

**English 330: The Canadian Postmodern  
Graduate Seminar, Spring 2010**

**Wednesdays 4:05-7:05  
ML SCI 107**

Canada is a country with no single national language, culture, history, literature, or even popular culture, in which government policies of bilingualism and "official multiculturalism" ensure the country remain a mosaic of different traditions, identities, and languages rather than a melting pot in which everyone becomes more or less "the same." While from time to time the occasional Canadians pundit will publicly lament this lack of cohesiveness, which is caused as much by a vast and challenging geography that creates many distinct regional identities as it is by Canada's complex history, most Canadians view this lack of a common thread that binds the country together to be one of Canada's chief strengths. Rather than weakening the country or its citizens' attachment to it, this lack of a monolithic national identity in fact seems to allow the country to work tremendously well.

As the poet, novelist, and critic Robert Kroetsch suggests, Canada's unique situation is that it sees "disunity as unity." In a 1979 report on higher education commissioned, oddly enough, by the Québec government, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard "define[d] postmodern as an incredulity toward meta-narratives." On this basis alone, then, writes Kroetsch, "Canada is a postmodern country." It should not be surprising, then, that this perspective is reflected in the works of Kroetsch and many other writers from Canada, something that Linda Hutcheon examines in her 1988 book "The Canadian Postmodern."

In this seminar, we will spend the first few weeks delving into postmodern theory and asking whether or not there is something especially relevant in postmodernism to Canada. From there we will explore several key examples of Canadian postmodernist fiction, bringing this theoretical background to bear on our analyses of these texts.

**Course objectives:**

By the end of the course, you will

- be very familiar with literary postmodernism, key terminology, and with the overall critical debates about postmodernism.
- have a sense of how this debate has played out in Canada and how the unique circumstances of that country are reflected in the development of literary postmodernism in Canada.
- have read and discussed at least eight Canadian novels and other secondary readings.
- have led, with a partner, an hour-long discussion of one of the texts, integrating secondary research and any relevant theoretical approaches to the work. One week later, each presenter will submit an 10 page paper stemming from your presentation.

- have submitted at the end of the course a 15-20 page paper that draws on at least two of the works covered in the class.

**Course texts:**

Watson, Sheila, The Double Hook

Leonard Cohen, Beautiful Losers (McClelland & Stewart)

Robert Kroetsch, The Studhorse Man (U of Alberta Press)

Michael Ondaatje, Running in the Family (Vintage)

Jacques Poulin, Volkswagen Blues (Cormorant Books)

Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (Vintage)

Nicole Brossard, Mauve Desert (Coach House Press)

Guy Vanderhaeghe, The Englishman's Boy

Jeffrey Moore, The Memory Artists (St Martins Griffin)

Douglas Coupland, The Gum Thief (Bloomsbury)

**Assignments:**

**60 minute presentation** (20%)

Presentation paper - 10 pages (30%)

Term paper - 15-20 pages (40%)

Participation and attendance (10%)

**Schedule:**

Jan. 20: Introduction; Postmodernism and Canada

Jan. 27: Readings: Malpas Chapter 1 (1-32); Hassan, "Towards a Concept of Postmodernism" & "From Postmodernism to Postmodernity"; Kroetsch "Disunity as Unity," Linda Hutcheon, from The Canadian Postmodern; entry on "Postmodernism and Postcolonialism" from the Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada. (all readings available on the Blackboard site for our course)

Feb. 3: Sheila Watson, The Double Hook (Presentation: )

Feb. 10: Leonard Cohen, Beautiful Losers (Presentations: Jonathan and Jeff F. )

Feb. 17: Robert Kroetsch The Studhorse Man (Presentation: Danielle and Allison)

Feb. 24: Timothy Findley, The Wars (Presentation: ) CLASS CANCELLED

March 3: Michael Ondaatje Running in the Family (Presentation: Nell and Jenna)

March 10: Spring recess

March 17: Jacques Poulin Volkswagen Blues (Presentations: Colin and Joanne)

March 24: Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (Presentations: Katie and Ashley)

March 31: Timothy Findley, The Wars (Presentation: )

April 7: Nicole Brossard, Mauve Desert (Presentations: Dana and Sarah)

April 14: Guy Vanderhaeghe, The Englishman's Boy (Presentation: Spencer and Francis )

April 21: Jeffrey Moore, The Memory Artists (Presentations: Dani and Jenn)

April 28: Douglas Coupland, The Gum Thief (Presentations: Jeff A. and Alex ); Last day of class

DATE TBA: TERM PAPER DUE