English 318: Contemporary Canadian Literature

Fall 2008
Room: DWE 1515
Time: T, Th 11:30 - 12:50
Office hours: T, Th 1:30-2:30
Professor Linda Warley
Office: HH 270 Ext. 35379
lwarley@uwaterloo.ca

Note: this course is managed through UW-ACE: please get into the habit of checking there for announcements and have your UW-ACE mail forwarded to the email account you use most often.

Course Description and Objectives

In this course we will study selected literary works in prose, poetic/prose, and drama with an eye to thinking about contemporary Canada as a “postcolonial” literary space. How contemporary authors engage with the past—a colonial past, a diasporic past, an aboriginal past—will be one of the key issues we explore throughout the course. We will also consider how authors map out various questions about race, gender, and social class in their work. We will study both literary works and selected critical/theoretical essays in class. Plus we will view three National Film Board documentaries. The objectives of the course are as follows:

- To introduce students to postcolonial theory as one methodology through which contemporary Canadian literature can be interpreted.
- To historicize and theorize some Canadian literary themes and writing strategies.
- To develop students’ oral and written presentation skills.

Book list

John Steffler. *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*
Joseph Boydén. *Three Day Road*
Lawrence Hill. *The Book of Negroes*
Lorena Gale. *Angélique*
SKY Lee. *Disappearing Moon Café*
Fred Wah. *Diamond Grill*
Carol Shields. *Larry’s Party*

All of the critical/theoretical readings are available in the following volume:

Sugars, Cynthia, ed. *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (2004). Copies are available for purchase at the UW Bookstore. The volume is also on reserve at the Dana Porter Library for one-hour loan.
Students are responsible for ensuring that they have in their possession copies of all assigned readings and that they have read each assigned text thoroughly before the scheduled class.

I also recommend that you obtain copies of these reference works, especially if you plan to go on to advanced English study.

Any good writing handbook; the bookstore has copies of *The Little Brown Compact Handbook*.

Students will find useful two reference works in Canadian literary studies (shelved in the reference section of the Dana Porter Library):

W.H. New, ed. *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*
Eva-Marie Kröller, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*

**Schedule of Classes**

**Sept.**
9 Welcome and orientation to the course
11 Lecture: The state of contemporary Canadian writing

16 Film: *The View From the Typewriter* (NFB 1992)
18 Lecture: Postcolonial reading strategies
   Read: Linda Hutcheon “‘Circling the Downspout of Empire’: Postcolonialism and Postmodernism” and Alan Lawson “Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Settler’ Subject”

23 Read: John Steffler
25 Steffler
   Seminar: The meaning(s) of exploration

30 Lecture: The ‘Native’ subject
   Read: Thomas King “Godzilla vs. Postcolonial” and Marie Battiste “Unfolding the Lessons of Colonization”

**Oct.**
2 Read: Boyden
   Seminar: Cree people and their cultures (in Northern Ontario)

7 Boyden
9 Lecture: Blackness in Canada
   Read: Rinaldo Walcott “A Tough Geography’: Towards a Poetics of Black Space(s) in Canada

Thanksgiving is Monday Oct. 13
14  Read: Hill
    Seminar: African Canadian literary history
16   Hill
21  Lecture: Performance and identity
    Read: Sherene Razack “To Essentialize or Not To Essentialize: Is This the Question?”
23  Read: Gale
    Seminar: Black theatre in Canada
28   Gale
30  Film: *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (NFB 2004)

Nov.  4  Read: Lee
    Seminar: Chinese Canadian literary history
6     Lee
11  Read: Wah
    Seminar: Multiculturalism, Canadian style
13   Wah
18  Read: Shields
    Seminar: Gender, race, and class
20   Shields
25  Film: *Living in the Hyphen* (NFB 2003)
27   Concluding thoughts
    Seminar: A book project of your own

**Assignments**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar presentation</td>
<td>Sign up by Sept. 16</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Sign up Oct. 7-Oct.30</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term essay</td>
<td>Nov. 13</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final examination</td>
<td>Fall exam period</td>
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1. **Group seminar presentation**
This assignment will give you an opportunity to meet each other and to work together as a team. The purpose of the seminar is to present important critical, cultural, and historical materials that will provide a broader context through which the literature might be interpreted. Your seminar must be analytical (i.e. not just present facts) and should
connect in meaningful ways with the writers and texts we are studying in the course. The seminar should last 40 minutes.

**Sign up by Sept 16th for one of the seminar topics listed at the end of the syllabus.**

**Advice:** On UW-ACE you will find a downloadable document that gives you practical advice on how to prepare good seminar presentations.

**Handout:** You are also responsible for providing each member of the class with one piece of paper that represents notes to your seminar. These notes can take any form you like, but they should be substantial enough that students could later use them as study notes for the final exam. They must also include all works cited in correct MLA format.

**Equipment and aids:** The classroom is supplied with a computer, data projector, DVD and VCR players, blackboard, overhead projector, and screen. If you would like to show any part of a film it is imperative that you check with me first to make sure that it clears copyright restrictions.

**Evaluation:** Each member of the group will receive the same mark; thus, it is up to you to ensure that the work of the group is shared equally. I will evaluate your presentations according to the following criteria: the intellectual rigour of the presentation; the commitment and preparation of the group; the coherence of the presentation (i.e. you must demonstrate that you have worked together as a group and that you have thought about how you will integrate your material and share the labour—in terms of both preparation and presentation); your ability to generate and respond to comments and questions from other members of the class.

