Introduction

CARRIE HINTZ AND ELAINE OSTRY

Neverland, Narnia, Hogwarts, Middle Earth, Oz. Children and young adults imaginatively travel to many fantasy worlds. From Lewis Carroll’s nonsensical Wonderland to the contiguous worlds of Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials series, hundreds of children’s and young adult books have presented invented “secondary worlds” that go by their own rules and conventions. In many of these alternative worlds, utopian elements abound. Some books present nonexistent societies that, in the utopian and dystopian tradition, are meant to depict environments that are measurably better or worse than the reader’s own. With Sarah Fielding’s The Governess or, Little Female Academy (1749), children’s literature begins with a utopian vision of an all-girls’ school that teaches ideal social organization. The history of children’s and young adult literature is entwined with that of utopian writing from that moment on.

Utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults has been produced for a variety of reasons, and it has had a range of effects, from play and escape to sustained political reflection. In utopian writing, younger readers must grapple with social organization; these utopian works propose to teach the young reader about governance, the possibility of improving society, the role of the individual and the limits of freedom. Utopian writing for children and young adults examines the roots of social behavior and encourages the child to question his or her own society. It often sets up a confrontation between the child and the adult world. In addition, children and young adults are generally in the center of the action or set of concerns, sometimes even bearing the major responsibility for the formation, survival, or reform of the society.

Some utopian writing for children and young adults offers an idealized, pastoral vision that evokes an Edenic image of the ostensibly unspoiled state of childhood itself. Other texts aimed at a young audience raise questions
Introduction

about political organization and the ideal society, focusing on the built rather than the natural environment. The essays in *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* engage with a variety of texts from the eighteenth century to the present day, encompassing a variety of genres popular in children’s and young adult literature: science fiction, fantasy, the school story, and historical fiction. These essays argue for and establish a unique space for children’s and young adult utopias and dystopias. They define and explore the category of utopian writing for children, while keeping an eye on the special readership in these books. They link major figures in adult utopian literature to those of children’s literature. Ultimately, they provide a context in which we can appreciate the importance of utopia and dystopia in children’s and young adult literature, and show how crucial child and adolescent readers are to utopian literature as a whole. In utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults, the stakes are high: these writings may be a young person’s first encounter with texts that systematically explore collective social organization.

We have also included four essays by creative writers who have explored utopia or dystopia in their works. We feel it is important to give voice to creators as well as critics of utopia and dystopia for young readers. James Gurney, Monica Hughes, Alberto Manguel, and Katherine Paterson all add perspectives that complement the essays by academics and enlarge on general themes of utopia. Included as well is an interview with Lois Lowry, whose popular novel *The Giver* (1993) has generated much interest in the field, provoking the kind of troubling, exciting discussion about social organization, individuality, and childhood that this collection seeks to continue.

**Utopianism**

Utopian writing is a notoriously difficult genre to define. A popular use of the term “utopian” is as a means to dismiss an impractical scheme or vision, but this usage fails to do justice to the seriousness of the body of utopian writing and utopian thought, as well as the variety of purposes for which utopian works are written. Lyman Tower Sargent defines “utopianism,” or “social dreaming,” as “the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live” (Sargent, 1994, 3). It often “includes elements of fantasy” (Sargent, 1994, 4). Texts that possess the element of “utopianism” do not necessarily show an elaborated social system, and they may not be radical, but their aspirations toward ideality or amelioration are fundamentally social.

When Thomas More wrote *Utopia* in 1516, he inaugurated a tradition that many writers follow today, but one that has become increasingly complex. Critics differ in their definitions of utopia: Does a text’s utopian status lie within the form of the work, the thematic message of the work, the intention of the author to portray an ideal or nightmarish world, the intentions and beliefs held by the characters who live in the fictional society, or the response of the reader? It is impossible to rely on genre, for example, to establish a text’s utopian nature, since the form of utopian works varies. Furthermore, even a text like *Utopia* is a hodgepodge of elements: travel narrative, political commentary, theological speculation, and a large portion of humanist intellectual exercise. Lyman Tower Sargent defines “utopia” as a “non-existent society described in considerable detail” and reserves “eutopia” for those societies “that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived,” with “dystopia” as considerably worse. Since we are aware of the difficulty of gauging authorial intention, we add to this definition a consideration of the perception and beliefs of the characters about the ideality of their society. We use “utopia,” a more familiar term for the reader, to signify a nonexistent society that is posited as significantly better than that of the reader. It strives toward perfection, has a delineated social system, and is described in reasonably specific detail. Dystopias are likewise precise descriptions of societies, ones in which the ideals for improvement have gone tragically amok.

In this volume, we include the first annotated bibliography of utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults. In compiling it, our most difficult task was limiting our definition of utopia. Arguments can be made for including almost any book for children and young adults, provided that the definition of utopia is stretched far enough, thus rendering the category less useful. How does one know a utopian work when one sees it? No one model captures the range of visions of the ideal society in the Western world. How does one discern the dystopian as a distinct category from the utopian? As Sargent notes, “fashions change in utopias; most sixteenth-century eutopias horrify today’s reader even though the authors’ intentions are clear. On the other hand, most twentieth-century eutopias would be considered dystopias by a sixteenth-century reader and many of them would in all likelihood be burnt as works of the devil” (Sargent, 1994, 5). To complicate matters further, several essays in this collection demonstrate how perspectives can change within a single work, as seemingly ideal societies are exposed as dystopian, or characters disagree about the ideality of their society.

