

ENGLISH 211: SEMINAR FOR ENGLISH HONOURS

Introduction to Critical Theory

Term 2 Winter 2020



Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920.

“A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”
—Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

PLEASE READ THE SYLLABUS. As an experienced university student, you might feel ready to jump to the reading schedule and maybe take a glance at the assignments section. In our case, this time, various accommodations are being made to enhance the online course experience and make it more flexible for folks learning from home in different time zones. Please take note of the explanatory material contained here, so that you understand what we will be doing and why.

Course description: This problem- and play-based approach to general literary and critical theory studies what counts as knowledge, and why do we think so, how we find meaning and where, how humans adapt, respond, and resist in the face of changing conditions in the world, the status of art as expression, and how we have determined communication and interpretation. You might think of critical theory as consisting in the arguments which justify the work of the arts and humanities, and expose the measure of their worth. It asks what function critics and creatively-thinking theorists play in the processes by which a society reproduces itself, and how to advocate most effectively for those in the world who face social and political barriers to thriving and flourishing.

We will read and discuss a rich selection of short fiction and poems in conjunction with narrative theory, ecocriticism, studies in media and communication, critical race theory, feminist literary criticism/gender studies/queer theory, old and new materialisms, studies in the workings of the mind and psychoanalysis, decoloniality, post/structuralism, and cultural theory.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

UBC's Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, occupied, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) people. I acknowledge the land rights of the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

COURSE INFORMATION

Official Course Title	Course Code Number	Credit Value
Seminar for English Honours	ENGL 211 001	3 credits

PREREQUISITES

Eligibility for upper-division English courses.

CONTACT INFO

Course Instructor(s)	Contact Details	Office Location	Office Hours
Prof. Judith Paltin	judith.paltin@ubc.ca	BUTO 502	M 12-1, W 11-12, or by appointment, via video chat in a Zoom meeting room https://ubc.zoom.us/j/7635718208?pwd=dXJ3VHdycUp2c2s5MWQ1QTFEcnU1dz09

COURSE INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

My preferred pronouns are she/her or they/them. I earned my PhD in English in December 2013 from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and began working at UBC the following year. At UBC, I supervise research and teach courses in modern Anglophone literature, modernist studies, and critical and cultural theory. I am passionate about teaching high quality courses that are meaningful and truly interesting to you, that give you questions to ponder, methods of thinking, and ideas to carry forward into your next endeavors. The quickest way to reach me is by email to judith.paltin@ubc.ca, and I will try to respond within 48 hours. If you haven't heard from me by then, please kindly let me know I somehow missed your communication.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND VITAL INFORMATION

This course meets MWF from 1:00-1:50 pm Pacific Time (Vancouver's timezone) online in Canvas Zoom meetings. These are accessed from the lefthand navigation menu on your Canvas course website. The attendance policy is suspended during this term. Supporting materials will be available to supplement class meetings, and the Canvas discussion forum is a backup and fully active alternative venue for course learning and participation, especially during any periods of technical breakdown or issues with synchrony. Our seminar methods are discussion-based, supplemented by brief bouts of lecture, when I think that might be helpful. As seminars rely heavily on your collective contributions, I encourage you to attend the synchronous meetings as often as possible, and when you can't, to participate in the online discussion forum in lieu.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

The reading schedule shows you which readings we will be discussing each day. At the beginning of each week, I propose a literary/fictional text, or more than one, to accompany our theory readings for the week. Do your best to read those companion texts the week before, or weekend before, but I understand sometimes you will still be reading them as the week opens. You are always free and welcome to bring in other examples, literary, historical, or otherwise, that may shed light on our discussions. If it is something other seminar members may not know about, please also give a brief summary sentence or two to help.

The reading schedule may change if in my opinion the class would benefit from slowing down, or for other reasons. Please have the assigned texts available to refer to during class.

