

## Contemporary Canadian Writers

EN 4254 3.0 A / Fall 2019

York University

**Instructor:** Dr. Robert Zacharias

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Office hours: Mondays, 12-1

Seminar: Wednesdays, 11:30-2:30

HNE 206

Note about communication: All students are welcome to visit me during office hours, or, for urgent matters, to connect with me by email (rather than office phone). I will do my best to respond to emails within 48 hours of regular business hours (Monday – Friday, 8:30-5). Please start by checking the syllabus for answers to basic questions, and be sure to monitor our Moodle page and your university email.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will explore a selection of (broadly defined) literary and critical texts by contemporary Canadian writers over the past two decades. Working across genres and contexts, we will emphasize the close reading of literary texts, attending to formal, aesthetic, and critical concerns. We will also historicize our readings, and explore the contested politics of contemporary Canadian literary studies itself. *Who* or *what* constitutes Canadian literature, and why does it matter? What is “CanLit,” and how does it differ from “literature in Canada”? What does the study of literature within a national frame enable, and what does it limit?

This is a reading intensive seminar course that will emphasize in-class discussion of course material. It is crucial for students to complete assigned readings prior to attending class, so they can be active participants in discussions and assignments. Brief illustrated lectures will be used to introduce and explore key concepts and concerns, with student presentations, reading responses, and limited group work helping to direct and expand our focus. We will also take time to build and sharpen the research, writing, and presentation skills that are central to literary studies.

Each class will begin with an introductory lecture that will be followed by student presentations and class discussion. Each class will be divided in two with a 5 minute break, and will close with a “look ahead” at upcoming text or assignments.

### COURSE TEXTS

Abel, Jordan. *Injun*. Vancouver: Talon, 2017.

Clements, Marie. *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*. Vancouver: Talon, 2005.

Plett, Casey. *Little Fish*. Vancouver: Arsenal, 2018.

Lemire, Jeff. *Essex County*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2009.

Thúy, Kim. *Ru*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2012.

Vassanji, M.G. *Nostalgia*. Toronto: Knopf, 2017.

Maddin, Guy. *My Winnipeg*. IFC Films, 2008.

- Students may use any edition of the above texts, which are available in the campus bookstore or online. *My Winnipeg* is available through itunes and comparable online movie services. Additional readings accessed via moodle.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. students will understand and engage the history, critical concerns, and a range of key texts in Canadian literary studies
2. students will synthesize, annotate, and evaluate relevant secondary materials
3. students will analyze content, form, and paratextual aspects of literary texts in order to construct critically sophisticated, well-supported readings of literature
4. students will contextualize literature within its relevant critical, historical, and political contexts
5. students will gain foundational skills for further university education, including reading critically, research skills, and essay writing

**COURSE SCHEDULE \***


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1.	Sept 4	Introduction & Syllabus
2.	Sept 11	<i>Unnatural and Accidental Women</i> (Clements)
3.	Sept 18	<i>Ru</i> (Thúy)
4.	Sept 25	<i>Little Fish</i> (Plett)
5.	Oct 2	<u>“The Blue Road: A Fairy Tale”</u> (Compton)
		<b>- In Class Essay (1 hr)</b>
	Oct 9	<b>NO CLASS – FALL READING WEEK</b>
6.	Oct 16	<i>Nostalgia</i> (Vassanji)
7.	Oct 23	<i>Injun</i> (Abel)
8.	Oct 30	<i>Essex County</i> (Lemire)
9.	Nov 6	<u>“An Animal to the Memory”</u> (Bezmozgis)
		<b>- Abstract &amp; Bibliography Exercise</b>
10.	Nov 13	Poetry: <u>Brand; beaulieu; Lai &amp; Wong</u>
		<b>- Research Essay Due</b>
11.	Nov 20	<i>My Winnipeg</i> (Maddin)
12.	Nov 27	<b>Final Test (In Class)</b>

How to Find Class Readings:	- <i>Italicized readings are separate books or works</i> - <u>Underlined readings are on moodle</u>
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- This schedule is meant to provide students with a general outline for the course. Minor changes may be made as the course progresses.

Other key dates

Last date to add course without permission of instructor:	Sept 17, 2019
Last date to add course (instructor’s permission needed):	Oct 1, 2019
Last date to drop a course without receiving a grade:	Nov 8, 2019
Course Withdrawal Period (receiving a grade of “W”):	Nov 9 – Dec 3, 2019

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

In Class Essay	(Oct 2)	15%
Research abstract exercise	(Nov 6)	5%
Research Essay	(Nov 13)	30%
Seminar Presentation		25%
Final Test	(Nov 27)	20%
Participation and Reading Responses		5%
		100%

**In Class Essay (Oct 2, second half of class) 15%**

This in-class writing assignment asks students to construct and write a short essay (roughly 500 words) in response to an essay prompt about the material and concerns covered in class to date. Students will have the option of three different prompts, each of which asks students to work across texts and / or genres.

