

**EN 6998 3.0**  
**STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE:**  
**READING IN THE “RUINS” OF CANLIT**  
York University

**Instructor:** Dr. Robert Zacharias  
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Seminar Hours: TBD  
Office Hours: TBD

**Course Description**

Over the past two decades, Canadian literature has been enjoying what Cynthia Sugars calls “immense international acclaim,” with Canadian novelists winning major international awards such as the Booker and Nobel Prize, and some scholars celebrating the field as having “gone global” (Brand). In the introduction to a prominent 2018 essay collection, however, editors Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker declare that “after a series of controversies and scandals, the signifier ‘CanLit’ currently lies in ruins.” How are we to understand these competing assessments of contemporary Canadian literature, and how might they inform our readings of literary texts? What is “CanLit,” and how does it differ from “literature in Canada”? What does the study of fiction within a national frame enable today, and what does it limit?

This course will read a selection of contemporary Canadian literature in English alongside a historicized engagement with the questions above, as well as an introduction to a range of intersecting critical concerns, including: the institutionalization of Canadian literature; literary citizenship; race, gender, and the politics of literary studies; literary citizenship; Indigenous literature(s); celebrity and award culture; and the future of national literatures in the wake of the transnational turn.

**Required Texts** will include selections from the following, and others to be determined:

Literature

Alexis, Andre. *Days by Moonlight*. Toronto: Coach House, 2019.  
King, Thomas. *Borders*. Illustrated by Natasha Donovan. New York: Little Brown Ink, 2021.  
Elliott, Alicia. “The Same Space.” *A Mind Spread out on the Ground*. Toronto: Doubleday, 2019: 43-51.  
Thien, Madeleine. “Simple Recipes.” *Simple Recipes*. Toronto: Knopf, 2001.  
Matuk, Nyla, ed. *Resisting Canada: An Anthology of New Poetry*. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 2019.  
Moscovitch, Hannah. *Essay*. (2005) In *The Russian Play and Other Short Works by Hannah Moscovitch*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008.

Criticism

- Anderson, Benedict. "Introduction"; from "Cultural Roots." *Imagined Communities*. Verso, New York: 1983. 1-7, 22-36.
- Andrews, Jennifer and Pricilla L. Walton. "Rethinking Canadian and American Nationality: Indigeneity and the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel in Thomas King." *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006): 600-617.
- Atwood, Margaret. "What, Where, and Why is Here?"; "Survival." *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972. 9-19; 29-43.
- Banting, Sarah. "If What We Do Matters: Motives of Research in Canadian Literature Scholarship." *English Studies in Canada* 42.3 (2016): 27-64.
- Brandt, Di. "Going Global." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 71 (2000): 106-113.
- Cariou, Warren. "On Critical Humility." *Studies in American Indian Literature*. 32.3-4 (2020): 1-12.
- Carter, Adam. "National Literature, Canadian Criticism, and National Character." *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2016. 41-63.
- Chariandy, David. "Black Canadian Literature: Fieldwork and 'Post-Race.'" *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. New York: Oxford UP, 2016. 529-64.
- Coleman, Daniel. "White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada." *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*. Toronto: U Toronto P, 2006. 3-45.
- Davey, Frank. "Surviving the Paraphrase." *Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Turnstone, 1983. 1-12.
- Episknew, J. "Socially Responsible Criticism: Aboriginal Literature, Ideology, and the Literary Canon." *Creating Community: A Roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal literature*. Bearpaw Publishing, 2002. 51-68.
- Felski, Rita. "Context Stinks!" *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2015. 117-150.
- Fuller, Danielle and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, "A Reading Spectacle for the Nation: The CBC and 'Canada Reads.'" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.1 (Winter 2006): 5-36.
- Frye, Northrop. "Conclusion" from *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: U Toronto P, 1965. 333-361.
- Justice, Daniel Heath, "The Necessity of Nationhood: Affirming the Sovereignty of Indigenous National Literatures." *Moveable Margins: The Shifting Spaces of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Chelva Kanaganayakam. Toronto: TSAR, 2005. 143-59.
- Kamboureli, Smaro, and Roy Miki, eds. *Trans. Can. Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2007. (Kamboureli; Brydon; Cho)
- Lecker, Robert. "The Canonization of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry into Value." *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 656-671.
- Martin, Paul. "A Prisoner of Its Own Amnesia: The Role of the University in The Canadian Literary Institution." *Sanctioned Ignorance: The Politics of Knowledge Production and the Teaching of Literatures in Canada*. Paul Martin. Edmonton: U Alberta P, 2013. 51-93.
- McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, eds. *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. Toronto: Book\*hug, 2020.
- McKittrick, Katherine. "Introduction: Geographic Stories." *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2006. ix-xxxi.
- Miki, Roy. "Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing." *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing*. Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1988. 101-124.
- Milz, Sabine. "Is Canadian Literature Still 'National?' Twenty-First-Century Canadian Literature in Spatial Perspective." *English Studies in Canada* 35.1 (2010): 5-35.

