

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 2220 Philosophy and Literary Art Forms  
Dr. Karen Houle  
Fall 2013

*Course Meets: MWF 10:30 to 11:20 in CRSC 116*

Instructor: Dr. Karen Houle

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**NB:** I don't have email at home; email contact during daily working hours, only, please.

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-3.

**Philosophy and Literature:**

There are many ways to explore the complex spaces at the conjunction of “philosophy” and “literature.” Taking literature *philosophically*, one could focus on the **content or topic or theme**. *The chief question is what? What-the-novel-is-about-that-is-philosophical? What philosophical theme is the literary work explicitly addressing?* Some common philosophical themes: life, death, time, love, subjectivity, embodiment. People are more inclined to notice these aspects of a text.

One could also study **texts** in terms of **form or genres**: *novel, poem, short story, novella, essay (belles lettres), aphorism, theatrical dialogue, or treatise*. Even more: the structural elements of texts: the *shape* of a narrative, the *flow* and *rhythm* of the arguments within an essay, the length of a work; the number and form of the basic set of symbols (letters or numbers or grammatical elements like commas); the amount and placement of spaces between the letters and the edge of the page; the roughness or smoothness of the paper; the thickness of the ink or screen; presence of mimetic visual elements like photographs or drawings; the ways that the eyes move across or down the scrolled or flipped pages. *The chief question is how?* How is it structured? How is it built? People are less inclined to notice that all texts have these aspects. Or, to study these aspects philosophically.

Typically a study of literature + philosophy would approach texts from either one or the other of these angles. In this class, we are interested in both. We want to investigate how these two axes – content and form; what and how – are meaningfully entwined. We want to explore *the philosophical significance of that intersection* for instance, the way that the form of Plato’s philosophy as dialogue underwrites the metaphysical view that Sokrates argues for. *Or:* what kinds of thinking-about political issues like Israel:Palestine are availed via a graphic novel like Guy Delisle’s *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City* Language, compared to the same topic taken up by a national newspaper? Whether heard or spoken or read or written; whether encountered in a philosophy text or a short story, whether on a page or on a screen,

language is a *skin* that rubs up against you (Roland Barthes). It *does* something. It is an action. What does it do?

One of things it does is participate in the ongoing production and reproduction of a **particular idea** of the self, or what in philosophy we call *the subject*. The “subject” is a perennial philosophical theme running from the Pre-socratics through to 21<sup>st</sup> century speculative metaphysics. How language-use acts to ratify and naturalize a certain view of the self, and a particular experience as a self, is what we will focus on in this course.

### **Required Literary texts**

1. W. G. Sebald, Austerlitz\* (298 pp)
2. Javier Marias, A Heart So White\* (278 pp)
3. J. M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello \* (230 pp)
4. Virginia Woolf's The Waves \* (260 pp)
5. Individual shorter pieces might be posted on Course Link.

### **Required Philosophy texts**

1. Judith Butler's Giving an Account of Oneself
2. Individual essays to be distributed in class or posted on Course Link

**Expectations.** Students are expected to read these texts in their entirety, probably at least twice. They should come to every class having first read these texts, prepared to discuss them, and going back to the texts to re-read after we are finished discussing in class. Students should expect to spend 8-10 hours a week on this course. There are no additional modules. No on-line quizzes. Just reading and attending class. Some of the readings will be longer than in other philosophy courses because we will be reading novels. Do not let this scare you off, as the reading will move by much more quickly than reading a dense, philosophical text.

### **Assessment/Assignments:**

<b>A. Reading Responses</b>	<b>2 x 15% (30%)</b>
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Students will submit two 400-500 word response-readings to **any** 2 of the 4 novels we read. These will be due after our in-class discussion of the novels, but **before** we begin to discuss the next ones. What is expected in these assignments is that students demonstrate a grasp of a major thematic feature of the novel which is substantively connected to a philosophical idea we have been working through. Students will trace and explicate that thread through a close reading of the work, adding a critical commentary on that thread drawn from Butler and making one argument for the relationship between that theme and a structural feature of the text. **Note:** You must pay close attention to where we are in the term. You may not hand in two response readings at the end because you lost track of time.