Are the nonexistent societies of utopian writing even meant to be attainable? Maureen Moran draws attention to the perennial and productive tension in utopia’s oscillation between model and dream: “Some utopian models offer glimpses of perfection which can never be attained; possibility ‘seems beside the point’ for in this modality, fantasy is primarily a compensation for deprivation and an expression of needs which reality can never meet. The very unrealizability of the fantasy draws the reader
reluctantly back to the existing order of things. On the other hand, utopias may be read as agents of change, ‘an imperative to drive us onward,’ as Karl Mannheim claims.⁷ The essays in this collection show both utopian models—models that are sometimes mutually exclusive—as writers show both the unrealizable dream and visions that are meant to lead more directly to social improvement.

Utopia can be more of a space for self-conscious speculation than a model of unrealizable, perfect space or political engagement. As Fredric Jameson argues: “it is less revealing to consider Utopian discourse as a mode of narrative, comparable, say, with novel or epic, than it is to grasp it as an object of meditation, analogous to the riddles or koans of the various mystical traditions, or the aorisms of classical philosophy, whose function is to provide a fruitful bewilderment, and to jar the mind into some heightened but unconceptualized consciousness of its own powers, functions, aims and structural limits.”⁸ The “fruitful bewilderment” of which Jameson speaks might well describe a young person’s intellectual process while coping, for example, with the mysteriously colorless world and ambiguous ending of Lowry’s The Giver (1993). Jameson’s remarks solicit political awareness through a renewed consideration of social as well as mental limits and possibilities.

An awareness of social organization, we argue, is necessary for a work to be called utopian; not every text written for young readers that shows a positive environment can be classified as such. As we compiled our bibliography, we saw several texts that portrayed wish fulfillment, where the world, like the Land of Cockaigne, is filled with delights pleasurable to the eye and ear, and even edible.⁹ Books that show people immersed in a hedonistic fantasy where they get everything they want are to be distinguished from utopias if the texts do not contain a social dimension for the reader, or offer a system of collective organization. Books about happy families, for instance, are not technically utopias.ⁱ⁰ While Roald Dahl’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (1964)¹¹ offers a virtual copia of confectionary abundance, it has a claim to the title of “utopia” because of the enclosed nature of its structure (no one is ever seen coming in or out), the strictness of the workers’ discipline and an emphasis on beauty in industrial life reminiscent of William Morris. While wish fulfillment and satisfaction of bodily and spiritual cravings undoubtedly form part of a utopia—unfulfilled desire is certainly one catalyst for utopia—the presence of these elements in a work written for children and young adults does not in itself signify a utopia.

 Likewise, many books for young readers offer visions of communities that are highly developed technologically or even morally, but which are not necessarily utopian, since they do not represent a significant enough modification of the society to which the reader belongs. Another problematic genre is the Robinsonnade, which portrays solitary civilization or pure adventure devoid of utopian content. Poetry for children often has utopian sentiments, but we have not found any elaborated utopias or dystopias in poetry. In general, picture books are also excluded from our bibliography; we prefer to concentrate on works aimed for a slightly older audience, as picture books rarely develop their social settings. However, we have found some notable exceptions. Babar the King by Jean de Brunhoff (1933)¹² presents a fairly comprehensive vision of the ideal city of Celesteville through both text and image. In Celesteville, everyone has a job for which he or she is ideally suited. The city itself is well designed and pleasant: “[t]he Industrial building is next door to the Amusement Hall . . . very practical and convenient” (12–13). When Misfortune threatens to visit Celesteville, it is driven away by “graceful winged elephants who chase Misfortune away from Celesteville and bring back Happiness” (44). Paul Fleischman’s Westlandia (1999)¹³ and James Gurney’s Dinotopia: A World Apart from Time (1992) and The World Beneath (1995) depict whole utopian worlds that describe food, shelter, clothing, recreation, and social relations.¹⁴ An unusual picture book dealing with utopia is Xanadu: The Imaginary Place (1999).¹⁵ We do not include it in our bibliography, since it is not fiction, but rather a school project from North Carolina that invited children to express their own utopian hopes. It adds the actual voices of children to the study of utopianism.

What are we to make of the many examples of historical fiction that treat a highly developed social organization? One could easily argue that Holocaust literature is dystopian;¹⁶ we have, however, excluded this genre as simply too broad and deserving of its own study.¹⁷ Historical fiction demands an attention to the complexities of history that detract from the abstract formulation of utopia and dystopia. Likewise, there are a number of fictional texts that dramatize the lives of children in a communal setting such as a Shaker colony.¹⁸ For the most part, we have chosen to exclude these books in favor of a concentration on fantasy texts not rooted in specific historical events. We have chosen texts that focus on the roots, abstract dreams, and plans of utopia and dystopia. Even when one limits the investigation to the fantasy genre, utopian and dystopian writing exhibits a variety of political ideologies, formal techniques, and intended audiences.

The Association of Childhood and Utopia

Children’s and young adult utopias are in particular need of sustained study for two reasons. First of all, there is a long tradition of thinking of childhood itself as utopian, a space and time apart from the corruption of everyday adult life.¹⁹ The second reason is the unique function that utopianism and utopian writing plays in children’s socialization and education.

