DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

English 318: Contemporary Canadian Literature

Winter 2005
Room: MC 4040
Time: T, Th 10:00-11:20
Office hours: T, Th 2:00 – 4:00

Professor Linda Warley
Office: HH251 Ext. 5379
lwarley@watarts.uwaterloo.ca

I. Course Description

How and why do contemporary Canadian authors represent and enter into imaginative dialogue with the past? What is it about the past that matters? 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 representations of the past serve in the present? These are the questions that provide the analytical focus of the course. The method of the course combines study of eight literary works, three documentary films and six theoretical and critical works. Students are expected to attend all lectures and regularly contribute to classroom discussions. Students will also be involved in the preparation of group oral seminars, as well as an individually researched and authored essay. A final exam will provide another opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning in the course.

II. List of readings

Primary works:

John Steffler. The Afterlife of George Cartwright (1992)
Monique Mojica. Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots (1991)
Dionne Brand. A Map to the Door of No Return (2002)

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

Sugars, Cynthia, ed. Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism (2004). This volume is available for purchase at the UW bookstore and one copy is on reserve at the Dana Porter Library for three-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.

M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*

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

Students may find useful two newly published 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*

### III. Assignments

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar presentation</td>
<td>sign up by Jan. 11</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Jan. 25 – Feb. 17</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term essay</td>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<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 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 30 minutes.

**Sign up by January 11th for one of the seminar topics listed below.**

**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.
Advice: On my web site http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~lwarley/ you will find a downloadable document that gives you practical advice on how to prepare good seminar presentations. Please look in the “teaching” section of the web site.

Equipment and aids: The classroom is supplied with a blackboard, an overhead projector, and a screen. If you require any other audio-visual equipment please let me know well ahead of time so that I can book it through the A-V centre. If you would like to show any part of a video please 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 study in depth a limited number 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 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 and the MLA International Bibliography. Access them through the “indexes & databases” section of the University of Waterloo library web site.

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 January 25th and February 17th. 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 March 15th in class. Hand in both
a print and a diskette version of your essay. Please write in or convert the
der paper to Word '97 format or submit an RTF version.

Advice: On my web site http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~lwarley/ you will find a
downloadable document that gives you practical advice on how to write good essays.
Please look in the “teaching” section of the web site.

Evaluation: The essay will be marked out of 100% with a marking scheme as follows:
30% for formulation and articulation of topic and thesis; 40% for structure,
argumentation, and interpretation of primary and secondary sources; 30% for
presentation, writing accuracy 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.

IV. Course Policies

1. Classroom work
   Attendance is mandatory, and you 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 or on the
web at http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocpl/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 academic penalty, proportional to the extent of the infraction, and could include an official written reprimand from the Associate Dean that will be placed in your file. Please consult the following web site for a comprehensive explanation of plagiarism and how to avoid it
http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html

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 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**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 4</td>
<td>Lecture: Welcome and orientation to the course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 6</td>
<td>Lecture: The state of contemporary Canadian writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 11</td>
<td>Film: <em>View From the Typewriter</em> (NFB 1992)</td>
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<td>Questions for discussion: Which writers are represented in the film and what features might characterize them as a group? What assumptions about Canada and Canadian identity does the film seem to be working with? What is the role of literature, according to this film? The film is partly a history of literary cultural production in Canada: what have you been asked to learn about that history from this film?</td>
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<td>Jan. 13</td>
<td>Lecture: Reading strategies</td>
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<td>Reading: Linda Hutcheon &quot;&quot;Circling the Downspout of Empire': Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism&quot; AND Alan Lawson &quot;Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Settler’ Subject&quot;</td>
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<td>Jan. 18</td>
<td>Daphne Marlatt</td>
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<td>Seminar: Women in history/women in literature</td>
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<td>Jan. 20</td>
<td>Daphne Marlatt</td>
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<td>Jan. 25</td>
<td>Michael Ondaatje</td>
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<td>Seminar: Literary geographies/literary histories/urban spaces</td>
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<td>Jan. 27</td>
<td>Michael Ondaatje</td>
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Feb. 1  John Steffler
     Seminar: The meanings of exploration
Feb. 3  John Steffler
Feb. 8  Lecture: Cultural difference and CanLit I
     Reading: Thomas King “Godzilla vs. Post-colonial” AND Marie Battiste
     “Unfolding the Lessons of Colonization”
Feb. 10 Film: *Redskins, Tricksters, and Puppy Stew* (NFB 2000)
     Questions for discussion: How is humour deployed in this film? What
     political function might humour serve? How does the film either confirm
     or challenge stereotypes about “Natives”?
Feb. 15 Monique Mojica
     Seminar: Native women’s histories
Feb. 17 Monique Mojica

**Feb 22 + 24**  **Winter reading break**

Mar. 1  Joan Crate
     Seminar: Literary ancestors
Mar. 3  Joan Crate
Mar. 8  Lecture: Cultural difference and CanLit II
     Rinaldo Walcott “‘A Tough Geography’: Towards a Poetics of Black
     Space(s) in Canada” AND Himani Bannerji “Geography Lessons: On
     Being and Insider/Outsider to the Canadian Nation”
Mar. 10 George Elliott Clarke
     Seminar: African-Canadian histories
Mar. 15 George Elliott Clarke
Mar. 17 Dionne Brand
     Seminar: The personal, the communal, the historical
Mar. 22 Dionne Brand
Mar. 24 Film: *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (NFB 2004)
     Questions for discussion: How much of this history did you know before
     watching this documentary? To what extent is this story about the present?
     What formal, structural, aesthetic strategies does the filmmaker adopt in
     order to approach her subject and how effective are they?
Mar. 29 Fred Wah
Mar. 31 Fred Wah
     **Seminar: Fictionalizing history**

Apr. 5  Concluding thoughts and exam preparation
VI. 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 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 only on Internet sources.** Please keep in mind that we have to ensure that we have copyright permission to show films to members of the class. Please check with me ahead of time. I will book AV equipment for you. Please give me enough time to ensure its availability and delivery on the day of your seminar. Portable equipment (VCRs, DVD, players, data projectors, etc.) will be delivered to my office and should be picked up by a member of your group before class. The classroom is equipped with an overhead projector and a screen, so these do not need to be booked separately.

**Note:** questions suggested below are intended to be generative, not definitive or exhaustive.

**Seminar Topic: Women in history/women in literature**

Follow some of the sources Marlatt uses in her novel. How do various representations of places, people, and events that you might find in your research compare to Marlatt’s representation of the same or similar places, people, and events?

**Seminar Topic: Literary geographies/literary histories/urban spaces**

How does Ondaatje’s novel engage with ideas about Canadian urban life in general and Toronto in particular?

**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.

**Seminar Topic: Native women’s histories**

Choose three of the 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.
Seminar Topic: Literary ancestors

Why is E. Pauline Johnson such a significant figure in the history of Native literature in Canada? What are some of the debates that surround her?

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.

Seminar Topic: The personal, the communal, the historical

How do the three terms in this seminar topic interweave and inform one another in Brand’s book? For what purpose(s) and to what effects?

Seminar Topic: Fictionalizing history

Assume that you are writing a literary work (a collection of poetry, a play, or a novel) 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 it will take, and why it is important.