Reading theory is not intrinsically different from other kinds of reading, although the norms and conventional moves may be unfamiliar. If you meet a term you don't know, please ask about it in class, via email, or on the Canvas discussion forum. It is helpful and effective to take notes and to form questions while you are reading and to bring notes and queries to class meetings. How you read is important. Select a quiet place, if possible, and try to read a chosen amount without interruption. As Honours students, you are also able and expected to carry out a certain amount of basic contextual research on your own about the texts (cough *internet*) and to deploy that information when it would be productive during discussions and in your writings.

CRITICALITY AND FREE THINKING

Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into the Wreck" (sent with course welcome announcement and available on Canvas or online)

January 11 (Monday): Course Introduction.

January 13 (Wednesday): Moses Mendelssohn, "What Is Enlightenment?" Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"; Christine Sharpe, "The Weather" (excerpt from *The New Inquiry*, not the full book chapter)

January 15 (Friday): Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics"

FORM, HISTORY, THEORY

James Joyce, "The Sisters"; Shakespeare Sonnet 98

January 18 (Monday): Plato, excerpts from *The Republic* Bks. VII and X

January 20 (Wednesday): Sigmund Freud, "The Creative Writer and Daydreaming."

January 22 (Friday): Auerbach, "Odysseus's Scar."

MAKING AND ORGANIZING KNOWLEDGE: PERCEPTION, DESIGN, CAUSALITY

W.B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," "At the Hawks' Well," "The Circus Animals' Desertion"

January 25 (Monday): Kant, from *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

January 27 (Wednesday): Hegel, from *Phenomenology of Spirit*

January 29 (Friday): Nietzsche, from *The Birth of Tragedy*

NARRATIVE THEORY AND CRITICISM

Virginia Woolf, "The String Quartet," "Monday or Tuesday," "Kew Gardens"

February 1 (Monday): Porter Abbott, from *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*; Tzvetan Todorov, "Structural Analysis of Narrative."

February 3 (Wednesday): Cleanth Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase"; William K Wimsatt Jr and Monroe C Beardsley: "The Intentional Fallacy"

February 5 (Friday): Roland Barthes, from "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative"; "The Death of the Author"

DISCOURSE, DECONSTRUCTION/POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Gertrude Stein, "Rooms" (from *Tender Buttons*)

February 8 (Monday): Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" from *Writing and Difference* (1967)

February 10 (Wednesday): Jean Baudrillard, from *The Precession of Simulacra*

February 12 (Friday): Michel Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality, Vol I*. **First position paper due.**

February 15-19 **READING WEEK**, no class

MARXISMS, MATERIALISMS

T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion"

February 22 (Monday): Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour" from *Econ. and Phil Mss. 1844*

February 24 (Wednesday): Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"

February 26 (Friday): Frederic Jameson, from *The Political Unconscious*

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MIND/BODY

Djuna Barnes, "A Night Among the Horses"

March 1 (Monday): Sigmund Freud, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* and "The Uncanny"; Carl Jung, "Shadow Self" (from various sources)

March 3 (Wednesday): Jacques Lacan, from "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious"

March 5 (Friday): Teresa De Lauretis, "The Death Drive." **First essay due.**

ENVIRONMENTAL CRITICISM AND POSTHUMANITY

Ursula LeGuin, "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow"; Robinson Jeffers, "Tor House"

March 8 (Monday): Aldo Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain"

March 10 (Wednesday): Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"

March 12 (Friday): Rob Nixon, excerpt from *Slow Violence*

DECOLONIZATION, BIOPOLITICS, AND ANTI-RACISM

Audrey Lorde, "A Litany for Survival"

March 15 (Monday): Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies"

March 17 (Wednesday): Paul Gilroy, from *The Black Atlantic*

March 19 (Friday): bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness"; Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, "Why I Choose to Write in Irish: The Corpse That Sits Up and Talks Back"

FEMINISMS, MEDIATION, SOCIAL JUSTICE

Virginia Woolf, excerpts from *A Room of One's Own* ("Shakespeare's Sister," "Androgynous Mind")

March 22 (Monday): Dorothy Richardson, "The Future of Feminism"

March 24 (Wednesday): Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision"

March 26 (Friday): Sara Ahmed, from *Living a Feminist Life*. **Second position paper due.**

QUEER THEORY, GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

Katherine Mansfield, "Leves Amores"; Woolf, "Slater's Pins Have no Points"

March 29 (Monday): Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now"; Warner and Berlant, from "Sex in Public"

March 31 (Wednesday): Monique Wittig, "One Is not Born a Woman"

April 2 (Friday): Good Friday, **no class**.

