All utopias are visions of a better world. Some are fictional depictions, others are prescriptions or blueprints. All, sometimes directly, sometimes only by implication, offer a critique of contemporary society. But to what end and to what effect? And where do women's visions of a better world find a place?

This course is an interrogation of the utopian tradition (and its underside, the dystopian tradition) from a feminist perspective. We will look at the utopia as a literary, social, and political phenomenon in both historical and contemporary terms.

We begin with an examination of the male-constructed utopias up to, and including, the twentieth century. Here, we attend to the various ways in which women and women's lot figure in this body of literature. From here, turning our attention to women utopianists, we pose a series of questions: Why do women begin writing utopias/dystopias when they do? Can we discern a common critique of the existing order, especially with regard to the position of women? In the case of prescriptive texts, how viable are these proposals and what would it take to realize them? Finally, is the feminist utopian tradition in itself a force for social change?

REQUIRED READING

Piercy, Marge, Woman On the Edge of Time (N.Y.: Fawcett Crest, 1976)
Gearhart, Sally Miller, Wanderground (Boston: Alyson Publications Inc. 1984)
Le Guin, Ursula K. The Dispossessed (Avon, 1975)
Elgin, Suzette Haden Native Tongue (Daw Books, 1987)

ASSIGNMENTS

25% Class participation and Written and Oral Presentation (10 pp.)
25% Mid-term exam (in class)
50% Final Paper (20 pp.)

Prerequisites: 60 credit hours or permission of the instructor.