Childhood is often viewed as a space sheltered from adult corruption and responsibility. This perspective comes from the Romantic conception of
childhood. To the Romantics and their heirs, children were innocent and pure, close to nature and God, possessing greater imaginative powers than adults. They were emblems of hope and the future, capable of converting adults to a better way of life. Usually unconsciously, Romantic children cast a “critical eye” on the adult world of material gain, corruption, and outdated ways of thinking. Childhood was also a time in which individuality could flourish before the conformity of the adult world took hold. The Romantic conception of childhood is one of the most prevalent cultural myths of the Western world. As we teach children’s literature, we are astonished at how fervently students cling to the image of the Romantic child. This image is a construction that served the ideological purposes of the Romantics and others since.

In reality, children are more complex and less...nice. The Romantic child fits a utopian frame easily, but real children face a variety of social and psychological pressures. No child knows utopia. The Romantic conception of the child empowers the child in one sense and limits him or her in another. The child holds the key to personal and social change, pointing the way to utopia. In Johanna Spyri’s Heidi (1880), the title character turns the most antisocial and atheistic of Alp-Uncles into a churchgoing pillar of the community. She is the youngest and seemingly most helpless of the characters, but she is the one who makes both Dörfli and Frankfurt better places, drawing people together and giving them mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. On the other hand, the image of the perpetually innocent child removes it from the complexities of development and the responsibility to understand the world. Utopias for children reflect this duality.

The Romantic vision of the child influenced educational programs such as that of Friedrich Froebel, inventor of the kindergarten, who considered play and imaginative activity crucial for intellectual and emotional growth. This concept is now universally held in the Western world. Utopian writing intervenes explicitly in children’s development. As child or adolescent readers enjoy speculative fiction that treats imaginary worlds significantly different than our own, they develop their imaginative powers. Escapism also plays a role; individuals under pressure form imaginative havens where none exist in real life. Some critics stress the compensatory nature of imaginative literature to those who suffer materially, and the way in which fantasy or folklore directly addresses the specific scarcity experienced by audiences or tellers.

As one example, the socialist paradise of L. Frank Baum’s The Emerald City of Oz (1910) is set against the economic hard times of late nineteenth-century America. Fantasy can also mirror and criticize reality, forcing readers to consider reality, ironically at the same time as they are escaping from it. Fantasy texts, especially those with specifically utopian or dystopian concerns, can be more than escapist: they can offer an improved vision of the future, or address deep and possibly unresolved fears.

Learning about Society

As we seek to articulate a definition of utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults, it is important to acknowledge the “dual focus” of this literature. Working with children’s literature necessarily commits the scholar to some awareness of reader response, because the literature speaks to young readers in different ways. Children’s literature specializes in “cross writing,” that is, writing on two levels for two different audiences, adult and child, “a dialogic mix of older and younger voices.” Most children’s literature, no matter how fanciful, contains lessons to be learned. It is an inherently pedagogical genre, and with cross writing, children learn more as they reread at different times in their lives. Likewise, utopian literature is “generally didactic” (Sargent, 1994: 6). Combined with children’s and young adult literature, it can be a powerful teaching tool.

Through utopian and dystopian writing, children learn about social organization. Gurney’s Dinotopia (1992), for example, is characterized by a remarkable unity between human and animal characters, and a repeated affirmation of the need for cooperation. All of the characters in the series learn that they need to work with others to achieve their individual and collective goals. More specifically, they learn that such cooperation can and must take place across difference—bridging gaps as large as those between human beings and dinosaurs. Similarly, Sombhe Lal’ly’s A Hive for the Honeybee (1996) shows both the harmony and tensions of bee life, where the good of the hive ultimately overcomes personal doubts about the society. With drones echoing Marx, it is also a good example of cross writing.

Utopian literature encourages young people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing or predisposing them to political action. In the long tradition of utopian literature, an imagined encounter with another culture urges readers to reflect on their home society, a reflection that sometimes takes the form of satire or social criticism. A utopian society likely has solved some of the problems besetting the “real” world, or else its flaws can teach the reader about social improvement. The pedagogical focus of writing for young people invests utopian satire with particular urgency.

The conundrum of many utopian and dystopian books for young readers is as follows: At what point does utopian cooperation become dystopian conformity? At one end of the spectrum, Gurney’s Dinotopia and its numerous sequels indicate the pleasures and advantages of a strong community, and putting others first. At the other end, however, lies the chilling Camazotz of Madeleine L’Engle’s A Wrinkle in Time (1962), where all of the children on the street bounce their balls in strictly exact unison. In dystopias for young readers, conformity kills individual creativity, resulting in a dull, oppressive society, as in Louise Lawrence’s Andra (1971). In Sonia Levitin’s The Cure (1999), any sign of nonconformity is immediately noted in a citizen’s file as
a sign of deviance. The hero, Gemm 16884, realizes that he is different, and is singled out for the “cure”: he is thrust into the body of a Jewish boy during the Black Death. His experience with discrimination initially leads him to reject difference, but he soon realizes the need to celebrate it in order to foster love. Young readers, faced with the pressure to conform in their own lives, can learn from these texts not to be ashamed of how they may differ from the norm.

Much of children’s literature pits the child against the adult world and, in “showing up” the adults, is subversive. Subversion and social criticism are shared by utopian literature; both genres focus on how society might change for the better. The sharp division between the child and the adult world allows for the social criticism that utopias contain. Through the child, the writer casts a “critical eye” on the world. The Romantic association of the child with hope for the future links the child to utopias even further. Utopias for young readers suggest that children can achieve a state of ideality that adults cannot; at times, the impetus for the fictional child to fix society’s problems exerts a powerful pressure on the child itself. This can be seen in O. T. Nelson’s The Girl Who Owned a City (1975), in which everyone over the age of twelve has been killed by a mysterious disease; hence the children cannot rely on adult figures. Violent gangs roam the streets, creating a dystopian, violent society; it is up to the surviving children and the book’s protagonist, Lisa, to rebuild from the devastation.

