

**English 6209: Topics in Colonial,  
Postcolonial and Diasporic Literature**  
**Instructor: Julie Cairnie**  
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**Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 – Fall 2017**

**Course Title: South African (and Canadian) Literatures of Transition**

Course Description

The release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 signalled to the world what seemed to be a definitive turning point in South Africa's contemporary history, ushering in the possibility for negotiations between the National Party and the liberation organizations that had been forced underground under apartheid rule. And yet this moment of change, in all its poignancy, was largely a symbolic one, and the profound consequences of the eventual transfer of power are still being played out. 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.

Students will examine the means by which contemporary South African 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 governance; and re-assess the function of literary and artistic endeavour, especially in the absence of overt censorship. In our course we are especially interested in the forms (non-fiction or fiction) for writing about South Africa's transition to democracy, and the various identities (white, Christian, etc) which are in transition.

There are profound (and uncomfortable) points of connection between South Africa and Canada. It is imperative that we situate ourselves as readers located in Canada, a country that has recently participated in its own Truth and Reconciliation Commission (concerned with the Residential School system imposed on First Nations peoples). The final module of the course will be concerned with Canadian literatures of transition.

Course Readings

*South Africa*

J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (Vintage)  
Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Broadway)  
Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (Picador)  
Sindiwe Magona, *Mother to Mother* (Beacon)  
Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime* (Doubleday)

*Canada*

Gord Downie and Jeff Lemure, *Secret Path* (Simon & Schuster)

Thomas King, *Inconvenient Indian* (Anchor)  
Leanne Simpson, *Island of Decolonial Love*  
Richard Wagamese, *Medicine Walk*

NOTE: We will be reading a number of articles (available on or linked through D2L); in addition, we will view a selection of films

Evaluation

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