

ENGLISH 490:
Literature Majors Seminar
Modern Political Fictions and Democracy

Term 1, Winter Session, 2023-2024



Filming of *The Man in the High Castle*, Amazon Prime series, on UBC's Main Mall in 2016

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Department of English Language and Literatures at UBC Vancouver is on the unsundered traditional territories of the Musqueam people; our departmental offices are located on ʔəlq̓sən, called Point Grey in English, a promontory claimed by the British as a Colonial Admiralty reserve in the mid-nineteenth century and occupied by the University of British Columbia since 1914.

This territory has been a site of learning for many generations before UBC stood here, and we recognize our obligations as teachers, researchers, scholars, and learners in ensuring that our classrooms and our work uphold the best of that longstanding learning context now and into the future.

We also recognize the myriad ways that English as a discipline has been informed, shaped, and challenged by both colonizing violence and decolonial commitment, and that these complexities continue to impact much of what we do in and beyond the classroom regardless of our areas of teaching and research focus. As a department, and as a community, we are working to do better, to think better, and to be a better place for faculty, staff, students, and community members to understand the profound power of language and literature to impact our lives and relationships in good as well as harmful ways.

We are committed not to simply acknowledge Musqueam territory, but to realize that acknowledgment in an active dedication to more just, more accountable relations.

We invite all members of our community to review the [Musqueam-UBC Memorandum of Affiliation](#) to understand more about this important relationship, and to consider how we can all help realize the commitments in that document and in UBC's renewed [Indigenous Strategic Plan](#).

COURSE INFORMATION

Official Course Title	Course Code Number	Credit Value
Literature Majors Seminar	ENGL 490-001	3 credits

PREREQUISITES

This course is restricted to students in year: =4 with one of these specializations: maj engl,emp lit,emp llit.

CONTACT INFO

Course Instructor(s)	Contact Details	Office Location	Office Hours
Prof. Judith Paltin	judith.paltin@ubc.ca	BUTO 502	M 12-2 and by appointment, in-person or 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 2013 from the University of California, Santa Barbara. At UBC I supervise research and teach courses in modern Anglophone literature, modernist studies, gender and sexuality 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, 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 on Mondays from 10:00 am until 11:50 am Pacific Time (Vancouver's time zone) in BUCH B 312 on UBC Vancouver campus. The Canvas discussion forum and zoom meeting room are backup and fully active alternative venues for course learning and participation during any events such as snow days, pandemic recurrence, or other emergencies that may arise around meeting in person.

Class methods are largely discussion-based, supplemented by periods of lecture, when I judge that would be helpful. As this kind of active seminar learning relies heavily on your collective contributions, I encourage you to prepare to speak at least once in every class meeting, and weekly online in the discussion forum.

Course description. The premise of this course is that overtly polemical political fiction, traditionally not given the prestige of "high" or "sophisticated" literary fiction, is undervalued in terms of helping us to understand more about how politics constructs our world and our experience. I am also interested in fundamental questions about forms of democracy. Toward what kinds of utopia does modern democratic politics gesture when the traditional ideal of the City of God is out of reach or unavailable? Modernism and its kinfolk carried out a lengthy thought-experiment during much of the twentieth century, devising new political fictions without the support of a guarantee of goodness. We will read a set of novels, shorter fiction, poems, and drama whose politics are overt and whose aesthetic prowess is distinctive, but which are not as straightforward as is commonly thought. We will support our literary readings with nonfiction essays by fiction writers and political theorists.

Learning Outcomes. Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and explain the cultural and political significance of major works of modern fiction, verse, drama and other media that reflect anti-capitalist, decolonial, feminist, environmental, and critical race concerns, among other social, political, and economic issues.
- Engage with varieties of genre and textual studies that take account of differential identities and ideations of citizenship and human and animal rights, referencing

contemporary and historical instances of speech and writing in contexts that are often culturally complex.

- Identify and integrate into their own research appropriate research sources 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 modern 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 classification.

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, presentations providing contextual and background information, library and media research, theoretical discussions, discussions of controversies and issues, and writing activities.

During class 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 interaction among all of us. If I am talking, feel free to intervene with questions and contributions. 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

When possible, course materials will be supplied in electronic form under the doctrine of fair dealing or via UBC-paid subscription to students at no charge on Canvas, in the LOCR, and via URL links to online open-access or UBC-subsidized subscription to web-based materials.

