

PHL B04 H3S
Philosophy and Literature

Syllabus

M 1-2pm & W 1-3pm (UTSC)

Instructor: Natalie Helberg

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Office Hours: Friday 4-6 (Toronto time) and by appointment

Course Description

In this course, we will explore the intersection of philosophy and literature. How are philosophical ideas materialized? Does the language that mediates them matter? Are ‘literary’ forms particularly appropriate for the realization of certain philosophical projects (e.g., the ethical and political projects which often seem part and parcel of the contemplative life, phenomenological explorations, or examinations of human finitude and other existential themes)? How might literary forms of philosophy or philosophical forms of literature advance one of the philosophical discipline’s deepest promises: that of helping us critique and transform the world around us? We will chase these questions across a number of works of theory and literature. In the final portion of the course, we will explicitly highlight the relation between social critique and literature, exploring the relation philosophy might bear to creative forms of writing when the discipline takes interest in different axes of marginality.

****How the course will run:*** We will run the course on Blackboard Collaborate, unless we encounter persistent technological issues, in which case we will switch platforms. You can access our sessions through the course’s Quercus page (go to ‘Bb Collaborate’). We will meet on Mondays and Wednesdays at our scheduled times. In the event that technological problems ever render it impossible to carry out a lecture, I will make a lecture recording to replace the real-time lecture. If attending lectures will be difficult due to time-zone differences or other unavoidable factors, please get in touch and I’ll do my best to accommodate you.

Our reading schedule isn’t set in stone and we will be free to adjust it as the course progresses. Some topics may require more time to cover than our reading schedule indicates, in which case we will allow them to spill over into subsequent weeks. Think of the course, of our thinking in the course, as an organism developing, rather than as a body of pre-partitioned information whose delivery is rigidly determined in advance.

Evaluation:

***PARTICIPATION** is not mandatory but it is encouraged. I'm hoping the course will be an experience of collective/communal thinking which challenges teacher-student hierarchies, but at the same time I have no desire to penalize students who are introverted and highly uncomfortable speaking up. It is possible to get an A in the course even if you are only a silent presence during our sessions. **BUT: you can also earn between a 5%-7% 'bonus' in the course for thoughtful contributions you make to our lectures throughout the term.** I will invite conversation as I lecture and keep track of participants. I will add the bonus to your final grade at the end of term. (Note, though, that it is not possible for me to assign grades higher than 100%, even if a student originally at 96% has technically earned an extra 5%.)

First Essay (Feb. 7th): 1500 words (30%):

Second Essay (March 14th): 1500 words (30%):

Take-home Final (40%): "Notes and Exercises Book" (due during the exam period—full instructions provided during the last week of class).

Assignment Submission: All assignments should be submitted through Quercus by midnight on the day they are due.

Extensions: Extensions may be permitted. Please request an extension before the day the assignment you are requesting an extension for is due. That being said, retroactive extensions may be possible, depending on a person's reasons for requesting them. Getting in touch to explain your situation and see what accommodations are possible never hurts!

Late Policy: Late assignments for which an extension has not been granted will be penalized (2% of the grade will be subtracted each day after the deadline until the assignment is submitted).

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty:

Plagiarism (misrepresenting the work of others as one's own, or failing to cite one's sources properly) and other forms of academic dishonesty are serious offenses and will not be tolerated. Offenses of this kind run counter to the aims of education and evaluation: Skill acquisition (one becomes a better reader, writer and thinker because one does the work) and fair assessment (one's grades should reflect one's actual capacities; competition in the academic environment should be fair). In order to avoid inadvertent acts of plagiarism, students should familiarize themselves with the resources found here:

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/newstudents/transition/academic/plagiarism>.

Accessibility:

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Accessibility-related concerns should be communicated to me. I will do my best to accommodate students who require accommodations. Depending on the nature of the accommodation, students requiring accommodations may also need to contact accessibility services:

www.accessibility.utoronto.ca

E-mail Policy: Feel free to talk to me during my office hours about the philosophical ideas and questions we're entertaining in the course, or speak up when we meet and pose questions of this kind then. You can email me about extensions, meetings, and other practical matters.

Texts:

I will post electronic versions (PDFs) of most of our readings on Quercus (see the 'files' section) or provide links to electronic versions of the texts which are available through the UofT library or from other sources. You can find these links on our syllabus. Some of the texts for the course must be purchased:

W.G. Sebald: *The Rings of Saturn*. New Directions. (Will be available through the UofT Bookstore.)

Joshua Whitehead: *Full-Metal Indigiqueer*. Talon Books, 2007. (Will be available through the UofT Bookstore)

Claudia Rankine: *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, 2014. (Will be available through the UofT Bookstore)

Lee Maracle: *My Conversations with Canadians*. Bookhug, 2017. (Will be available through the UofT Bookstore).

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Reading Schedule:***Week 1:******Literature, Empathy and Animality***

Jan. 11: Intro class

Jan. 13:

Franz Kafka: "A Report to an Academy." PDF available.

J. M. Coetzee: Selections from *Elizabeth Costello* (“Realism”). Penguin, 2003. PDF available.

Martha Nussbaum: Selections from *Poetic Justice* (“Fancy”). Beacon, 2005. PDF available.

Week 2:

Literature, Empathy and Animality Continued

Jan. 18: J. M. Coetzee: Selections from *Elizabeth Costello*. Penguin, 2003. “The Lives of Animals” available through UofT library (start on page 13 and read to the end of that chapter):

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/lib/utoronto/reader.action?docID=4689381&query=Elizabeth+Costello#>

Jan. 20: Jacques Derrida: Selections from “The Animal That I Therefore Am.” PDF available. (Please read pages 1-9, 13-14, 18-20, 27-31, 33, and 47-51.)