**Research Abstract & Bibliography Exercise (Nov 6) 5%**

Students must bring a hard copy of an abstract and annotated bibliography in support of their final research essay to class on Nov 2. The completion grade for this exercise is based on full completion of both the assignment and the in-class exercise.

**Research Essay (Nov 13) 30%**

This research essay must critically engage with one or more of the literary texts examined in class, and must be between 2500 - 3000 words (10-12 pages double spaced). The essay must include an original argument with a clear and persuasive thesis, and conform to current MLA guidelines as practiced in tutorial. It should be thoroughly proofread and free from grammatical and spelling errors. Note that this major paper is a research essay, and, as such, must make reference to at least four relevant, peer-reviewed critical articles. Students will work together with professor to determine their essay topic.

Essays are to be submitted on moodle by the START OF CLASS on the due date.

**Seminar Presentation 25%**

In ten-minute, conference-style presentations, students will rigorously explore an aspect of the week's readings of their own choice. I will introduce the author and text briefly in class, so the challenge here is for students to move well beyond summary to engage, test, and expand upon an important aspect of the reading. The purpose is to sharpen student presentation skills, delve into the material itself, and to prompt class discussion. Each presentation should include the following:

- A clear thesis claim about a specific passage or work as a whole, with accompanying argument and evidence
- Three closing questions to prompt class discussion

Students must clear the focus of their presentation with the professor at least 2 days before their presentations to avoid overlapping with their peers, and are encouraged to discuss presentation with me during that week's office hours.

Students are also required to submit a brief text (250 words) reflecting on the strengths and weakness of the presentation itself (as opposed to its content), together with the presented paper (unchanged, 1000 – 1250 words) within a week of the presentation. Classes three – eleven will have 2 to 3 presentations each; sign up at the close of the second class.

**Final Test (Nov 27) 20 %**

The in-class final test will assess comprehension of course material through a range of short answer questions, and will require students to offer a close reading of a new piece of contemporary Canadian writing.

**Participation and Reading Responses (throughout semester) 5 %**

Students must complete one of the following two reading response options:

Option 1) Submit three single-page responses (250 words) on class readings and / or discussions over the course of the semester. The final day of classes is the deadline for each semester's responses. These responses are meant to encourage students to critically engage with course material, to provide another forum for class discussion and participation, and to raise questions or concerns throughout the course.

Option 2) Attend a showing of the theatre department's presentation of *Good Night Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*, Nov 17-23, and submit a single response.

Please note:

- These should be your *responses* to class material, not your class notes
- The full participation grade, based upon not only your insightful reading response(s) but also your consistent, active, and informed participation in discussions and tutorials, will be given at the end of the course.

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**Grading:** Assignments and tests will bear either a letter grade designation or number grade: (A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 89, B+ = 75 to 79, B = 70 – 74, C+ = 65 – 69, C = 60 – 64, D+ = 55 - 59, D = 50 – 54, E = marginally below 50%, F = below 50%).

**A+ Exceptional.** Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques and exceptional skill or great originality in the use of those concepts/techniques to satisfy requirements.

**A Excellent.** Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with a high degree of skill and/or some elements of originality in satisfying the requirements.

**B+ Very Good.** Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with a fairly high degree of skill in the use of those concepts/techniques in satisfying the requirements.

**B Good.** Good level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using them to satisfy the requirements.

**C+ Competent.** Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with considerable skill in using them to satisfy the requirements.

**C Fairly Competent.** Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with some skill in using them to satisfy the requirements.

**D+ Passing.** Slightly better than minimal knowledge of required concepts and/or techniques together with some ability to use them in satisfying the requirements.

**D Barely Passing.** Minimum knowledge of concepts and/or techniques needed to satisfy the requirements.

**E Marginally Failing.**

**F Failing.**

For a full description of York grading system see the York University Undergraduate Calendar, at <http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/2010-2011/academic/index.htm>.

### **IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION FOR ALL STUDENTS**

*Note: the following information is adapted from York University websites, and is standard to many courses at York.*

**Academic Honesty and Integrity:** York students are required to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and they are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty (<http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/>). The Policy affirms the responsibility of faculty members to foster acceptable standards of academic conduct and of the student to abide by such standards.

**Class note: In an academic setting, plagiarism is a serious offense. We will discuss plagiarism and review MLA research and citation guidelines, but it is ultimately the responsibility of students to know what constitutes plagiarism and to avoid it entirely. Ignorance is not a defence, so err on the side of caution. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, discuss it your instructor *before* submitting work.** We will be assessing all submitted material for potential plagiarism, and reserve the right to put your work through plagiarism software such as turnitin.