Utopian fiction reveals the social foundations of our own world—and the cracks that form in them. Class systems come under much scrutiny in utopias and dystopias for young readers. Like Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1975), with its seemingly perfect world, many texts are predicated on the discovery of a society where the sufferings of some allow for the pleasure, comfort, and exaltation of others. We see this pattern, for example, in Zilpha Keatley Snyder’s Green-sky Trilogy (1975–1977). In these books, the utopian treetop life of the Kindar is explicitly contrasted to the misery of the bottom-dwelling Erdlings, and, as Carrie Hinz argues in her essay, it is precisely that inequity that the Kindar ultimately must correct. The class system of the real world is exaggerated and criticized in John Christopher’s The Guardians (1970), H. M. Hoover’s Children of Morrow (1973), John Tully’s NatFact 7 (1984), Robert Swindell’s Daz 4 Zoe (1990), among many others. Writers often pull no punches in depicting the brutality of class inequality taken to an extreme. In Tom Browne’s Red Zone (1980), for instance, twenty-second-century Britain echoes imperial Rome, as the privileged Inner Zone citizens watch the Red Zone denizens fight to the death.

Exposure to these types of texts can lead young readers to see inequality in their own communities and countries, and even lead them into a finer understanding of how the industrialized world exploits developing nations.

Encountering these phenomena in fiction as a young person prepares the reader for a more sustained consideration of the nature of justice and other elements of ideal social life. Indeed, many of the texts we have found openly discuss the nature of democracy, typically in contrast to totalitarianism. The texts mirror political systems that the young readers are just beginning to learn about in school. The fundamentals of democracy are shown in Deborah Moulton’s Children of Time (1989), in which a postnuclear community, the “Demosee,” struggles to make fair, consensual decisions rather than give in to barbaric impulses. G. R. Kesteven’s The Awakening Water (1977) contains a society guided by the all-powerful Party, and a democratic resistance movement led by youths. Long before child readers encounter Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) and Brave New World (1932), they have access to the themes of these classics.

These texts confront the tensions between individual freedom and the needs of society. In many dystopias, totalitarian societies assert the power of determining who lives and who dies. Euthanasia—often called, in Orwellian fashion, “release” or “recycling”—figures prominently in these books. In Lowry’s The Giver (1993) and Gathering Blue (2000), and Nina Bawden’s Off the Road (1998), the old and sick are put to death as useless members of the community. In Sonia Levitin’s The Cure (1999), death is the punishment for nonconformity and dissidence. Books like this challenge young readers to consider the value of every individual to the community, as well as the need to keep society from dismantling individual rights.

Learning about the Self through Utopian Writing

How do depictions of utopia and dystopia in young adult literature differ from those in children’s literature? For starters, young adult utopias and dystopias tend to be elaborated in greater detail than those directed toward children. The system behind the utopia or dystopia is analyzed for the reader, and its components enumerated. In creating the annotated bibliography, we discovered that utopias predominate in children’s literature, whereas dystopias are far more common in young adult literature. This is hardly surprising. It reflects the way in which young children are rarely depicted to themselves as suffering, especially collectively. Furthermore, adolescence frequently entails traumatic social and personal awakening. The adolescent comes to recognize the faults and weaknesses of his or her society, and rebels against it. A common trope in such literature is the emphasis on the lie, the secret and unsavory workings of the society that the teen hero uncovers. Dystopian literature thus mingles well with the coming of age novel, which features a loss of innocence.

Indeed, dystopia can act as a powerful metaphor for adolescence. In adolescence, authority appears oppressive, and perhaps no one feels more under
surveillance than the average teenager. The teenager is on the brink of adulthood: close enough to see its privileges but unable to enjoy them. The comforts of childhood fail to satisfy. The adolescent craves more power and control, and feels the limits on his or her freedom intensely. Denied legal and social power, teenagers in these books often wield awesome mind control. The adolescents in Stephanie S. Tolan’s *Welcome to the Ark* (1996) are trapped in an isolated group home for troubled youth; through mind control, they contact similarly gifted children around the world, and combine forces to conquer violence.

Sometimes the “growing pains” of a society moving toward utopia or away from dystopia are framed as synonymous with adolescent growth itself, and the development of agency. In Monica Hughes’s *The Tomorrow City* (1978), adolescents defend free will against an all-controlling computer, invoking the metaphor of a teenager who must learn to make his or her own decisions to mature fully.

During adolescence, one is indeed faced with decisions that mirror those made by society as a whole: What are the proper limits of freedom? To what extent can one rebel? At what point does conformity rob one of his or her identity? The bloom is off the rose, as society views the teenager in far more negative terms than it does the child. In contemporary literature, there is no “Romantic teenager” following the Romantic child. Little wonder that books featuring adolescents who successfully rebel against an oppressive adult society are so common. In the average young adult dystopia, the adolescent knows best.

