

**English 6209: Topics in Colonial,
Postcolonial and Diasporic Literature**
Instructor: Julie Cairnie
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Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 – Fall 2018

Course Title: South African and Canadian Literatures of Transition

Course Description

It's difficult to settle on a definitive date for South Africa's transition from an unjust white supremacist state to the so-called "Rainbow Nation." Perhaps it was the release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 that signalled to the world what seemed to be a definitive turning point in South Africa's contemporary history. Or it might have been its first democratic elections on 27 April 1994. South Africa turned a sharp corner that day, especially in the world's imaginary. Photographs and video footage circulated widely of orderly and diverse crowds. In South Africa it was understood, however, that this transition would be fraught and that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was necessary in order to reckon with the violence of the past and move forward into a peaceful post-Apartheid future. People across the country were riveted by the testimony, which was broadcast through television, radio, and print media from 1996-98.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida famously (and controversially) referred to South Africa's Apartheid as "racism's last word," and many understood this literally. From its inception in 1948 to its "end" in the early 1990's, many countries (including Canada) viewed Apartheid South Africa as their "atavistic other" (Rosemary Jolly). And yet following Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology for the Indian Residential Schools in 2008, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to reckon with Canada's own violent colonial history; and this was modeled on South Africa's TRC. There was testimony and there were more apologies, but the proceedings were not broadcast and circulated as widely as they were in South Africa a decade earlier. Just as in South Africa, the process was fraught and criticized, but the end result was a report with a list of calls to action (rather than recommendations). In the aftermath of the TRC, (some) Canadians are paying attention to the process and its outcome, although this is far from uncomplicated.

In South Africa the period of transition from white minority rule to liberal democracy has brought with it a whole range of complex challenges for those who govern and live in the 'new' South Africa, for those who write about it, and for those who endeavour to chart a less violent and more just future for it. Among these challenges are the attempts to come to terms with a traumatic past, and to deal with questions of reclamation—of land, of stories, and of human rights that have heretofore been denied to a majority of the population. The transition in Canada is similar, but also unique. In large part, it is a transition from ignorance to awareness, as so many settler Canadians were unaware of the conditions under which Indigenous children were "educated," as well as many other injustices. Transition in Canada has produced a range of literature that works to understand that past and move towards a more equitable future.

In this seminar we will examine the means by which a selection of contemporary South African and Canadian writers address a violent and often deliberately obfuscated past; accommodate and bring into dialogue new stories that began to emerge through the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission and other means; grapple with issues of multiculturalism and non-racialism; re-evaluate the assumptions upon which national and cultural identities are built and claims of belonging are staked; come to terms with residual and new forms of violence bred by centuries of colonial rule followed by apartheid/colonial governance; and re-assess the function of literary and artistic endeavour.

Course Readings

South Africa

J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (Vintage)
 Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Broadway)
 Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (Ohio UP)
 Sindiwe Magona, *Mother to Mother* (Beacon)
 Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime* (Doubleday)

Canada

Gord Downie and Jeff Lemure, *Secret Path* (Simon & Schuster)
 Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian* (Anchor)
 Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (ARP Books)
 Richard Wagamese, *Medicine Walk* (Emblem)

NOTE: We will be reading a number of articles (available on or linked through Courselink); in addition, you are expected to view a range of films and other media – this will facilitate your understanding of the culture of transition in South Africa and Canada.

Important Websites

- TRC (South Africa) (<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>)
- South African Government (<http://www.gov.za/>)
- ANC (<http://www.anc.org.za/>)
- Mail and Guardian (<http://mg.co.za/>)
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (<http://www.csvr.org.za/>)
- TRC (Canada) (<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=26>)
- National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
<http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca>

Recommended South African Films

- (1) John Boorman (dir) *In My Country* (2004) a film adaptation of *Country of My Skull*
- (2) Anthony Fabian (dir) *Skin* (2008)
- (3) Lee Hirsch (dir) *Amandla!* (2002) a film about the role of music in the struggle against Apartheid
- (4) Deborah Hoffman and Frances Reid (dirs) *Long Night's Journey into Day* (2000) a documentary about the TRC
- (5) Gavin Hood (dir) *Tsotsi* (2005) a post-apartheid adaptation of Athol Fugard's novel *A Reasonable Man* (1999)
- (6) Tom Hooper (dir) *Red Dust* (2006) an adaptation of Gillian Slovo's novel
- (7) Steve Jacobs (dir) *Disgrace* (2008) an adaptation of Coetzee's novel.

(8) Michael Raeburn, (dir) *Triomf* (2008) an adaptation of the Afrikaans novel *Triomf* by Marlene van Niekerk

Recommended Canadian/Indigenous Films

(1) Jeff Barnaby (dir) *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013)

(2) Tracey Deer (dir) *Mohawk Girls* (2005)

(3) Neil Diamond (dir) *Real Injun* (2009)

(4) Chris Eyre (dir) *Smoke Signals* (1998)

(5) Robert J. Flaherty (dir) *Nanook of the North* (1922)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4kOIZMqso0&feature=youtu.be>

(6) Zacharias Kunuk (dir) *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001)

(7) Alanis Obomsawin (dir) *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993)

(8) Peter Stebbings (dir) *Empire of Dirt* (2013)

Evaluation

Seminar Presentations (two)	30%
Seminar Response	10%
Conference Presentation	20%
Final Paper	40%