DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

English 318: Contemporary Canadian Literature

Winter 2003
Room: RCH 206
Time: T, Th 11:30-12:50
Office hours: T, Th 2:00-3:30 p.m.

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I. Course Description

In this course we will study works by Canadian authors published between the early 1970's and the late 1990's. Our thematic and theoretical focus in the course will be on the ways in which the selected texts represent and enter into dialogue with various pasts—personal, communal, and national. What is it about the past that matters? How do writers use the past? How do we read literary representations of the past in relation to the contemporary moment of the publishing and reception of these books? What social, cultural, political interests do such literary reconfigurations of the past serve in the present? These are some of the questions that will shape our study. Students will engage these issues in a sophisticated and theorized way by attending lectures and contributing to discussions, as well as through written and oral presentations. Selected readings of literary criticism and theory will enhance our study of the primary materials, and students (in groups) will present and analyze relevant contextual information.

II. Reading List

A. Required


The following theoretical/critical works are on reserve at the Dana Porter library. Please consult the schedule of classes for further information about when and which parts of the works are to be prepared for class.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice of Post-Colonial Literatures*
Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern*
Henighan, Stephen. *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*
Heble, Ajay, Donna Palmateer Penne and J.R. (Tim) Struthers, eds. *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*
Verduyn, Christl, ed. *Literary Pluralities*
B. Highly Recommended


Note: All royalties earned from the sale of *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* go to the Department of English Language and Literature Scholarship Fund.

III. Assignments

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar presentation</td>
<td>sign up by January 9</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Jan. 28 - Feb. 27</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final examination</td>
<td>winter exam period</td>
<td>30%</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 seminars is to present important cultural, historical and political materials that will provide a broader context through which the literature might be understood and interpreted. Your seminar must be analytical (i.e. not just present “facts”) and should link the seminar material to the particular writers and texts we are studying in the course. **The seminar should last 30 minutes.** Sign up by **January 9, 2003** for one of the seminar topics listed below.

**Important:** 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.

Here are some strategies that ensure a good seminar presentation:

- Be well prepared. Hastily cobbled-together presentations are often incoherent (i.e. the parts don’t work very well together). In practical terms, this means that your group should meet and work together on several occasions prior to presentation day. Exchange e-mail addresses and phone numbers early in the course.
- Be focused. Think of your presentation as an orally presented group essay: that is, you should stay on topic and make sure every part of the presentation relates to the topic.
- Too much lecturing is dull. Every teacher quickly learns that simply talking at people limits, rather than fosters, their active learning. Part of your job is to find ways to facilitate the interest and intellectual involvement of class members.
- Be creative. You may invent any number of ways to present your material. Consider using audio-visual materials, and please let me know well ahead of time if you need to borrow equipment so that I can make the necessary arrangements.
- Think about the design of your notes. Give others a way of remembering the substance of your presentation. The notes should be substantial enough that they can serve as study notes, but they do not have to record every detail of your presentation.
- Have fun! Enthusiasm is infectious.

**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 rigor 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. Research paper
The purpose of this assignment is for you to engage more fully with the texts (including the
theoretical/critical works) studied in the course. There are three steps to this assignment:

1) Design an original essay topic, extrapolate a thesis from the topic, and write 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. Note: this is a research essay and you are expected to draw on at least three
well-chosen critical sources and to research sources beyond those on the course
syllabus.

2) Schedule a ten-minute appointment with me during my office hours (if possible) to
take place between January 28 – February 27, 2003. 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) Write the essay. The essay should be 8-10 double-spaced pages in 10-12 point font,
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.

4) The essay is due on March 13, 2003. Hand in both a print and a diskette version
of your essay. Please write in or convert the paper to Word '97 format or
submit an RTF version.

Evaluation: 10% of the mark for this assignment will be based on the interview with me. Thus,
it is important that you come to the interview with your essay topic, thesis, and essay plan well
formulated. The finished paper will be graded according to the following criteria: the intellectual
challenge 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.).

3. Final examination
The final exam will cover the work of the course as a whole.

IV. Policies

1. Classroom work
   Attendance is mandatory, and students are expected to arrive in class well prepared,
having read and thought carefully about the material to be discussed that day.
2. Plagiarism and other academic offences
   All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offence, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at http://wwwadm.uwaterloo.ca/inoucal/UW/policy_71.html). If you need help in learning how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

   All suspected cases of plagiarism will be investigated and reported. Proven cases will result in AT LEAST automatic failure of the assignment and could lead to other penalties, including failure of the course or consequences even more dire. Please consult the following web site for a comprehensive explanation of plagiarism and how to avoid it http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html.

