

## SOAP OPERA AND UTOPIA Christine Geraghty



### PART ONE | INTRODUCTION

Christine Geraghty's "Soap Opera and Utopia" is: a discourse of women's fiction with/in the utopian framework offered by Richard Dyer' "Entertainment and Utopia". It has compared and contrasted three genres: romance, women's fiction and soap operas. It studies the "areas of common grounds" between "prime time soaps and their equivalents".

In all three, we see:

- (1) A "division between the public and the private sphere, male and female space respectively"
- (2) The "[p]hysical action tends not to be the motivating force in the narrative; instead the emphasis is on the building up and maintenance of relationship."
- (3) A tendency to "seek to enable their readers to imagine an ideal world in which values traditionally associated with women are given space and expression and in which there is some model of the way in which relationships, particularly those between men and women, could be organized on women's terms."
- (4) The emphasis is on the "central woman protagonist(s)" as well as on their "fantasy and escapism"; and, the exploration of both "fantasy and escapism" occurs through the creation of utopias, set against dystopias.



### PART TWO | FIVE 'UTOPIAN SOLUTIONS'

1. Expression of energy (set against 'exhaustion' of a 'grind, alienated labour, pressures of urban life')
2. Satisfactions of abundance and material equality (set against 'the experience of scarcity and the unequal distribution of wealth')
3. Intensity with its emphasis on excitement and drama (set against 'dreariness and monotony')
4. Transparency of 'open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships' (set against 'a feeling of manipulation')
5. Feeling of belonging to a community (set against 'the experience of fragmentation')

### PART THREE | DISCUSSION ON FIVE 'UTOPIAN SOLUTIONS'

#### Expression of energy:

“Energy is thus a characteristic which appeals to the viewer as an expression of how it feels to act vigorously and to affect events.” It originates from: the pace of the plots, the narrative structures, short scenes and characters’ characterization.



#### Satisfactions of abundance and material equality:

“[P]overty is eliminated by the simple tactic of ignoring it and the audience is invited to enjoy the spectacle of abundance through the emphasis on sensuous luxury.” The “satisfaction of abundance and material equality” is expressed through: women’s sensuous and dresses, expensive paintings, abundant fruits and so on.



#### Intensity with its emphasis on excitement and drama:

Intensity appears when their “emotion is expressed, as Dyer puts it, ‘directly, fully, unambiguously,’ [...] [as well as] directly to the audience when the [particular] character is alone. [...] The mask that they put on for other characters, particularly their husbands, is dropped and the full extent of their grief and anger is revealed.”

#### Transparency of ‘open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships’:

“[A] feeling of manipulation, an inability to get beneath the surface, is contrasted with the utopian concept of transparency of open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships. [...] Transparency emphasizes the utopian possibilities of being open and honest in emotions without being hurt, and Dyer associates it with the conventions of ‘true love’.”

#### Feeling of belonging to a community:

It is “underpinned by communal interests and collective activity. [...] it is also experienced in the interaction between the programmes and their audience. Soap offers a common currency to viewers which permits the enjoyment to be shared between those who do not watch the programmes together. [...] Unlike sport, discussion of soap operas also involves sharing ideas on personal relationships and emotional dilemmas.”



#### **PART FOUR | GENDER-NEUTRALITY IN THE IDEAL WORLD OF SOAPS**

“A study of the way in which these soap operas present the possibility of an ideal world also reveals that the concepts offered by Dyer for its analysis are not gender neutral.” Intensity, transparency and community are “associated with women characters” while abundance “tends to be provided by the men for the women to enjoy and display.” But energy is “linked with masculine behaviour, either open through male characters [...] or women [...] who take on male values in the business world or less overtly with bossy women [...] who try to impose their own wishes on others rather than enable communal energies to be expressed.”

#### **PART FIVE | POINTS TO BE NOTED**

1. The concept of an ideal world
2. Five ‘utopian solutions’ against five dystopian troubles
3. Gender neutrality/partiality with/in soap operas
4. Soap operas and culture and cultural studies
5. Fantasy and escapism
6. Bangladeshi/Indian TV Serials in the light of “Soap Opera and Utopia”

