

Seminar presentation sheet

Academic year	2016/17
Seminar n°	4
Seminar title	[UN]SUSTAINABLE HUMAN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN EARLY-MODERN LITERARY UTOPIAS
Teacher(s) (Name, SURNAME)	Paola SPINOZZI
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Teacher(s)' presentation	<p>Paola Spinozzi is an Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Ferrara. She researches the theories and methodologies of verbal-visual studies and is the author of <i>Sopra il reale. Osmosi interartistiche nel Preraffaellitismo e nel Simbolismo inglese</i> (Firenze: Alinea, 2005) and of <i>The Germ. Origins and Progenies of Pre-Raphaelite Interart Aesthetics</i> (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012, with E. Bizzotto). She studies literary representations of scientific theories and is the editor of <i>Discourses and Narrations in the Biosciences</i> (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011, with B. Hurwitz). Her research on utopia focuses on art and aesthetics, imperialism, racism, Darwinism, and post-apocalypse. She is the editor of <i>Histoire transnationale de l'utopie littéraire et de l'utopisme</i> (Paris: Champion, 2008, with V. Fortunati and R. Trousson). She investigates sustainability in the humanities and is the editor of <i>Cultures of Sustainability and Wellbeing: Theories, Histories, Policies</i> (London and New York: Routledge, forthcoming, with M. Mazzanti).</p>
Seminar presentation	<p>Thomas More's <i>Libellus vere aureus</i> (1516), Tommaso Campanella's <i>The City of the Sun - La Città del Sole</i> (1623) and Francis Bacon's <i>New Atlantis</i> (1624) are ού/εύ-τόποι. They envision ideal commonwealths that exist within the discursive space traced by European travellers and insular hosts.</p> <p>An autarchic republic envisioned by a statesman admiring Plato and an evangelical society based on early Christian communities coexist in Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i>. After deconstructing England, he imagines an island where wellbeing is ensured by egalitarian policies and towns are designed according to symmetrical urban planning.</p> <p>Tommaso Campanella's <i>La città del Sole</i> merges classical and mediaeval thought, magic and occultism, Neo-Platonism and Scholasticism in order to</p>

	<p>concoct a republic based on communist principles and governed by wise and learned people.</p> <p>Francis Bacon's <i>New Atlantis</i> is the archetype of scientific utopia, but also one of the few utopian projects to be realized: a few decades after its publication the Royal Society adopted its organisational model of scientific work.</p> <p>By theorizing the most efficient forms of government and the role of religion and science in society, by addressing colonialism, fuelled by discoveries of new worlds, More, Campanella and Bacon shaped early modern thought in Europe and introduced philosophical and political concepts that have invited constant reconfigurations throughout the centuries.</p>
<p>Prerequisites to follow the seminar</p>	<p>Students are expected to: read <i>Libellus vere aureus</i>, <i>La Città del Sole</i>, <i>New Atlantis</i>; watch at least Season 1 of <i>Utopia</i>; read one critical text per each of the four sections.</p>
<p>Seminar objectives /skills to be developed by the students</p>	<p>Thomas More, Tommaso Campanella and Francis Bacon envision ideal societies and raise questions about their sustainability.</p> <p>While indicating a firm faith in rational models of government, Renaissance utopian manifestos invite discussion about relativism and pluralism. The belief expressed by More, Campanella and Bacon that humankind can be rationally regulated invites our appraisal: in responding to their proposals for correcting and sustaining human institutions, students will be encouraged to identify limits (<i>pars destruens</i>) and strengths (<i>pars construens</i>).</p> <p>At the end of the seminar, students will have acquired critical skills allowing them to understand how and why utopia as a literary genre continues to stimulate critical thinking, always prompting new visions and proposals. They will be invited to identify what may ensure a strong connection between the needs of the individual and interests of society, between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. They will be able to appraise utopianism as an intellectual frame of mind and utopia as a critical method for facing and overcoming crisis.</p>
<p>Session 1 – Presentation / plan</p>	<p>The first session will focus on the genealogy of utopia as a literary genre by exploring sources from classical antiquity such as Aristophanes' <i>The Birds</i> and <i>Women in Parliament</i>, Plato's <i>The Republic</i> and <i>Laws</i>, Lucian's <i>True History</i>, Horace's and Juvenal's satires.</p> <p>We will define the specificity of utopia as a genre. We will show its rhetorical complexity, exemplified by the double etymology of the word "Utopia" and thriving on polysemy. We will define how it is related to the Platonic dialogue, satire, political treatise, travel literature, and how it thrives on a skilful mixture of fictional, historical and autobiographical elements.</p>
<p>Session 2 – Presentation / plan</p>	<p>In the second session we will explore ancient, early modern and contemporary history. We will discuss how More, Campanella and Bacon developed specific views about (un)sustainable societies in their own age, drew upon forms of government from classical antiquity and anticipated history in and beyond Europe.</p>

<p>Session 3 – Presentation / plan</p>	<p>The third session will explore the three early-modern authors in relation to the English TV series <i>Utopia</i> (2012-2013). The first aim is to understand why throughout the centuries utopian and anti-utopian writers have continued to investigate the complexity of an ideal humankind and society thriving on rational perfectibility. The second aim is to delve into a new concept of “critical utopia” which has taken shape in the twentieth and twenty-first century by stressing pluralism and relativism, encompassing national issues and universalism, and disclosing a transnational view of human institutions.</p>
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