Utopian and dystopian fiction does give teenagers an important Romantic characteristic, as they often save the world from destruction. This literary pattern reverses the hierarchy in which real children and young adults are at the bottom. The idea of children “saving” adults is a Romantic concept. As we mentioned before, this act is traditionally unconscious; in these books, however, teenagers are fully aware of the role they play. If “[u]topia caters to our ability to dream, to recognize that things are not quite what they should be, and to assert that improvement is possible” (Sargent, 1994, 26), then perhaps young adults possess this ability, this hope, in greater quantities than their jaded elders. Agents of hope, they come to embrace their ability to lead. This leadership may take the form of individual command. Talon in Neal Shusterman’s *Downsiders* (1999) leads his underground utopian community in their defense against the Topsiders, and then into their new kingdom of rooftops. He shines as particularly resourceful among the eminently practical Downsiders. In many of these books, children and adolescents form groups that resist the dystopian system under which they suffer. In Garth Nix’s *Shade’s Children* (1997), a band of young adults (who have managed to escape the state slaughter of all children over fourteen) tries to end the domination of aliens. The young boys in John Christopher’s *The Tripods* Trilogy (1967) infiltrate the city of the Masters and fight against them. In these books, children and young adults learn about the need for leadership, the stresses of decision making, and the dynamics of group cooperation against a common enemy. They learn how to use limited resources to overcome incredible odds, and become more powerful and capable than they ever could have imagined.

**Utopian Writing and Technological Fear**

Technology in utopian writing for children and young adults can represent both darkest fears and brightest hopes, as young readers are exposed to anxieties about technology while being shown the wonders that it can perform. A large-scale technological intervention in human affairs, such as the construction of an entire domed society, could be seen as a positive response to human needs and an improvement in humanity’s lot, or the worst possible step imaginable. In Claire Cooper’s *Earth Change* (1985), the only possibility of shaking off dystopia lies in finding and working with scientists who have the proper knowledge to help people advance. Gerry Turner’s *Stranger from the Depths* (1967) displays a city replete with technological wonders, including ones that actively combat disease. By contrast, sometimes the vision of technology is anything but sanguine. In Ben Bova’s *City of Darkness* (1976), a domed New York City of the future is the only place where it is possible to live, but it is marred by violent warfare. Shirley Parenteau’s *The Talking Coffins of Cryo-City* (1979) shows a world where a computer programs everything connected to the well-being of a city, including the weather. The city’s slogan is “PERFECT WEATHER FOR A PERFECT WORLD” (Talking, 13). This is a positive state of affairs until it becomes apparent that any deviant behavior is punished by banishment to cryogenic coffins. You are thawed out later when your major character flaw can be corrected—but long after everyone you know has died.

Above all, portrayals of technology alert young people that no matter what technology is used, and the extent to which it is used, it must be used wisely. Some writers strongly emphasize the need to achieve a balance, especially in such works as *The Secret Under My Skin* by Janet McNaughton (2000), in which the democratic Weavers Guild wants slowly to bring back technology, which has been condemned outright after the environmental disaster called the “technocaust.” Technology is hastily ushering in a “posthuman” age: our very bodies are being altered, human cloning looms on the horizon, artificial intelligence is a real possibility. Writers are projecting future scenarios of such developments and mining them for significance; utopian and dystopian literature provides them with an ideal forum for this exploration. Young readers are invited to consider what it means to be human in the twenty-first century.
Children have a great deal to worry about, especially in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. We remember fearing nuclear war during our 1980s adolescence (a fear fueled not just by the Cold War but by TV movies like Threads [1984] and The Day After [1983]) as well as global warming and overpopulation. A startling number of works in the dystopian mode for young adults deal with post-disaster and environmentally challenged scenarios. For example, Robert C. O’Brien’s Z for Zachariah (1975) is set after a nuclear war, and includes a consideration of what kind of society will be built from the ashes, and Robert Swindell’s Brother in the Land (1984) explores tensions between people in a postnuclear society. The enormous pressure on our environment is in the forefront of dozens of young adult dystopias from the 1970s to the present day. One of many examples is Adrien Stoutenburg’s Out There (1971), in which entrepreneurs and developers are eager to exploit even the few pristine parts of the environment. Concern for the environment and the preservation of natural resources in these books are related to class issues because both phenomena relate to the equitable stewardship of what we have on earth. Dystopias function as cautionary tales for a young audience, warning them to take care of the Earth and each other.

When children were asked to express their own utopian dreams in Xanadu: The Imaginary Place (1999), many of the entries showed a strong concern for the environment, and a desire for beautiful surroundings. The Land of Cockaigne lived on with children’s wishes for such things as “houses made of Hershey Kisses” (Xanadu, 8). One child, Synovia Smith, writes, “My favorite thing to do on a Saturday would be to eat a hole in my [candy] house, then fix it” (18). Many children responded with a more social view of utopia that would have cured the problems plaguing their own communities: “My Xanadu has peace in the world. Girls can go outside without getting hurt. And boys can walk down the street without getting shot,” writes LaToya Cunningham (21). There would be no prejudice in many of their Xanadus. The teachers involved in this project reported that the exercise of building a fictional utopia made the classroom community stronger and more harmonious (27).

Utopian and dystopian fiction is a productive place to address cultural anxieties and threats as well as to contemplate the ideal; therefore, we expect that this genre will become increasingly popular and provocative. Utopian and dystopian literature talks about the fears, questions, and issues that interest children and young adults. Although these books are written by adults, they allow young readers to take control, if only imaginatively. Jack Zipes argues in Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from Slowenly Peter to Harry Potter (2001) that American children are becoming more controlled, every minute of their time measured out in supervised, organized activity, and increasingly influenced by the market and media. Zipes claims that such control leads to a great need for children and young adults to take charge when they can. As children become progressively more controlled, so will the need for books that address the desire for agency increase. What could give more freedom to children and young adults than to open the vistas of new worlds through speculative fiction, and ultimately inspire them to change the world around them?