**B. In-class work:****Total possible = 36%**

Students will be given particular micro-tasks in almost every class. These tasks might be: to write a response to a quotation from a novel or an essay; to describe an event from a reading in terms of their own experiences; to explain a concept from one of the essays or lectures; to say how one work is connected to another. Students are assessed in terms of the care, clarity and creativity of their thinking and writing, and on evidence of having done the reading and paid attention in class. You will receive either: 0, 1, 2 or 3 (unacceptable, fair/good, or excellent). At the end of the term, I total all the possible grades earned and render this into a mark out of /36. All in-class work must be done in class, except where otherwise indicated. Missed classes where in-class work was done will not be 'made up' (*except in the excusable circumstances set out in the University Calendar*). Pick these up and hold on to them. They will be useful for the final paper.

**C. Final exam is a take-home essay**(2500 words, Handed out November 28<sup>th</sup>: Due December 5<sup>th</sup> by 4:30pm)**Worth = 34%****A General Look at the Term**

(Nb: It is your responsibility to check on Course Link to find out exactly where we are and what you should have read before class)

Date	Come Having Read...or done
First full week (Sept. 9-13)	Foucault, "Two Pipes" and "The Unravelled Calligram" from <u>This is Not a Pipe</u> (on Course Link) * <u>Austerlitz</u> 3-117
By end of September	Butler, Ch. 1 "An Account of Oneself" *All of <u>Austerlitz</u> <b>(Response Reading due)</b>
By end of October	Butler, Ch. 2 "Against Ethical Violence" *All of <u>Elizabeth Costello</u> <b>(Response reading due by ~ Oct. 15)</b>  *All of <u>The Waves</u> <b>(Response reading due by end of Oct)</b>

<p>By end of November</p>	<p><b>Butler, Ch. 3 “Responsibility”</b>  <b>*All of <u>A Heart So White</u></b>  <b>(Response Reading due)</b></p>
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## Regulations

### E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students. I will set up a D2L site for posting things distributed in class, and possibly announcements.

### When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. Where possible, this should be done **in advance** of the missed work or event, but otherwise, just as soon as possible after the due date, and **certainly no longer than one week later**. In the event of missed **in-class work**, you will receive zero unless you are able to provide evidence of having missed the class for clear medical or compassionate reasons. Having signed up for the course constitutes a commitment to participating in, and contributing to, all aspects of it, including the in-class components. This means that you may not go on Facebook or YouTube or text message in your pocket while in the classroom. If you are so bored and distracted by the class, or these marvelous texts please don't come. If you come and you're distracting to me or your peers I will ask you to leave the classroom or I'll sit you in a different location. Should you be asked to leave, or you decide to miss class, or to leave class early, even in order to work a shift, or play a game of rugby you will not be able to \*make up\* what you missed by some other means. Sorry. Note: if appropriate, documentation of your inability to meet that in-course requirement is necessary, the course instructor will request it of you. Such documentation will rarely be required for course components representing less than 10% of the course grade. Such documentation will be required, however, for Academic Consideration for missed reading responses. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration. ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml))

### Drop Date

The last date to drop one-semester Fall 2009 courses, without academic penalty, is Thursday October 31<sup>st</sup> For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses see: ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-drop.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-drop.shtml))

### Copies of out-of-class assignments

**Keep** paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of **all** in and out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time. Sometimes the dog does eat your homework. Or a thief steals all your marked papers. At the end of the term, I would be happy to compare our tallies.

### Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The University of Guelph takes a serious view of academic misconduct, and it is your responsibility as a student to be aware of and to abide by the University's policy. Included in the definition of academic misconduct are such activities as cheating on examinations, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and submitting the same material in two different courses without written permission from the relevant instructors. **Be warned that work you do for any other course, even a section of your work, cannot simply be copied and handed in for credit in this course, or vice-versa.** To better understand your responsibilities, read the Undergraduate Calendar. ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c01/index.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c01/index.shtml)) for a statement of Students' Academic Responsibilities; also read the full Academic Misconduct Policy ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml)). You are also advised to make use of the resources available through the Learning Commons (<http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/>) and to discuss any questions you may have with your course instructor, TA, or academic counsellor.

Instructors have the right to use software to aid in the detection of plagiarism or copying and to examine students orally on submitted work. Instructors have the right to request to see prep. notes for the final essay. Should there be any question about the integrity of the work you submit, the matter will be handed over immediately to the department chair and the Dean of Arts' office, for closer investigation. For students found guilty of academic misconduct, serious penalties, up to and including suspension or expulsion, can be imposed. Hurried or careless submission of work does not exonerate students of responsibility for ensuring the academic integrity of their work. Similarly, students who find themselves unable to meet course requirements by the deadlines or criteria expected because of medical, psychological or compassionate circumstances should review the university's regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration in the calendar ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml)) and discuss their situation with the instructor and/or the program counsellor or other academic counsellor as appropriate.