Department of English, University of Waterloo  
English 318: Canadian Literature Since 1967  
Winter 1998

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30 - 4:00 p.m.

I. Course Description

This course will be framed by a particular theoretical approach to reading: postcolonialism. While colonialism is always grounded in specific economic and political relations, it is also experienced symbolically through language and other signs. Canadian literature can be called postcolonial because literary writing is one arena where a dynamic engagement with inherited and indigenous symbolic systems takes place. This remains a significant (though of course not exclusive) concern of Canadian writers and critics in the contemporary period. Canadian writers are also concerned about their relationship with a neo-imperial power—the United States. In this course, we will study how contemporary writers engage with the experience of colonialism and its effects. Central to our analyses will be the understanding that difference—of race, gender, culture, history, etc.—influences any individual’s or group’s position with respect to colonial power structures.

II. Books

A. Required (to be read in this order)
Margaret Laurence. *The Diviners* (New Canadian Library)  
Robert Kroetsch. *Badlands* (General Publishing)  
Daphne Marlatt. *Ana Historic* (Anansi)  
George Elliott Clarke. *Whylah Falls* (Polestar)  
Rohinton Mistry. *Tales From Firozsha Baag* (McClelland and Stewart)  
Guillermo Verdecchia. *Fronteras Americanas* (Coach House)

B. Highly Recommended

Note: All royalties earned from the sale of *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* will go to the Department of English Scholarship Fund.
III. Schedule of classes

Jan. 6 Introduction and seminar assignment
8 Lecture: What is postcolonial literature?
13 Lecture: The postcolonial obsession with origins
15 Seminar: Margaret Laurence, The Diviners
20 The Diviners
22 Seminar: Robert Kroetsch, Badlands
27 Badlands
29 Library research seminar

Feb. 3 Lecture: Postcolonialism and women's experiences
5 Seminar: Daphne Marlatt, Ana Historic
10 Ana Historic
12 Lecture: Aboriginal writing
Essay plan and annotated bibliography due

Winter term break February 16-20

24 Seminar: Lee Maracle, Ravensong
26 Ravensong

Mar. 3 Lecture: Postcolonialism and multiculturalism
5 Seminar: George Elliott Clarke, Whylah Falls
10 Whylah Falls
12 Seminar: Rohinton Mistry, Tales From Firozsha Baag
17 Tales From Firozsha Baag
Research essay due
19 Lecture: America

24 Seminar: Michael Ondaatje, The Collected Works of Billy the Kid
26 The Collected Works of Billy the Kid

31 Seminar: Guillermo Verdecchia, Fronteras Americanas

Apr. 2 Fronteras Americanas

7 Essays returned and exam preparation

IV. Assignments
1. Group seminar presentations
This assignment will give you an opportunity to meet each other and to work together as a team. For the purpose of the seminars, we will stay focused on the literary works, although you may draw upon the more theoretical issues that frame the course. Your presentation should last approximately one hour.

Your main task is to engage the class in a debate about the literary work studied. Your presentation must be analytical. That is, while you could provide background information about the writer you should keep this kind of information to a minimum. Try not to simply stand at the front of the room lecturing. This puts everyone to sleep and shuts down others’ intellectual engagement with the text. We want the lively involvement of everyone. Part of your task is to find ways of facilitating that involvement.

You are also responsible for providing each member of the class with one piece of paper which represents notes to your seminar. These notes can take any form you like: pictures, questions, maps, diagrams, quotations, etc.

You may be as creative as you wish in determining how to get things going. Use whatever materials you want, including audio visual media if that seems appropriate. Just let me know ahead of time what you need in terms of equipment and I will arrange to have it delivered to the classroom on the day of your presentation.

Evaluation: Each member of the group will receive the same mark; thus, it is up to you to ensure that each member of the group contributes equally. I will evaluate your presentations according to the following criteria: the intellectual challenge of the issues raised; enthusiasm and commitment of the group to the project; background preparation; 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); ability to respond to comments from other members of the class; ability to link a discussion of the primary text to some of the broader issues pursued in the course.

2. Annotated bibliography and essay plan
This assignment is designed to get you started on your research essays. A list of suggested topics follows, but you could also work on a topic of your own design (for more information see below).

The assignment consists of two parts: an essay plan—in which you describe a topic, state a thesis, and describe an outline—and an annotated bibliography of selected critical sources. An annotated bibliography is a list of critical works that includes a synthesis of the content of the article or review. We will devote one
class early in the term to a library seminar in which you will receive instruction on searching electronic databases

You will be required to find and annotate five critical works (books, essays in edited collections, essays in academic journals or other periodicals, reviews, etc.). These critical works may be focused on a specific writer or primary text, or they may be on more general issues (e.g. “race” in Canadian writing, aboriginal writing in Canada, theoretical approaches to Canadian literature, etc.). You may make use of the critical works to which I refer in my lectures and are on reserve at the Dana Porter Library; however, you cannot exclusively rely on these materials. Part of the purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to explore the library and conduct independent research.