Animal Farm, George Orwell ~\$12

Brave New World, Aldous Huxley ~\$12

Death and the King's Horseman, Wole Soyinka ~12

Three Dublin Plays, Sean O'Casey ~\$20

Native Son, Richard Wright ~10

It Can't Happen Here, Sinclair Lewis ~\$8

A Clockwork Orange, Anthony Burgess ~\$16

The Man in the High Castle, Philip K. Dick ~\$19

Tropic of Orange, Karen Tei Yamashita ~\$16

The Dispossessed, Ursula Le Guin ~\$16

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

The reading schedule shows you which readings we will be discussing each day. You are always welcome to bring in other examples, literary, historical, mediatic, or otherwise, that may shed light on our discussions. The reading schedule may change if in my opinion the class would benefit from slowing down, or readings become unavailable, or for other reasons. Please have the assigned texts available to refer to during class.

N.b., There are no class meetings on statutory holidays: Oct 2 (National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, observed), Oct 9 (Thanksgiving), and Nov 13 (Remembrance Day, observed).

MODULE 1. THE POWER POLITICS OF DYSTOPIAN WORLDS

Sept 11 George Orwell, *Animal Farm*; W.B. Yeats, "Easter 1916"

Sept 18 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*; Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War"

MODULE 2. TRUTH AND HISTORY

Sept 25 No class, no text (use the time to read ahead), instructor is away. Special brief writing assignment in lieu of class meeting.

Oct 12 (this is "Make-Up Monday"—please see the welcome announcement for an explanation) Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, including author's note.

Oct 16 Richard Wright, *Native Son*; James Baldwin, "On Being White and Other Lies"

Oct 23 Sinclair Lewis *It Can't Happen Here*; Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and the Limits of Liberalism" (Ch. 6 of *Hegemony, Radical Democracy, and the Political*)

MODULE 3. ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES, DISSENT AND REVOLUTIONS

Oct 30 Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (this work in particular comes with a content warning; please reach out for information and/or discussion); Stuart Hall, "The great moving nowhere show"

Nov 6 Sean O'Casey, *Three Dublin Plays* ("The Shadow of a Gunman" "The Plough and the Stars" "Juno and the Paycock"); Virginia Woolf, "The Leaning Tower"
Andre Breton, "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art"

MODULE 4. SCIENCE FICTION AND HETEROTOPIA

Nov 20 Ursula Le Guin *The Dispossessed*

Nov 27 Karen Tei Yamashita *Tropic of Orange*

Dec 4 Philip K. Dick *The Man in the High Castle*; Raymond Williams, "A Lecture on Realism"

ASSESSMENTS OF LEARNING

Requirements consist of contributions to class learning (what is sometimes described as participation), a reading journal, a set of discussion questions which you will lead, and a critical-analytical end of term essay.

20% Contributions to class learning. This is a holistic assessment of your course engagement and activity outside the major assignments, including listening and interacting in class, participating in learning activities such as in-class discussions, the special writing assignment on Sept. 25, reading and replying to online discussion posts, asking questions or otherwise contributing to class learning.

30% A reading journal. Please produce approximately 1-2 pp of typed writing in response to each week's readings. The journal at the end of the course should thus contain at least 10 pp. The topics are of your free choice, as long as they are arguably relevant to the course and the reading.

10% Lead a few minutes of class discussion based on your prepared questions on an assigned reading of the day. We will average two of these per week, with a sign-up sheet available at the beginning of the term.

40% A critical-analytical essay of at least 2000 words. This essay assignment includes a library research component (using professional-level peer-reviewed secondary sources) and an analysis component. The analysis component includes producing an analytical thesis, close readings, and an incisive interpretation of assigned texts.

A general writing rubric and specific assignment prompts are supplied on Canvas. Your written work for this course will follow the general writing rubric 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 should offer a focused, well-reasoned discussion with reference

to primary course-assigned texts. You are welcome 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, if appropriate.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

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.

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 we can cooperate creatively together to find techniques and activities to make this 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 and

attendance standards for your reference: <https://english.ubc.ca/resources/resources-for-students/#attendance>.

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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