BAD READING: TOWARDS THE UNCRITICAL IN CANADIAN LITERATURE AND CRITICISM

While university English departments purport to teach “critical reading,” literary and cultural theorists have recently turned (or, rather, returned) to the question of what it actually means to read “critically.” Not only has critique—what is, for many, the *sine qua non* of literary studies—fallen under some particularly remarkable scrutiny (or self-scrutiny) as a result of this turn, but there has also been an upsurge of interest in the sorts of reading and thinking that are relegated to the dubious realm of the “uncritical.” The critique of critique is particularly significant in the context of Canadian literature, where postcolonial, anti-Imperial, and anti-American sentiments (not to mention the persistent suspicion that Canada is culturally unworthy) have lead Canadian literature scholars to assume an ambivalent position with respect to the conventions of literary analysis, if not to knowledge production in general. This course will be devoted to exploring the apparent patterns and ideological investments of Canadian literature scholarship and to ascertaining the potential contribution of the “uncritical” to the study of Canadian literature.

The first section of the course will address the modern history of the term “critical” through texts by Kant, Foucault, and Butler. From there we will consider six avenues through which the “uncritical” has been theorized: “immanent criticism,” “reparative” reading, post-secular critique, affective reading, social-justice criticism, and indigenous epistemologies. Alongside the theoretical readings, we will be looking at literary texts and the extant criticism on these texts as evidence of what critique has meant for Canadian literary studies in particular instances. These literary texts are somewhat notorious for the ways in which they have and have not been taken up by critics, and for the debates they have inspired. Final papers will take the form of a case study on the critical reception of one of these works of literature, assessing the role of the critical and the uncritical in Canadian literature scholarship.

**Course Texts:**

**Literature**
- Dionne Brand, *What We All Long For* (Knopf, 2005)
- Sheila Watson, *The Double Hook* (McClelland and Stewart, 2008)

**Theory**
- Michael Warner, “Uncritical Reading”
- Immanuel Kant, “Was ist Aufklärung?”
- Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* (selections)
- Judith Butler, “What is Critique?”
Raymond Williams, “Criticism” (*Keywords*)
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading: or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You”
Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”
  “Valéry Proust Museum”
Catherine Liu, “Art Escapes Criticism, or Adorno’s Museum”
David M. Buyze, “Cultural Taste & the Postcolonial Other”
Len Findlay, “Always Indigenize!: The Radical Humanities in the Postcolonial Canadian University”
Michael Bérubé, Hester Blum, Christopher Castiglia, and Julia Spicher Kasdorf, “Community Reading and Social Imagination”

**Evaluation:** Short Paper 15%, Seminar Presentation 30%, Final Essay 40%, Class Participation 15%