The bibliographic citations must conform to the MLA style (explained in the Little, Brown Compact Handbook). Annotations should be 1-2 paragraphs in length and should immediately follow individual bibliographic citations. Remember that the annotation is a synthesis of the content of the source. You should also identify the critic’s main argument.

**Evaluation:** This assignment will be marked according to the following criteria: refinement of the essay topic and thesis; development of the essay outline; accuracy of the bibliographic citations (MLA format); accuracy, efficiency, and coherence of the annotations; relevance of the critical works to the essay topic.

3. Research essay

In preparing your essay, you are to make use of at least three critical works from your annotated bibliography. The purpose of this assignment is for you to learn how to situate your own interpretation of a text in relation to arguments made by other critics. It is not enough to string together other critics’ words and views; your own ideas and your own voice must remain primary. Use critical sources as starting points, but do not rely on other critics to do the interpretive work for you. The research essay should be 2500 word (10 double-spaced pages) long.

**Evaluation:** The research essay will be graded according to the following criteria: the interest and persuasiveness of the argument; the integration, relevance and analysis of the evidence presented (both from the primary text/s and from secondary sources); the logic and coherence of the discussion; mechanics (organization, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, etc.).

**Note 1:** If you are having difficulty designing a suitable essay topic and extrapolating a thesis from it, please consult with me early in the process of working on your bibliography and essay.

**Note 2:** If you are uncertain how to use secondary sources in your research papers please ask me for clarification and instruction. Incorrect or sloppy
documentation could result in academic penalty (see also section on “Plagiarism” below).

Late policy
Your peers are counting on you to show up for your group seminar presentation; do not let them down. If an emergency arises, be sure to contact both me and your co-presenters as soon as possible. Depending on the circumstances, we will either reschedule the presentation or rethink the way in which your grade for the presentation will be determined. In either case, you will be required to provide official documentation to explain and justify your absence.

I will not be granting extensions. Late essays will be penalized 3% per day, including weekends. Emergencies (usually medical) will be fairly dealt with, but you will be required to provide documentation to substantiate your incapacity. Computer problems, while enormously frustrating, do not count as emergencies.

Note: I will not accept any essays at all after the last day of classes.

Plagiarism
Presenting the words, ideas, or other intellectual property of someone else as your own is plagiarism. All direct quotations from texts (primary or secondary), all paraphrases of another’s words, and all presentations of another’s ideas must be properly documented. For a detailed description of how to handle borrowed material, refer to the Handbook. Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense, and it will be punished most harshly. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with University of Waterloo Policy #71 (in the Undergraduate calendar 1: 10) for a complete statement of the meaning of plagiarism and other academic offenses and their consequences. Again, be sure to ask me if you are uncertain how to handle borrowed material.

4. Final examination
The final exam will cover the work of the course as a whole. It will consist of two essay questions, and you will be asked to discuss the work of at least four different authors. You will not be able to extensively repeat material that you have already discussed in your seminar presentations and essays. There will be choice of questions.

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<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library seminar</td>
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<td>Essay plan and bibliography</td>
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<td>Research essay</td>
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<td>Final examination</td>
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V. Suggested essay topics

Essays should be 10 typed, double-spaced pages long (2500 words) and should be documented according to the MLA style. Please number your pages and leave at least one inch margins on left and right sides of the page. A separate title page is not necessary. For your own protection, keep a copy of your essay.

1. Write an essay that is inspired by one of the following keywords:
   
   settlement and/or home
   place and/or placelessness
   aboriginality
   ethnicity
   race
   dependence
   history
   resistance
   contradiction
   border
   language
   hybridity
   dispossession

2. Write an essay in which you analyze several book reviews written shortly after the publication of a work. If you are writing on Verdecchia’s play, you could also analyze performance reviews. Some things to consider: Where is the review published and what kind of reader is it aimed at? What seem to be the reviewer’s criteria of evaluation? Can you identify any underlying assumptions which lead the reviewer to evaluate the book in particular terms? Is the “Canadianness” of the work addressed and if so how? Does the review constitute an example of colonial or postcolonial discourse?

3. Write an essay in which you construct an argument concerning whether or not Canadian literature or aboriginal literature can be read as postcolonial. Substantiate your argument by referring to at least one of the primary works on the syllabus. Remember that you may make use of the critical works on reserve, but you must also look further afield by conducting your own research.

4. Design your own essay topic. Feel free to consult with me if you are uncertain as to your topic’s suitability. Remember that I will be evaluating it as part of your essay plan and I reserve the right to offer explicit direction at that point.
**English 318: SEMINAR ASSIGNMENT**

**Note:** No more than five students per group.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Title/Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Margaret Laurence</td>
<td><em>The Diviners</em></td>
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<td>January 22</td>
<td>Robert Kroetsch</td>
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<td>February 5</td>
<td>Daphne Marlatt</td>
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<td>George Elliott Clarke</td>
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<td>March 24</td>
<td>Michael Ondaatje</td>
<td><em>The Collected Works of Billy the Kid</em></td>
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<td>March 31</td>
<td>Guillermo Verdecchia</td>
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