

Utopia

Definition of Utopia

The literary term utopia denotes an illusionary place that projects the notion of a perfect society to the reader. Here, the “perfect society” refers to ideal conditions achieved within the material world, as opposed to the expected idealism of afterlife in Christianity or other religions. Further, the citizens presiding in such utopias are bearers of a perfect [moral](#) code, or at the least, every violator of the moral code is harshly punished. A utopian society is one where all social evils have been cured.

Utopia and Heterotopia

An important distinction to be appreciated is that between an imaginary utopia and a live heterotopia. However, the terms should not be treated as opposites of one another. They denote a midway experience, with instances that are both real and unreal. Most of the examples that Foucault provides of heterotopias include several utopian aspects. However, the relationship between these two notions has tended to be ignored in the interpretation of heterotopia.

Description of Utopian Literature

A piece of writing that concerns itself with the description of a perfect society in the physical world, as opposed to the perfection of afterlife, is considered to be utopian literature. The original motives behind utopian novels were political, social, and philosophical. Plato's *The Republic*, written around 380 BC, is usually considered the first example of Utopia in history.

Some traces of utopian elements can be found in Arthurian literature – in the idealization of King Arthur's court at Camelot – but the trend followed by medieval poets involved romanticizing an imaginary past, rather than

using hypothetical utopias for the purposes of criticizing political institutions and suggesting alternatives. It was by the time of Sir Thomas More's book *Utopia*, written in 1516, that the notion of utopia was practically manifested, and his name for the imaginary kingdom became the new name for the writing [genre](#).

Utopia examples show common characteristics, including the following:

An elaborate description of the geographic landscape, often given by guides native to the region.

The narrator or [protagonist](#) of the story is an outsider to the utopian society.

He is very skeptical of the society's modern political, social, economic, or ethical problems.

One of the common misunderstandings about utopian models is that they serve to project a better way of life. To the contrary, the reason behind such literature is to help the reader envision the problems, paradoxes, or faults entrenched within such a political framework.

Examples of Utopia in Literature

The examples quoted below portray various scenarios of utopia:

Description of the Republic of Christianopolis, by Johannes Valentinus Andreae, 1619

The City of the Sun, by Tommaso Campanella, 1602

New Atlantis, by Francis Bacon, 1627

Nova Solyma, the Ideal City, by Samuel Gott, circa 1649

The Law of Freedom in a Platform, by Gerrard Winstanley, 1652

Looking Backward, by Edward Bellamy, 1888

News from Nowhere, by William Morris, 1890

Freeland: a Social Anticipation, by Theodor Hertzka, 1891

A Modern Utopia, by H. G. Wells, 1905

Function of Utopia

Over time, the vision encapsulating the notion of utopia has suffered radical transformations. Events such as war, church reform, revolution, and economic change have contributed toward the construction of a new type of utopia.

The term utopia formulated new shapes and new prefixes, each type having

of constructing an organized society in the reader's mind. The writer makes use of the tool to highlight the discrepancies prevalent within an existing political and legal framework.

A utopian society is framed in such a manner as to present the idea of an ideal sociopolitical culture to the reader. The writer is presenting his [audience](#) with a standard example of a socially and morally fit society with the use of utopia, to make them realize the various deficiencies of their existing societal framework.

Utopia is a tool for exposing the flaws prevalent within an existing political structure. Further, the tool has been widely employed by writers who intended to make an impact on the consciences of readers. The writer uses utopia in order to portray a scenic picture in the eyes of the reader, in an attempt to make him fully appreciate the various diverging factors contributing towards the failings of the existing society. It deals with constructing a standard sociopolitical society in the reader's mind, in order to criticize the prevalent legal norms.