From Train Travel to the Postnuclear Age

The essays in our first group, “Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: Utopia in Transit,” discuss how trains and planes not only lead children into utopias, but are also utopian spaces in themselves. The next section, “Community and Socialism,” examines how utopias in children’s literature are created, linking utopia to education and cooperation. Moving from this discussion of the social basis of utopia, the final two sections, “Child Power” and “From the Wreckage: Post–World War II Dystopias and Utopias,” focus on the individual child’s role in utopias and dystopias. Far from being helpless and passive, children and young adults often wield power against their societies, acts of rebellion born of disillusionment and social criticism. These children and young adults thus come to a greater understanding of whether the society their elders have created for them is utopian or dystopian.

One of the first challenges an author of utopian fiction faces is how to transport characters to utopia. More than just the means of transportation, trains and planes in children’s utopias are gateways to perfect worlds, and are even utopias in themselves. Alice Jenkins’s “Getting to Utopia: Railways and Heterotopia in Children’s Literature” discusses how authors convey characters and readers to a utopia. The steam train in particular has been a common means of solving this problem in fantasy literature for children. The train is more than a mode of transportation; it is a space in which the themes of the works are dramatized. Jenkins suggests that the railway plays an important, even subversive, role in the text, and she uses Foucault’s theory of heterotopia to analyze this utopian space. Just as the railroad captured the imagination of the nineteenth century, the airplane captured that of the twentieth. Fred Erisman’s “American Boys’ Series Books and the Utopia of the Air” examines thirty series of aviation-related books published for American boys between 1920 and 1945 and comprising more than two hundred titles that offer a striking vision of the utopian society that may be achieved through mastery of the air. The books, from Thomson Burritt’s Russ Farrell Series (1924–1929) through Canfield Cook’s Lucky Terrell Series (1942–1946), assume the coming of a world in which the airplane is a part of the life and work of every citizen. In this world, the delights and discipline of flying, initially restricted to the aviator, will become a part of democratic life. Every citizen will share in the excitement of flight, and, more to the point, the entire society will share in the exaltation and the
Introduction

intellectual/spiritual cleansing that only flight can offer. The books project a sense of a progressive future, in which the young will become the shapers of a technologically oriented flying society. Led by progressive America, all mankind will thus ascend to a new and higher level of human capacity.

We complete this section with Alberto Manguel's piece, "Travels Through Dystopia: H. G. Wells and The Island of Dr. Moreau," on his adolescent reading of H. G. Wells's The Island of Dr. Moreau (1895),61 and how this dystopia influenced him. Manguel is the coeditor, with Gianni Guadalupi, of The Dictionary of Imaginary Places (1999),62 and the editor and writer of numerous anthologies and books.

In the section "Community and Socialism," essays examine the social underpinnings of utopia, emphasizing social criticism and social contracts. They stress that not only is it vital to have an ideology of social cooperation in a utopia, but it must also be passed on to the next generation. Sara Gadenken's "Sarah Fielding's Childhood Utopia" examines the ways in which Fielding's The Governess, or Little Female Academy (1749) inculcates the technologies of self necessary for her female utopia, through a system that her narrator calls "a Method of being very happy" (Governess, 8). This book was the first English children's novel intended for children to read for themselves; therefore, the genre of children's novels began with utopian thinking. The stories that make up The Governess are told in an attempt to restore unity after the schoolgirls have been fighting. Following social models that preceded Locke, the novel expresses the social nature of identity and relationships in a way that conceives of value as rooted in communal practice, and argues that the community should be constructed and guided by values that emphasize communal rather than individual good. The development of the imagination is fundamental to the formation of this utopian community.

Catherine Frank brings together a major figure in utopian literature, H. G. Wells, and an important writer for children, E. Nesbit; these writers knew each other and shared social agendas. In "Tinkers and Time Machines: Time Travel in the Social Fantasy of E. Nesbit and H. G. Wells," Frank reads two of E. Nesbit's children's novels, The House of Arden (1908)63 and Harding's Luck (1909),64 together with H. G. Wells's The Time Machine (1895),65 and seeks to illuminate the way both authors' involvement in the socialist Fabian Society shaped their sense of the function and style of both adult and children's literatures. These novels pair their real social concerns with fantastic modes of expression that render them innovative in both adult and children's genres. Specifically, both Nesbit's and Wells's narrative use of time travel ironically but firmly situates them between two eras. Their emphasis on the realistic characters' temporal movement out of contemporary England links their dissatisfaction with fictional realism to their participation in the Fabian Society and its political disapproval of real turn-of-the-century social conditions. Their implementation of time travel asks readers to transport themselves out of their everyday dystopias to gain through their imagination a perspective that makes those ills visible.

Holly V. Blackford's "The Writing on the Wall of Redwall" shows how Brian Jacques's work presents a utopian community of monk mice to its readers. The mice live in harmony with each other, the land, God, and a traditional way of life. Yet when the rats threaten the abbey, the mice not only engage in, but embrace, war. The peaceful tradition of the monastery is undermined by the legend of Martin the Warrior of Redwall, which inspires their military goals. In fact, the community relies on inequalities of gender, species, class, and church authority for its so-called harmony.

Carrie Hintz's " 'Joy But Not Peace': Zilpha Keatley Snyder's Green- Sky Trilogy" describes the way in which the Kindar people, denizens of the idyllic treetop "Green-sky" community, find out that their society is based on the deprivation and imprisonment of the Erdlings, who are held below the root. The article focuses on the Kindar's decision to dismantle the peaceful, happy utopia and allow the Erdlings into their society, disrupting their ideal culture. Children play a large role in that transformation, making it possible for the Kindar to seek justice despite the upheaval involved.