ANTITHEORY

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"

April 5 (Monday): Easter Monday, **no class**.

April 7 (Wednesday): Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory"; James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son"

April 9 (Friday): Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?"; Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?"

April 12 (Monday): Paolo Virno, from *Grammar of the Multitude*

April 14 (Wednesday): Jacques Rancière, "The Order of the City"

Course Wrap-up. **Second essay due**.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this class students will be able to:

- Identify and explain fundamental concepts and arguments of critical and literary theory, focusing (though not exclusively) on writers that reflect anti-capitalist, decolonial, feminist, environmental, and critical race concerns, among other social, political, and economic issues.
- Engage with the ways that theories and issues of concern interact with other theories and positions historically and in current scholarly conversations.
- Identify and integrate into their own research appropriate research frameworks and methods, and critically evaluate the scholarly quality of research sources.
- Evaluate and participate in lines of argument and critique relating to cultural change and theories about literature as a field by cultural theorists and stakeholders of diverse origins.
- Recognize and appropriately utilize methods of English studies' disciplinary modes of reading and criticism.
- Think beyond traditional nation- and period-defined fields of literary and cultural classifications.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In this course, you will read and analyze a range of writing on theory and criticism which will give you the opportunity to identify, define, compare, explain and discuss various aspects and issues of social, political, economic, and literary criticism, anticolonial praxis, gender/sexuality and cultural theory, and historical materials. Our activities include close readings and analysis, periods of lectures providing contextual and background information, library and media research, theoretical discussions, discussions of controversies and issues, and writing activities.

During seminar meetings, you should listen to each other carefully, and think about the matter at hand as you take notes, adding your own ideas and connections where you can. I welcome a conversational style during seminar meetings, with lots of interaction among all of us. If I am talking, feel free to intervene with questions and contributions by mic or chat text. Your own curious and imaginative contributions are always welcome in class, as long as you are not talking over other people, failing to share class time fairly, or taking the class too far away from the day's assigned topics for an extended period. Barring that, please explore your venturesome public intellectual self!

LEARNING MATERIALS

Course materials will be supplied at no charge on Canvas or via URL links to online web-based materials.

ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

Requirements consist of two position papers, two essays, and a presentation.

20% Two position papers explaining a critical or theoretical matter or concept of interest (10% each).

10% Class presentation (~10 minutes, including discussion questions; may be on same topic as one of your position papers).

70% Two analytical essays at least 1500 words each (each essay is worth 35% of the course grade). The analysis component includes close reading and an incisive interpretation of assigned texts. See assignment page for rubric and prompts.

All of the major assignments are required, i.e., in order to pass the course, you must submit work in each of these categories. A general writing rubric and assignment prompts will be supplied on Canvas. Your written work for this course follow the general writing rubrics issued on Canvas, and should take up a critical question or issue of concern to the course (in some cases, specific topics may be assigned) and offer a focused, well-reasoned discussion with reference to primary course-assigned texts. You may also choose to include real-world examples from high-quality journalistic or historical sources around an issue of concern to the course, or some other form of case study.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

I have been requested to add the following statement from the Provost's Office to this syllabus. If you have any questions or issues concerning these matters which you would like to discuss with me,

please kindly reach out in whatever way which may be safe for you. If there is no safe way, perhaps you might communicate that “I am concerned about the Provost’s recent statement.”

