part, including grading, are possible during the semester, and an announcement in class will be considered sufficient notice of such change.**