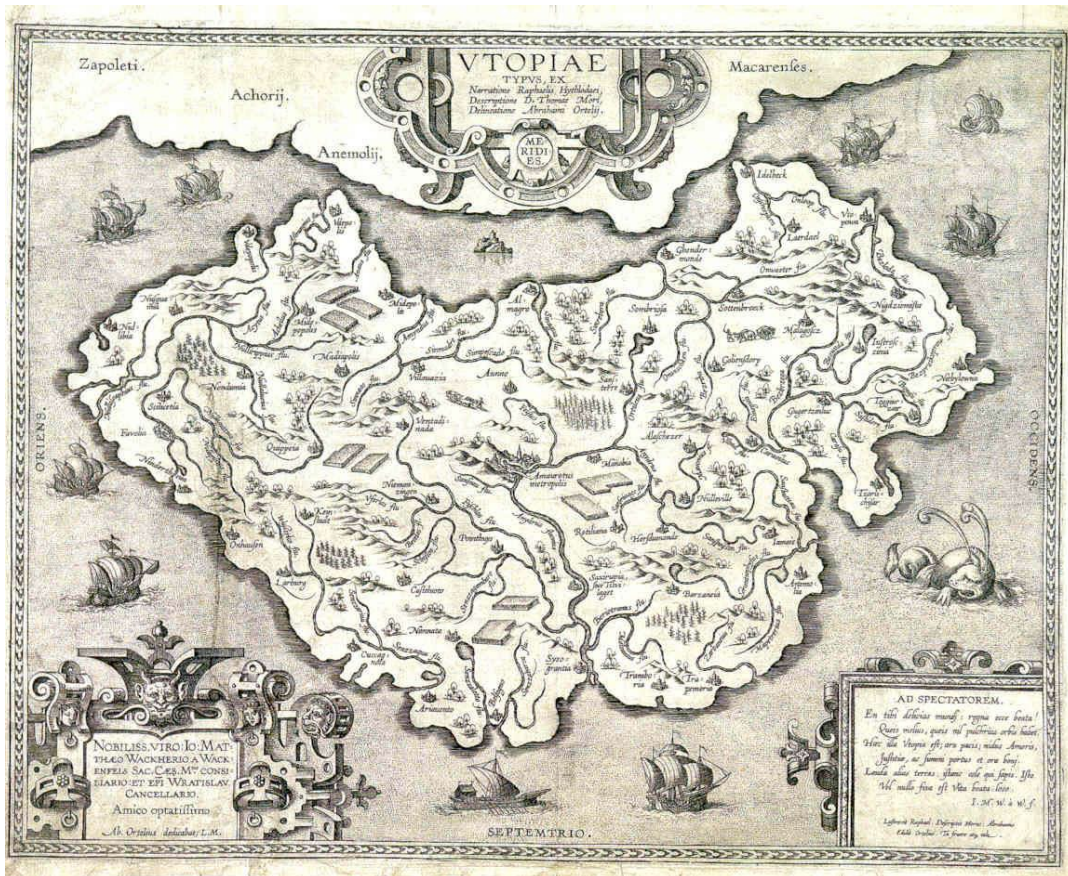


Professor Natania Meeker, Departments of French & Italian and Comparative Literature

Lecture TTh 11 am – 12:20 pm 63533D  
 Lab M 5 – 7:50 pm 63534R

Worlds Beyond



The trope of journeying to another place—toward a better life, a more expansive future, a more abundant or welcoming land—pervades political rhetoric and situations. World-building itself has often been portrayed as an intrinsically human activity (although we may challenge that assumption in this class!). And of course literature and philosophy are replete with imaginary worlds. But where does the journey to another world really take us? How do images of better or other worlds inform and shape actual political experiences and historical transformations?

In our readings and discussions, we will examine the way in which dreams of other worlds—worlds apart, worlds away, worlds elsewhere—stand in intimate relationship to projects of political and historical change. The fantastic voyage to another world enables multiple forms of speculation, investigation, and critique to take hold in the imagination. Worlds beyond serve as the basis for better worlds in the here and now. At the same time, these journeys shore up and stem from colonialisms and imperialisms; world-making is also world-destroying. What are the effects of imagined journeys on the

way in which societies envision not just the future but the present? How does the theme of the imaginary world, far away, intersect with projects of domination? What political and historical possibilities are opened up in the journeys taken by speculative fiction and philosophy? What possibilities are foreclosed?

In this class, we will discover some particularly potent, unnerving, and beautiful imaginary worlds in order to analyze the ways these visions shape and compel political projects of world-making and unmaking. We will examine the ways in which political structures are contested, resisted, and reconfigured as a key part of a struggle for a better world, and we will work to understand the ways in which political theory and history are themselves dependent upon the image of the “world beyond.” Our texts will include novels, treatises, historiography, films, and occasionally visual art.

**Texts** (*subject to change*)

Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Susan Bruce (ed.). *Three Early Modern Utopias*.

Octavia E. Butler. *Parable of the Sower*.

Cyrano de Bergerac. *Journey to the Moon*.

Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman. *Herland*.

Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*.

Plato. *Timaeus and Critias*.

Voltaire. *Candide*.