

Wednesdays 4pm – 7pm, Room Z-255, Pavillon McNicoll

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Office hours on appointment

**– HOME, HAUNTING, HOMELESSNESS –  
Contemporary First Nations Literature**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This special topics course in contemporary Canadian literature will focus on notions of memory, belonging, haunting, and homelessness, with particular attention to how these tropes are of crucial importance in First Nations writing.

Chocktaw author Louis Owens wrote that the challenge for many Native writers is “to write in a language that is not one’s own, [but] to convey an experience that is one’s own.” The writers that we will look at here have had to reappropriate the English (and French) language, and blend in Western literary forms with elements of the oral tradition. This is how a language is “made one’s own,” and becomes a decolonizing tool for reclaiming the stories that were once silenced by the colonial governments in power. This strategy is a positive writing process that opens up a space of empowerment and agency. It revitalizes communal knowledge and affirms, rather than merely restores, a sense of collective memory. The use of fiction, myth and story are ‘real’ in their depiction of history and reflection of life, and are tools towards reclaiming memory and restoring a sense of belonging, of ‘home.’

Tropes of memory, place, and belonging have been for a long time at the forefront of enquiry in Canadian literary studies. This course goes a step further and seeks to unveil how these tropes take on a different meaning in terms of First Nations literature (a discipline to be regarded as on its own, and not as a subdivision of Canadian Studies). Some of the questions we may seek to address are, for example: how are instances of colonial power still present today, and how do they continue to influence our understanding of belonging or situatedness? How are themes of guilt, dislocation, trauma and colonization addressed and complicated by forms of haunting and homelessness? How do First Nations literatures participate in the discourse of “home” in regards to contemporary Canadian literature?

**NB** – This course is an intermediate-level undergraduate course, designed to provide students with an introduction to First Nations contemporary literatures. Some of the assigned readings will be in French, so students should have a reading knowledge of the language. All assignments will be written in English.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*.  
Dennis, Darrell. *Tales of an Urban Indian*.  
Maracle, Lee. *Sundogs*.  
Robinson, Eden. *Monkey Beach*.  
Wagamese, Richard. *Ragged Company*.

**These books are available for purchase at the UdeM bookstore, EXCEPT for Lee Maracle's novel *Sundogs*, which is unfortunately out of print. A copy is available for photocopying on the course reserve, available at the BLSH library.** Alternatively you can buy it second-hand online via Amazon.

Additional readings will be required on a weekly basis. These will be made available for photocopying at the library. It is important that you read these in conjunction with the required novels.

Other resources and material will be made available throughout the course on:

<http://ang2325.wordpress.com>

**REQUIREMENTS**

In-class writing assignment	15%
In-class presentation/report	15%
First Essay	25%
Final Essay	35%
Participation (in-class assignments and discussion)	10%

Participation:

I expect students to come to class prepared to ask questions about the assigned texts and to participate in discussions, either in small group discussions or in discussions with the class at large.

In-class exam:

In your in-class exam you will be asked to identify quotations from the texts we studied, answer three short questions (out of five), and write a brief essay. You will be able to choose your topic from a list of four topics. Your essay must demonstrate that a) you have thoroughly read the texts under discussions; b) you thought through their themes and narrative form; and c) you are able to articulate a logical or even critical argument in order to answer the question of your chosen topic.

Papers:

Students have to produce two papers. Although they differ in length, both essays have to be argumentative essays, based on a clear thesis statement and logical organization of arguments and paragraphs. Each essay will be graded on the basis of a strong thesis statement, appropriate paragraph development, the coherence and relevance of its argument, its sensitivity to the literary texts at hand, correct grammar and style. Your essays must include at least four secondary

scholarly sources. I do not accept quotations from « Wikipedia » or other non-scholarly internet sources as valuable research references. In your essays you should avoid making general statements and, instead, aim at a precise discussion of relevant passages from the text. All essays **must** stay within the limits of the prescribed length of the assignment. They must be double-spaced, printed in Times 12, include a Works Cited list, and adhere to the MLA documentation style.

#### Additional Information:

Based on students' needs and levels, the course schedule may be modified.

You will occasionally be provided with extra handouts, which you will be required to read.

Due dates cannot be changed.

If you miss an in-class writing assignment or a homework assignment you will not be able to make it up, unless you have a medical note.

Extensions will only be granted for serious reasons. Late work will be penalized at the rate of 3% per day.

If you wish to schedule a meeting with me, or have any questions or concerns about the course or the assignments, you may email me, and I will respond as soon as I can.

#### Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism – the stealing or “borrowing” of another person’s written work and passing it off as one’s own – is a very serious academic offence. Plagiarism occurs when:

- a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work;
- b) an entire work (e.g., an essay), is copied from another source, or parts of the work are taken from another source without explicit reference to the author;
- c) an essay copies a sentence or paragraph of another work with minor variations.

Plagiarism occurs not only when direct quotations are taken from a source without explicit acknowledgement, but also when original ideas from the source are not acknowledged. A bibliography or “works cited” is insufficient to establish which portions of the student’s work are taken from external sources; formal modes of citation (i.e., page numbers and the author’s name in parenthetical references) must be used for this purpose.

Professors are required to report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. The minimal disciplinary measure is an F on the assignment, essay, or exam. Further measures can include an F in the course, suspension from the Faculty, and even the requirement to withdraw from the University.

If you are unclear on the definition of plagiarism or you are unsure about how to avoid it, please do not hesitate to ask me. Ignorance is not a valid defense.

**COURSE SCHEDULE** (*subject to change*)

Week 1 – September 7

Introduction to the course.

Listen to Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*. “You’re Not the Indian I had in Mind.”

Thomas King, “Borders.” (photocopies will be provided in class)

Week 2 – September 14

Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed*.

Excerpts from *Give Back*. (on reserve shelf)

Week 3 – September 21

Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed*.

Viewing of Neil Diamond, *Reel Injun*.

Week 4 – September 28 – **In-class Exam**

Week 5 – October 5

Richard Wagamese, *Ragged Company*.

Week 6 – October 12

Richard Wagamese, *Ragged Company*.

Viewing of Alanis Obomsawin, *No Address*.

Week 7 – October 19

Darrell Dennis, *Tales of an Urban Indian*. (Guest Speaker)

Week 8 – October 26 – **No class – Reading Week**

**\* First Essay Due Monday October 31<sup>st</sup> – Submit by Email \***

Week 9 – November 2

Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*.

Week 10 – November 9

Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*

Eden Robinson, “Queen of the North” (on reserve shelf)

Week 11 – November 16

Maracle, Lee. *Sundogs*

Week 12 – November 23

Maracle, Lee. *Sundogs*

Viewing of Alanis Obomsawin, *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (excerpts)

Week 13 – November 30

Gord Hill, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* (excerpts)

Viewing of Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (excerpts)

Week 14 – December 7 – **Final Essay Due – no extensions.**