During this pandemic, the shift to online learning has greatly altered teaching and studying at UBC, including changes to health and safety considerations. Keep in mind that some UBC courses might cover topics that are censored or considered illegal by non-Canadian governments. This may include, but is not limited to, human rights, representative government, defamation, obscenity, gender or sexuality, and historical or current geopolitical controversies. If you are a student living abroad, you will be subject to the laws of your local jurisdiction, and your local authorities might limit your access to course material or take punitive action against you. UBC is strongly committed to academic freedom, but has no control over foreign authorities (please visit <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,86,0> for an articulation of the values of the University conveyed in the Senate Statement on Academic Freedom). Thus, we recognize that students will have legitimate reason to exercise caution in studying certain subjects. If you have concerns regarding your personal situation, consider postponing taking a course with manifest risks, until you are back on campus or reach out to your academic advisor to find substitute courses. For further information and support, please visit: <http://academic.ubc.ca/support-resources/freedom-expression>

The following statement is composed by and mandated to appear in the syllabus by the UBC Academic Senate in support of **Senate Policy V-130**.

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

OTHER COURSE POLICIES

Our classroom space, even when virtual, is intended to be warmly welcoming, enriching, and respectful in all its interactions. I request that you kindly self-monitor your own contributions for civility, including off-topic phone or computer use. Your thoughtful and engaged participation affects other people’s experience and enhances your own impact and learning.

The following policy is adapted from ideas and writings by Prof. Koritha Mitchell, @ProfKori: This classroom will be free of hate speech regarding sexual orientation, gender expression, race, ethnicity, national origin, and socio-economic status or background. Students may suggest additions to this list which the class will discuss whether to adopt. This policy means that words that are slurs such as the N-word or F-word won’t be used in this class by any person, even when it appears in our texts and we are quoting the passage. Instead we will substitute the name of the first letter of the word. Dr. Mitchell points out that we can be responsibly engaged with texts and materials which contain these slurs without “giving them life with our breath” in our learning space.

Readings, discussions, and class materials may reference mature themes, violence, sexual matters, or conflictual ideas (this is a “content warning”). If you feel you do not wish to read one of the assigned texts because it may emotionally distress you, please see me well in advance of the assigned reading’s due date to request a substitute reading assignment; if we cannot agree on an appropriate substitution, you may be obliged to follow the original schedule of readings to complete the course.

Study at university-level is more than knowing a collection of facts, and class participation is crucial to developing your academic skills at this level. I hope under our present COVID-19 emergency, we can cooperate creatively together to find fresh techniques and activities to make this online course experience enriching, satisfying, and intellectually profitable to each of you.

The Department of English webpage (under “Resources for Students”) details the English department’s agreed-upon marking standards for your reference.

The course adheres to the university’s strict rule against plagiarism. If you represent the words, productions or ideas of anyone else as your own, you become subject to the disciplinary processes of the university concerning plagiarism, and may face a disciplinary process. If you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism, please ask me before you submit the assignment.

Students may record course materials for personal study purposes only, and may not share any portion of their recordings or lecture notes with any other person not currently enrolled in the course nor upload them to any online platform.

LEARNING ANALYTICS

This course will be using the following learning technologies: Canvas. This tool captures data about your activity and provides information that can be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In this course, I plan to use analytics data to:

- View overall class progress
- Track your progress in order to provide you with personalized feedback
- Review statistics on course content being accessed to support improvements in the course
- Track participation in discussion forums
- Assess your participation in the course

LEARNING AND OTHER SUPPORT RESOURCES

There is a student Writing Centre with coaching available in the Chapman Learning Commons in Barber: please see <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/tutoring-studying/writing/> for more information. Anyone with a documented disability is gently encouraged to contact the Access and Diversity Office in Brock Hall, 1203- 1874 East Mall (tel. 604.822.5844) for accommodations and support services. Other helpful programs are the academic services described at <http://students.ubc.ca/success>, and UBC Counselling Services tel. 604.822.3811 or, after hours, for anyone in distress, the Vancouver Crisis Line, tel. 800.784.2433. I am a resource person with UBC’s Positive Space Campaign. As its website announces, “the Positive Space Campaign is an initiative intended to help make UBC more receptive to and welcoming of its lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* (transgender, transsexual, trans-identified), two-spirit, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBT*TQIA+) communities, individuals and issues of

sexual and gender diversity on campus.” If you would like more information about this campaign, or to be put in touch with campus resources, please feel free to talk to me, or to contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion in Brock Hall, tel. 604-822-6353.

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