**Electronic Devices:** Please put your phones away and on mute. (It's just two hours, and we'll have a break midway through the class. You can do this.) Feel free to use laptops for note-taking and class-related work, but please respect your fellow students and me by refraining from social media and other distractions.

**Recording Slides or Lectures:** Please do not record the slides or lectures. The slides are far from comprehensive accounts of class material, and the vast majority of them—especially as we get further into the course—are simply meant as discussion prompts. The lectures will be full of student questions and discussions, and will, from time to time, touch on sensitive material. We need to respect their (and your) privacy. I am, of course, happy to make an exception for students who can provide a documented request for recordings as part of a formal academic accommodation process.

**Access/Disability:** York University is committed to principles of respect, inclusion and equality of all persons with disabilities across campus. The University provides services for students with disabilities (including physical, medical, learning and psychiatric disabilities) needing accommodation related to teaching and evaluation methods/materials. These services are made available to students in all Faculties and programs at York University.

Students in need of these services are asked to register with disability services as early as possible to ensure that appropriate academic accommodation can be provided with advance notice. You are encouraged to schedule a time early in the term to meet with each professor to discuss your accommodation needs. Please note that registering with disabilities services and discussing your needs with your professors is necessary to avoid any impediment to receiving the necessary academic accommodations to meet your needs. Additional information is available at the following websites:

Counselling & Disability Services - <http://cds.info.yorku.ca/>

York Accessibility Hub - <http://accessibilityhub.info.yorku.ca/>

**Assignment Submission:** Proper academic performance depends on students doing their work not only well, but on time. Accordingly, assignments for this course must be received on the due date specified for the assignment. Please discuss the submission process (hardcopy, electronic, Moodle, etc.) to be used in your tutorial with your tutorial leader.

**Lateness Penalty:** Assignments received later than the due date may be penalized up to one-half letter grade per day (including weekend days). Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., may be entertained by the Course Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor's letter).

**Missed Tests:** Students with a documented reason for missing a course test, such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., which is confirmed by supporting documentation (e.g., doctor's letter) may request accommodation from the Course Instructor. Further extensions or accommodation require students to submit a formal petition to the Faculty.

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**All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information,** available on the Senate Committee on Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy webpage (see Reports, Initiatives, Documents).

<http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/senate/academic-standards-curriculum-and-pedagogy-committee/>

**Ethics Review Process:** York students are subject to the York University *Policy for the Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants*. In particular, students proposing to undertake research involving human participants (e.g., interviewing the director of a company or government agency, having students complete a questionnaire, etc.) are required to submit an *Application for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants* at least one month before you plan to begin the research. If you are in doubt as to whether this requirement applies to you, contact your Course Director immediately.

**Religious Observance Accommodation:** York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. Should any of the dates specified in this syllabus for an in-class test or examination pose such a conflict for you, contact the Course Director within the first three weeks of class. Similarly, should an assignment to be completed in a lab, practicum placement, workshop, etc., scheduled later in the term pose such a conflict, contact the Course director immediately. Please note that to arrange an alternative date or time for an examination scheduled in the formal examination periods (December and April/May), students must complete an Examination Accommodation Form from Student Client Services, Student Services Centre or at [http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/exam\\_accommodation.pdf](http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/exam_accommodation.pdf) (PDF)

**Student Conduct in Academic Situations:** Students and instructors are expected to maintain a professional relationship characterized by courtesy and mutual respect. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the instructor to maintain an appropriate academic atmosphere in the classroom and other academic settings, and the responsibility of the student to cooperate in that endeavour. Further, the instructor is the best person to decide, in the first instance, whether such an atmosphere is present in the class. The policy and procedures governing disruptive and/or harassing behaviour by students in academic situations is available at - <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/disruptive-and-or-harassing-behaviour-in-academic-situations-senate-policy/>

There is also an academic integrity website with comprehensive information about academic honesty and how to find resources at York to help improve students' research and writing skills, and cope with University life. Students are expected to review the materials on the Academic Integrity website at - <http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity/>

## STUDENT ACADEMIC RESOURCES AT YORK

SPARK (Student Papers & Academic Research Kit): <https://spark.library.yorku.ca/>

Writing Centres: <http://acadresources.yorku.ca/writing-centres>

Libraries: <https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/>

LA&PS PASS (Peer-Assisted Study Sessions):  
<http://new-college.laps.yorku.ca/pass/>

Learning Commons: <http://learningcommons.yorku.ca/>

Academic Resources (LAPS) and F\_A\_Q's: \_\_  
<http://laps.yorku.ca/student-resources/academic-resources-and-faqs/>

Literary Research Guides: <http://researchguides.library.yorku.ca/literature>