   NOTE: I reserve the right to submit your essay to a plagiarism web site such as Turnitin.com.

3. 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 the 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.

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

V. Schedule of Classes

Jan. 7   Lecture: Welcome and orientation to the course

Jan. 9   Lecture: The state of contemporary Canadian writing
         Last day to sign up for seminars

Jan. 14  Lecture: Critical strategies
         Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, Introduction from The Empire Writes Back and Linda Hutcheon, Introduction from The Canadian Postmodern Absolute last day to sign up for seminars

Jan. 16  Daphne Marlatt and Robert Minden
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic/Event</th>
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| Jan. 21 | Daphne Marlatt and Robert Minden  
  Seminar: Multiple histories of place |
| Jan. 23 | Michael Ondaatje  
  Seminar: History, story, myth |
| Jan. 28 | Michael Ondaatje |
| Jan. 30 | Guy Vanderhaeghe  
  Film: excerpts from Birth of a Nation |
| Feb. 4  | Guy Vanderhaeghe  
  Seminar: Visual texts |
| Feb. 6  | Guy Vanderhaeghe |
| Feb. 11 | Lecture: Cultural difference and CanLit I  
  Thomas King “Godzilla vs. Post-colonial” in New Contexts of Canadian Criticism and Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm “We Belong to This Land: A View of ‘Cultural Difference’” in Literary Pluralities |
| Feb. 13 | Film: Redskins, Tricksters, and Puppy Stew |
| **Feb. 18 + 20** | **Mid-winter break** |
| Feb. 25 | Monique Mojica  
  Seminar: Native women’s histories |
| Feb. 27 | Monique Mojica  
  *Last day for essay interviews* |
| Mar. 4  | Lecture: Cultural difference and CanLit II  
  Ajay Heble “Sounds of Change: Dissonance, History, and Cultural Listening” |
| Mar. 6  | George Elliott Clarke  
  Seminar: African-Canadian history |
| Mar. 11 | George Elliott Clarke |
| **Mar. 13** | **Essays due** |
| Mar. 18 | Fred Wah  
  Seminar: The personal, the political, the historical |
| Mar. 20 | Fred Wah |
| Mar. 25 | John Steffler  
  Seminar: The meanings of exploration |
| Mar. 27 | John Steffler |
| Apr. 1  | Seminar: Literary writing and history  
  Stephen Henighan “‘They Can’t Be About Things Here’: The Reshaping of the Canadian Novel” |
| Apr. 3  | Concluding thoughts and exam preparation |
VI. Seminar Topics

Note: All of these seminar topics require you to do library research, as well as to connect the materials you present with the literature we are studying in the course. Depending on the topic, you will study microfilm and 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 on Internet sources.** If you need equipment to present your seminar, please give me as much lead time as possible to make the necessary bookings through Media Services. An overhead projector and screen will be in the classroom and do not need to be separately booked.

Note: the questions are intended to be generative, not definitive or exhaustive.

January 21  Seminar Topic: Multiple histories of place

Research the internment of Japanese-Canadians during WWII. How does this particular history inform Marlatt and Minden’s text? How does it intersect (or not) with other histories represented? What are the positions of the author and photographer in relation to the Steveston community they represent in this book?

January 23  Seminar Topic: History, story, myth

Research the various stories about Billy the Kid that circulate in both academic and popular texts (visual, written, Web, whatever). How does Ondaatje’s version compare? What has Ondaatje used, not used, distorted, invented? What are the effects and implications of his choices?

February 4  Seminar Topic: Visual texts

Compile and analyze a visual record of portrayals of the West as those images might specifically pertain to Vanderhaeghe’s novel. You may consider photographs, maps, films, fine art, cartoons, documentaries, or any visual texts. What do pictures and words do differently?

February 25  Seminar Topic: Native women’s histories

Choose three of the real Native women (individuals or groups) evoked by Monique Mojica in her play and present as much information about these women as you can. Pay particular attention to where you are finding that information and analyze how it is presented in those source texts. Compare your findings to Mojica’s representations of the same figures.

March 6  Seminar Topic: African-Canadian histories

What are some of the major events and figures that shape African-Canadian history? Analyze the relevance of that history in relation to Clarke’s verse play.
March 18       Seminar Topic: The personal, the communal, the historical

Do some research into contemporary theories of autobiography. Drawing on that research, can you indicate how the three issues in the title of this seminar relate to one another and work together to shape a “self”?  

March 25       Seminar Topic: The meanings of exploration

Why is exploration such a major trope 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.

April 1        Seminar Topic: Literary writing and history

Assume that you are writing a literary work (collection of poetry, play, novel, etc.) that has considerable historical content. Make a pitch to a publisher 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 they will take, and why they are important.