- Moss, Laura. "Between Fractals and Rainbows: Critiquing Canadian Criticism." *Tropes and Territories: Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writings in Context*. Ed. Marta Dvořák and W.H. New. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007. 17-32.
- Mount, Nick. *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*. Toronto: Anansi, 2017. Chapters 1; 3. Niedzwiecki, Hal. "Winning the Appropriation Prize." *Write Magazine* (May 2017): 8. Panayotidis, E. L., and P. Stortz. "The Imagined Space of Academic Life: Leacock, Callaghan, and English-Canadian Campus Fiction in Canada, 1914-1948." *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire De l'éducation*, 28.1 (2016). Online.
- Pennee, Donna Palmateer. "Literary Citizenship: Culture (un)Bounded, Culture Re)Distributed." *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy & Canadian Literature*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Ottawa: U Ottawa P, 2004. 75-86.
- Rak, Julie. "Another Dumpster Fire: An Opinionated Review of *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*, by Nick Mount." 16 Nov. 2017. *Hook & Eye*. Online.
- Roberts, Gillian. "Prizing Canadian Literature." *Prizing Literature: The Celebration and Circulation of National Culture*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011. 16-52.
- Smolash, Naava, and Myka Tucker-Abramson. "Migrants and Citizens: The Shifting Ground of Struggle in Canadian Literary Representation." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 36.2 (2011): 165-196.
- Sugars, Cynthia. "'World Famous Across Canada': National Identity in the Global Village." *Global Fissures: Postcolonial Fusions*. Eds. Clara A.B. Joseph and Janet Wilson. New York: Rodopi, 2006. 79-101.
- Szeman, Imre. "The Persistence of the Nation: Interdisciplinarity and Canadian Literary Criticism." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 65 (1998): 16-37.
- Whitehead, Joshua. "Notes on Indigeneity: An Addendum." *Tia House*. 11 May 2017. Web.
- Williams, Jeffrey J. "The Rise of the Academic Novel." *American Literary History* 24.3 (2012): 561-589.
- Wylie, Herb. "Hemispheric Studies or Scholarly NAFTA? The Case for Canadian Literary Studies." *Canada and its Americas: Transnational Navigations*. Eds. Siemerling and Casteel. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2010. 48-61.

### **Schedule (12 weeks)**

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|----|--------|---|
| 1. | Jan 10 | NATION & LITERATURE<br>(Herder; Anderson; Szeman; Justice)              |
| 2. | Jan 17 | LITERARY INSTITUTIONS 1<br>(Mee & Sangster; Martin; Brydon; Kamboureli) |
| 3. | Jan 24 | CANADIAN LITERATURE<br>(Coleman; Atwood; Frye; Lecker; Davey)           |
| 4. | Jan 31 | CANLIT 1<br>(Carter; Mount; Rak; <i>from</i> Matuk)                     |
| 5. | Feb 7  | CANLIT 2<br>(Niedzwiecki; <i>from</i> Rak, McGregor, & Wunker)          |

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| 6.  | Feb 14 | Moscovitch, <i>Essay</i> (Panayotidis & Stortz)<br>- <i>in-class essay assignment</i>               |
|     | Feb 21 | NO CLASSES – WINTER READING WEEK  |
| 7.  | Feb 28 | Alexis, <i>Days by Moonlight</i> (McKittrick; Williams)   |
| 8.  | Mar 6  | LITERARY INSTITUTIONS 2<br>(Felski; Episkenew; Moss; Banting)                                       |
| 9.  | Mar 13 | CITIZENSHIP<br>(Thein, “Simple Recipes”; Pennee; Cho; Smolash & Tucker-Abramson)                    |
| 10. | Mar 20 | INDIGENEITY AND CANLIT<br>(King, <i>Borders</i> ; Elliott; Whitehead; Cariou; Eigenbrod)            |
| 11. | Mar 27 | TRANSNATIONAL TURN<br>(Sugars; Wylie; Andrews & Walton)<br>- <i>in-class essay editing exercise</i> |
| 12. | Apr 3  | SELLING CANLIT: CANADA READS<br>(Milz; Roberts; Fuller & Sedo)*                                     |
|     | Apr 5  | Essay Due   |

#### NOTES ON THE SCHEDULE & READINGS:

- The class schedule provided is meant to provide students with a general outline for the course. Minor changes may be made as the course progresses.
- Class 12 will have an optional, off-campus meeting to attend a live recording of CBC television’s Canada Reads.