We complete this section with two essays by creative writers. In "Terrible Lizard Dream Kingdom," James Ourney, creator of Dinotopia, discusses how his utopia of dinosaurs and humans living in harmony developed. Katherine Paterson, author of Bridge to Terabithia (1977),66 has written a brief essay for us, "Bridge to Utopia," on utopianism in this book, and how readers have used her utopia to create their own.

In the "Child Power" section, the essays focus on the agency of children and young adults dealing with a faulty society. The child or young adult sees society's flaws for the first time. In real life, children and young adults are the most powerless individuals in a citizenry. In children's literary utopias and dystopias, however, they emerge as powerful, understanding more than their elders, often taking control and doing their best to alter society's course.

In "Suffering in Utopia: Testing the Limits in Young Adult Novels," Rebecca Carol Noël Totaro shows how four contemporary authors of young adult novels take on the challenging task of creating complex utopian and dystopian worlds in which suffering at the most basic level threatens or afflicts their heroes. In Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time (1962), Lois Lowry's The Giver (1993) and Gathering Blue (2001), J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (1997),67 and Sonia Levitin's The Cure (1999), the protagonist suffers from an inability to fit in with respect to physical size, level of maturation, the ability to experience the world through the five senses, or some combination of ailments. The heroes then embark on a voyage to another world or dimension of their own. Ultimately, by experiencing the contrast between two different worlds, the heroes come to
understand the nature and degree of their suffering as well as the nature of their communities of origin as primarily utopian or dystopian.

Maureen Moran’s “Educating Desire: Magic, Power, and Control in Tanith Lee’s Unicorn Trilogy” explores the utopian and dystopian alternative worlds represented in Tanith Lee’s fantasies for young adolescents: Black Unicorn (1991), Gold Unicorn (1994), and Red Unicorn (1997). It draws theoretically on two contending models of utopia: a construct that serves either as an unrealizable expression of desire, or as an agent of social change, a hopeful “anticipation and catalyst of emergent reality.” Using Lee’s Trilogy as a case study, the essay examines the applicability of such theorizations of utopia to literature for children with its emphasis on the moral, social, and emotional education of the individual (and, at least in part, the legitimation of certain dominant ideologies). It investigates how the heroine Tanaquil’s journeys to utopian and dystopian societies offer opportunities for an evaluation of alternative ways of being and living, emphasizing how magic conveys power and offers a bridge between reality and desire often missing in adult, “theoretical” utopias.

Monica Hughes is the author of The Keeper of the Isis Light (1980) and numerous other young adult science fiction books that explore issues of utopia and dystopia. In “The Struggle Between Utopia and Dystopia in Writing for Children and Young Adults,” she emphasizes the need to maintain hope for the young reader even in the most horrible of dystopias as she reviews her oeuvre.

The horrors of World War II and the threat of nuclear destruction have inspired dystopias in children’s and young adult literature, and have made the theme of hope more difficult to emphasize, yet perhaps all the more crucial. These essays in the section “From the Wreckage: Post–World War II Dystopias and Utopias” focus on science fiction and show the child or young adult in conflict with a world that seems to have dangerously lost control.

Kay Sambell’s “Presenting the Case for Social Change: the Creative Dilemma of Dystopian Fiction for Children” explores the formal dilemmas that face authors who seek to adapt the dystopian genre for the young. In the past thirty years, the dystopian novel has become the dominant genre model within futuristic fiction published for young readers. The essay considers the features that set a children’s dystopian novel apart from classic “adult” dystopias, and particularly focuses on the ways in which moral meaning is typically carried in these cautionary novels. It suggests that children’s writers are prone to compromising the narrative strategies on which the “adult” dystopian novelists rely to highlight their dire warnings. It outlines the ideological and imaginative fractures that result from the tendency of children’s authors to supply hope within the text itself, rather than leaving it implicit or barring it, as adult dystopian novelists do.

Karen Sands-O’Connor’s “The Quest for the Perfect Planet: The British Secondary World as Utopia and Dystopia, 1945–1999” argues that children’s literature has a great effect on national image because it is often a young person’s first understanding of a place and its people. This essay examines how national image is portrayed in the secondary world children’s novel in Britain after 1945, when Britain was redefining itself. Does British fantastic fiction face the future, or does it return to its paradigms of Empire, and what does the answer to this question mean for child readers and the notion of childhood, both in Britain and throughout the world? These books present an image of a “perfect” England/Britain as almost exclusively male, white, and regressive, which is then contrasted with the imaginary worlds of the authors.

We follow this last section with an interview with Lois Lowry, author of The Giver (1993), thus rounding out our collection with the voice of the most well-known (and widely taught) dystopia for young adults.

Children’s and young adult utopian literature offers a number of opportunities for future scholarship. The annotated bibliography included at the back of this volume testifies to the scope and variety of utopian and dystopian visions for young readers—from Edenic innocence to the darker dystopias of regimentation, warfare, and conformity. Many of the utopian and dystopian texts we have uncovered are worthy of further scholarly analysis, and inclusion in new literary histories.

Many questions remain in the field. Future studies will no doubt continue to engage with the complexities of the definition of utopia. Historical and biographical works will uncover connections between adult writers in the utopian tradition and writers for a young audience. There is also ample opportunity for research on historical events and time periods as they are reflected in utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults from the “golden age” of children’s literature to the posthuman age. Finally, new utopias and dystopias for children and young adults are being written today, reflecting the uncertainties and possibilities of our time. Utopian and dystopian writing for children and young adults will continue to be central, both for the young readers who are shaped by its questions and challenges, and for those who seek to trace its significance through scholarship.