Ron Silliman: “Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World.” PDF available.

Week 3:

Going Back to Plato: Philosophy’s Troubled relation to Writing and Poetry

Jan. 25: Plato: *Phaedrus*. Electronic version available. Selections from Book III and X of Plato’s Republic. Electronic version available.

Jan. 27: Jacques Derrida: “Plato’s Pharmacy.” PDF available.

Dodie Bellamy: “Crimes Against Genre.” PDF available.

Louky Bersianik: “Aristotle’s Lantern.” PDF available.

Lisa Robertson: Selections from *Soft Architecture*. PDF available.

Optional: Lisa Robertson: “Interview.” PDF available.

Week 4:**Writing and Philosophy in the 20th and 21st Centuries**

Feb. 1: Jacques Derrida: “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing.” In *Sovereignities in Question*. Fordham UP, 2005. PDF available.

Feb. 3: Rosmarie Waldrop: “Alarms & Excursions.” PDF available.

Paul Celan: “Death Fugue.” Electronic version available: <https://poets.org/poem/death-fugue>

Tasseomancy: “Black Milk.” See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESUA11MTv6k>

Charles Bernstein: “Creative Wreading and Aesthetic Judgment.” PDF available.

*****First Essay due Feb. 7th*****

Week 5:**‘No Poetry after Auschwitz’ (Philosophy’s Contemporary Worry about Poetry)**

Feb. 8: Theodor Adorno: “Cultural Criticism and Society.” In *Prisms*. MIT, 1983. Selections from Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*. Verso, 2005. PDF available.

February 10: Lyn Hejinian: “Barbarism.” In *The Language of Inquiry*. U of California P, 2000. PDF available.

*****Week 6 (Feb. 15th & 17th): Reading Week*****

Week 7:**Literature, Philosophy, and Consolation: Existential Themes**

Feb. 22: Friedrich Nietzsche: Selections from *The Birth of Tragedy*. Electronic version available.

Hélène Cixous: “The School of the Dead.” From *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. Columbia UP, 1994. PDF available.

Feb. 24: Julia Kristeva: “Holbein’s Dead Christ.” In *Black Sun*. Columbia UP, 1989. PDF available.

Hadara Bar-Nadav: Selections from *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)*. PDF available.

W.G. Sebald: *The Rings of Saturn*. Must be purchased.

Week 8:**Philosophy, Literature, and Cultural Critique**

March 1: Lauren Berlant: “Introduction: Affect in the Present” and “Cruel Optimism.” In *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011. Electronic version available through the UofT Library:

<https://books-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/duke/2012-01-06/1/9780822394716>

March 3: William Gass: “The Pedersen Kid.” In *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*. Nonpareil Books, 1981. PDF available.

Samuel Beckett: Selections from “Molloy.” PDF available.

Week 9:**Queer Phenomenology in Literature**

March 8: Sara Ahmed. “Orientations Toward Objects.” In *Queer Phenomenology*. Duke UP, 2006. Electronic version available through UofT library:

<https://books-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/duke/2012-10-25/1/9780822388074>

March 10: Sara Ahmed. “Disorientations and Queer Objects.” In *Queer Phenomenology*. Duke UP, 2006. (Also available using the last link, above.)

Joshua Whitehead: *Full-Metal Indigiqueer*. Talon Books, 2007. Must be purchased.

*****Second Essay due March 14th*****

Week 10:**Literature, Philosophy and Race**

March 15: Fred Moten: “There is No Racism Intended.” In *The Universal Machine*. Duke UP, 2018. Electronic version available through the UofT Library:

<https://books-scholarsportal-info.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/duke/2018-08-02/1/9780822371977>

Kristie Dotson: “HOW IS THIS PAPER PHILOSOPHY?” Electronic version available.

March 17: Fred Moten: “There is No Racism Intended” (finish up).

Claudia Rankine: *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, 2014. Must be purchased.

Week 11:

Literature, Abject Expression, and Social Class

March 22: Christine Overall: “‘Nowhere at Home’: Toward a Phenomenology of Working Class Consciousness.” Electronic version available.

Eileen Myles: Short selections from *Inferno: A Poet’s Novel*. OR Books, 2016. PDF available.

Dodie Bellamy: Short selections from *When the Sick Rule the World*. PDF available.

Dodie Bellamy: “The Feraltern.” Electronic version available.

March 24: Herman Melville: “Bartelby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street.” PDF available.

Gilles Deleuze: “Literature and Life.” PDF available.

Gilles Deleuze: “Bartleby; or, The Formula.” PDF available.

Week 12:

Indigenous Philosophy

March 29 (***last day to drop course***): Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation.” PDF available.

Lee Maracle: Selections from *My Conversations with Canadians*. Bookhug 2017. Must be purchased.

March 31: John Borrows: “Frozen Rights in Canada: Constitutional Interpretation and the Trickster.” In *Recovering Canada*. U of Toronto P, 2002. PDF available.

Week 13:

Indigenous Philosophy and Experimental Poetry

April 5: Lee Maracle: Selections from *My Conversations with Canadians*. Bookhug 2017.

Liz Howard: Selections from *Infinite Citizen of the Shaking Tent*. McClelland & Stewart, 2015. PDF available.

April 7: Christine Stewart: Selections from *Treaty 6 Deixis*. Talonbooks, 2018. PDF available.

Billy-Ray Belcourt: Selections from *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field*. Anansi, 2019. PDF available.

Week 14:

April 12: Last day of classes. Wrap up discussion. No new readings.