#### Assignments and Assessment

Participation	5 %
Short Paper (in class)	15%
Presentation	30 %
Major Paper	50 %
<i>(Abstract &amp; Exercise 5 % ; Final Draft 45 % )</i>	

#### Participation

**5%**

Students are expected to carefully read all assigned readings and to come to class prepared not only to respond critically to the discussion that emerges, but also to initiate it. participation grade is based on quality of participation, not quantity.

**Short Paper****(750~ words)****15%**

Students will be required to write an in-class essay, midway through the semester, responding to one of several discussion prompts provided and based on the material and discussions in the course thus far. These essays do not require additional research, but it is open book: students are welcome to use their course readings and notes. Essays are expected to include a clear thesis claim, and to build a persuasive argument through subordinate claims, textual evidence, and careful analysis.

**Student Presentations****(1500 words)****30%**

In 15-minute, conference-style presentations, students will begin our discussion of the week's literary text via an engagement with an assigned critical text. Each presentation should include the following:

- 1) A brief introduction to the essay (2 minutes max)
  - Description of its central claim and method. What is its thesis? How does it construct its argument?
- 2) A response to the essay (3 minutes max)
  - Do you find it convincing? Why or why not?
  - What are its strengths, weaknesses, and implications?
- 3) Bring the essay into discussion with the broader course (10-12 min)
  - How does this piece relate to the concerns of the course?
  - Be specific, make an argument, take risks!
- 4) Three closing questions to prompt class discussion (~ 3 min)

The challenge here is to move well beyond summary to engage, test, and expand upon the critical reading's argument and to bring it into meaningful conversation with the course and its concerns. A brief Q&A will follow each presentation before opening to a broader class discussion.

Part of the pedagogy behind this assignment is to introduce students to the conference model of research dissemination. As such, students are also required to submit a brief text of roughly 250 words reflecting on the strengths and weakness of the presentation itself (as opposed to its content), together with the unchanged conference paper (1000 - 1250 words) within a week of the presentation.

We will aim for a single presentation each week, with a maximum of two presentations per week. Students are to select material for presentation when the sign-up sheet is posted on eclass following the first class.

**Research Abstract & Bibliography Exercise (250 words)****5%**

Students must bring a hard copy of an abstract and annotated bibliography in support of their final research essay to our 11<sup>th</sup> class. The grade for this exercise is based on full completion of both the assignment and the in-class exercise.

**Major Paper****(3750 words)****45%**

The major paper must include a clear thesis and a persuasive argument, engage a range of relevant peer-reviewed articles that move beyond the course readings, and it should aim to make an original contribution to the field of Canadian literary criticism. A student's major paper and presentations must be on different topics/texts.

The final major paper should be approximately 3750 words, and should follow MLA formatting for citations, notes, and works cited. It should be thoroughly proofread and free from grammatical, typographical, and spelling errors, and should be submitted via eclass. The final draft is worth 45% of the course grade.

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**IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS**

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

**Electronic Devices:** Please put your phones away and on mute. Feel free to use your laptops in class for note-taking and class-related work, but please respect your fellow students, and the class, by refraining from social media and other distractions during the class time.

**Grading:** Assignments and tests will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding 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%).

The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York. 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>.

Note that students may take a limited number of courses for degree credit on an ungraded (pass/fail) basis. For full information on this option see Alternative Grading Option in the English Department's section of the Undergraduate Calendar.

**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. *Assignments are to be handed in digitally to the tutorial leader.*

**Lateness Penalty:** Assignments received later than the due date will be penalized one-half letter grade per day that assignment is late (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 will 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/>

**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/>).

**PLEASE NOTE: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and will be treated as such.** Students are responsible for understanding what plagiarism is, and ensuring they avoid any semblance of it in their work. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it in your writing, you must come and see me before submitting your work.

**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/>

**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, which can be obtained from Student Client Services, Student Services Centre or online 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/>