

BARTON

LIBRARY

Dare to know

Utopian Fiction

Fiction that depicts an ideal society.

A genre in which humanity lives in a perfect civilization devoid of most or all of humanity's problems. The term comes from Thomas More's 1516 novel of the same name. In many of these stories, war and sickness have been eliminated, often through advanced technology, and settings are normally fair, idealistic, harmonious, and flawless. Utopian fiction can be satirical and draw from **science fiction**. In whatever form, there is often much discussion of social implications and exploration of social sciences, including the nature and viability of utopias and their governance. While the discussion of perfection can be interesting, the emphasis of these novels is typically on the protagonists' emotions and perceptions as they live in their societies. Plato's *The Republic* (ca. 370-360 BC), and its discussion of an ideal society ruled by philosopher-kings, is an early example. Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), William Dean Howells's *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894), H. G. Well's *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933), B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948), and Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1962) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Supposedly perfect societies
Absence of poverty and war
Humanity's potential

Increased quality of living
Harmony with nature
Community
Beauty

Equality
Sense of purpose
Hidden flaws

Benefits of Reading

Allows readers to visit a "better world"
Permits readers to weigh the advantages and drawbacks of transformed societies

Encourages readers to hope for a better tomorrow
Inspires readers to work toward their ideal life

Modern Literary Examples

<i>Aurora Rising</i> (2017) by Alastair Reynolds
<i>Darcy's Utopia</i> (1991) by Fay Weldon

<i>The Dispossessed</i> (1974) by Ursula K. Le Guin

<i>Looking Beyond</i> (1971) by Ludwig A. Geissler	<i>The War of Don Emmanuel's Nether Parts</i> (1990) by Louis de Bernières
<i>The Messenger</i> (2004) by Lois Lowry	<i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i> (1976) by Marge Piercy
<i>Rushing to Paradise</i> (1995) by J. G. Ballard	
<i>Saturn's Race</i> (2000) by Larry Niven	<i>White Mars</i> (2000) by Brian W. Aldiss