2. **Term essay**

The purpose of this assignment is for you to analyze in depth one or two of the primary texts studied in the course by writing about those texts in relation to a topic of your choice. You must choose texts that are on the course syllabus or obtain prior permission from me. The best essays will also be researched, so spend some time reading literary critical sources about your text and your topic, and incorporate well-chosen sources into your essay. You do not have to be exhaustive, but a minimum of three relevant critical articles or books will enhance and contextualize your analysis. All sources (primary and secondary) must be fully acknowledged and cited in correct MLA format.

**Note:** Make sure that you research articles published in scholarly journals as well as book and Internet sources. The most useful electronic databases that index articles on Canadian literary topics are the Canadian Periodical Index, the MLA International Bibliography, JSTOR, Project Muse, and Web of Science. Access these resources through the “Research databases” section of the University of Waterloo library web site.

**Advice:** On UW-ACE you will find a downloadable document that gives you practical advice on how to write good essays.
There are three parts to the term essay assignment:

1) **Topic, thesis and essay plan:** Design an original essay topic, extrapolate a thesis from the topic, and compose an essay plan in which you structure the discussion and briefly indicate the kind of textual evidence (from both primary and secondary sources) that you will use to support your argument.

2) **Interview:** Schedule a ten-minute appointment with me during my office hours (if possible) to take place between Oct. 7-Oct. 30. During the interview, you will orally present to me your topic, thesis, and essay plan, and I will evaluate your oral presentation, as well as give you immediate feedback as to how you might refine or improve your essay. It is not necessary to hand anything in for this interview: I will take notes as we talk.

3) **Writing:** Based on your essay plan and our interview, write an analytical essay of 10 pages—double-spaced, in 10-12 point font, and with no more than 1 inch margins. Give your paper a descriptive title that includes the title or titles of the literary work or works analyzed. DO NOT make a separate title page. DO include a works cited page. Your essay must conform in EVERY way to MLA format. The essay is due on November 13th in class. Hand in a hard copy of your paper and ALSO upload a digital copy of it to the drop box on UW-ACE.

**Evaluation:** The essay will be marked out of 100% with a marking scheme as follows: 20% for formulation and articulation of topic and thesis; 50% for structure, argumentation, and interpretation of primary and secondary sources; 30% for writing style and accuracy (i.e. grammar and punctuation) and MLA documentation.

3. **Final examination**
   The final exam will cover the work of the course as a whole and will take place during the examination period. You will be required to write your answers in essay form.

**Course Policies**

**Classroom work:** Attendance in class is required, and you are expected to be well prepared, having read and thought carefully about the material to be discussed that day.

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or
the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm

Avoiding Academic Offences: http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Late essays and missed assignments: You have to be there for your group seminar presentation. The only exception would be for medical or other emergencies. In that case, contact me and group members immediately to make alternative arrangements. You will have to provide official documentation to substantiate your incapacity and you will be required to do make up work.

All essays must be handed in on the due date. I do not grant extensions except in emergency circumstances (computer problems do not count as emergencies). Again, official documentation will be required. If you decide to hand in your essay after the due date, the late penalty is 3% per day, including weekends.

**UNBREAKABLE RULE: I do not accept any essays at all after the last day of classes.

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

Seminar Topics

Your task is to connect your research findings with the issues and the materials that we are studying in the course. Depending on the topic, you will study audio/visual materials, as well as books and scholarly journal articles. Please use library resources to the fullest
extent possible and enlist the help of the librarians, who will be delighted to help you with your research. **Do not rely only on Internet sources.** Please keep in mind that we have to ensure that we have copyright permission to show films or some other audio-visual materials to members of the class.

**Note:** the questions around each topic given below are intended to be generative, not definitive or exhaustive.

**Seminar Topic: The meanings of exploration**

Why are travel and exploration such major themes in Canadian literature and culture? Give some other examples of texts (they could be literary, but they don’t have to be) where exploration is a major feature of their meaning and analyze the possible cultural functions of exploration in literature and other media.

**Seminar Topic: Cree people and their cultures (in Northern Ontario)**

What aspects of Cree history and culture do we need more information about in order to fully appreciate Boyden’s novel? Why is that historical and cultural information important?

**Seminar Topic: African Canadian literary history**

Research the history of African Canadian literature. What are the temporal parameters of this literature? Who are some of the major figures? What are some of the major themes, concerns, critical issues that shape this literature?

**Seminar Topic: Black theatre in Canada**

Situate Gale’s work in the context of and in relation to a history of black literature generally and black theatre specifically in Canada. How important is drama to black cultural expression in Canada? Who are some of the other playwrights? [You should consult with the African Canadian literary history group to ensure that these two seminars do not overlap too much.]

**Seminar Topic: Chinese Canadian literary history**

Research the history of Chinese Canadian literature. What are the temporal parameters of this literature? Who are some of the major figures? What are some of the major themes, concerns, critical issues that shape this literature?

**Seminar Topic: Multiculturalism, Canadian style**

Read the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, as well as any other Government of Canada documents that specifically pertain to multiculturalism, and perform a rhetorical analysis
of the *discourse* of multiculturalism. How do the literary and critical works we are studying reinforce and/or complicate the official discourse?

**Seminar Topic: Gender, race, and class**

Why are these important theoretical concepts in literary studies? How does Shields’s novel engage them? How does Shields’ treatment of these concepts connect with and/or depart from any of the other works we are studying in the course?

**Seminar Topic: A book project of your own**

Assume that you are writing a literary work (a collection of poetry, a play, or a novel) that engages with “postcolonial” issues in some way. Make a pitch to a publisher (i.e. us!) about why your work should be published. Depending on the number of students in this group, you could imagine more than one project. Make sure that you describe what the text(s) will be about, what form it will take, and why it is important.