Notes
3. Lyman Tower Sargent makes a distinction between “body utopias or utopias of sensual gratification” and “city utopias or utopias of human contrivance.” This is a useful distinction for writing for a young audience, which includes both artificial utopias and pastoral, natural utopias. See “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” Utopian Studies 5 (1994): 4; hereafter cited in text.


7. Tom Moylan outlines a particular type of “critical utopia” of the 1980s and 1990s. These texts, he claims, “reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream.” See Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination (New York: Methuen, 1986), 10.


9. Herman Pleij writes of the Land of Cockaigne, “work was forbidden ... and food and drink appeared spontaneously ... one only had to open one’s mouth and all that delicious food practically jumped inside.” See In Search of Cockaigne, trans. Diane Webb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 3.

10. Maria Nikolajeva divides her consideration of utopian children’s writing into pastoral, domestic, and social utopias. See From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children’s Literature (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2000). We tend to focus on the first and last categories, bracketing domestic utopias as an interesting phenomenon, but one that would encompass too many texts for this study.


17. See, for example, Canadian Children’s Literature’s special edition devoted to Holocaust literature: Children of the Shoah: Holocaust Literature and Education. CCL no. 95, vol. 25:3 (1999).


20. A contrast to the Romantic vision of the child is William Golding’s The Lord of the Flies, in which British schoolboys left to their own devices regress into savagery (London: Faber and Faber, 1954).


22. Robert Darnton explains that wishing in the fairy tales of eighteenth-century France “usually takes the form of food in pleasant tales... and it is never ridiculous... in most of the tales, wish fulfillment turns into a program for survival, not a fantasy of escape.” See “Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose,” in The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 33–34.


PART I

Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: Utopia in Transit
Annotated Bibliography of Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults

CARRIE HINTZ, ELAINE OSTRY, KAY SAMBELL, AND REBECCA CAROL NOËL TOTARO

This is the first annotated bibliography of utopian and dystopian fiction for children and young adults. Utopia and dystopia are slippery categories. For this bibliography, we have limited the categories to books that present nonexistent communities with an elaborated social system that is posited as significantly better than that of the reader; in dystopias, the society is significantly worse, often to a nightmarish degree. We have looked for books that elaborate on the social formation of a utopian/dystopian community, and which propose to teach young readers about governance. In most cases, children and young adults are the protagonists.

With an eye to space and feasibility, we have decided to focus on books that give an abstract formulation of utopia or dystopia. As a result, most of the books listed here are fantasy or science fiction. We do not claim to be all-inclusive. For the most part, we have omitted the following categories from our bibliography: historical fiction (including historical fantasy), traditional folk and fairy tales, classical utopias abridged for children, Arthurian fantasies, school stories, picture books, poetry, drama, domestic stories, Robinsonnades, pastoral fantasies, short stories, and books written originally for an adult audience but that have been often taught to, or appropriated by, children and young adults (such as Fahrenheit 451). We have also eliminated books that contain elements of utopianism but that do not delineate the social structure of the utopia or dystopia in detail.

We hope that this annotated bibliography will help scholars and other interested readers locate books for children and young adults that present a utopia or dystopia. We foresee increased interest in the field, and this bibliography can act as a springboard for such research.

Adams, Richard. Watership Down. London: Rex Collings, 1972. This novel portrays both utopian and dystopian communities from the point of view of a band of rabbits who leave the endangered warren of Sandleford, including Hazel, Fiver, and Bigwig. A great deal is revealed about rabbit political and social organization, including the powerful military officers or Owsla. As the rabbits journey to a safer world, they encounter “Esrafa,” a totalitarian warren controlled by the powerful General Woundwort, who imposes his strict rule on everyone. After escaping with several does, the rabbits find the “promised land” of Watership Down, a well-situated, prosperous warren where they can live peacefully.

In In the Keep of Time, the four Elliot children discover a time portal in an ancient tower. Through it, they experience fifteenth-century Scotland in a seeming Dark Age of war and hunger. The children accidentally step into the future where worldwide floods have returned civilization as they know it to nature. Tribes of peoples remain to hunt and gather. The children discover that these tribes believe that they are in an age of progress compared to the prior “Technological Civilization” that brought about environmental disaster through greedy over-mechanization. In In the Circle of Time, two teens, Robert and Jennifer, find a time portal among the Scottish Stones of Arden. In a future Scotland, they befriend Kartan, a young man whose pastoral, peace-loving society struggles to survive attacks from the technological, dystopian society (“the Barbaric Ones”) that has emerged in the postflood years of the twenty-second century. Kartan’s community includes sharing children, meals, and all property. The teenagers experience a successful, entirely positive utopia challenged by its opposite, and they see clearly what they have in their own time—and most important, in their own homes—in comparison. A description of this society continues in The Mists of Time.

Applegate, K. A. Animorphs [series]. The first of the series is Animorphs: The Invasion (New York: Scholastic, 1996). The world is invaded by Yeerks, who take over human bodies, as they have taken over many planets’ inhabitants. Five children meet a dying Andalite who warns them of the coming peril and gives them the ability to morph into animals. They form a resistance group against the increasingly Yeerk-dominated society, which plans not only to dominate politically, but also to destroy the environment. The Yeerks “are a plague that spreads from world to world, leaving nothing but desolation and slavery and misery in their wake” (Animorphs: The Message, 18–19).