

Beyond Apocalypse: Indigenous Speculative Storytelling
English 4771F, Fall 2020
Department of English and Writing Studies
University of Western Ontario

Contact Information:

Instructor: Dr. Pauline Wakeham

Office: Room 4413 University College

Email: pwakeham@uwo.ca

Telephone: (519) 661-2111 x. 85815

Class Meetings: Wednesdays from 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Class Location: UCC 56

Delivery Type: This course is currently scheduled to take place in person and on campus. In the event of concerns regarding COVID-19 transmission and/or a COVID-19 resurgence during the course, either at the discretion of the Instructor, Western University, or public health officials, the course delivery will move away from face-to-face interaction and course content will be delivered online in a synchronous seminar format during the regularly scheduled class time. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course Instructor.

Office Hours: Due to physical distancing restrictions, all office hours will be held by appointment via Zoom.

Prerequisite(s): 1.0 from English 3000-3999 or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description:

Global citizens are currently living in the midst of what, a few short months ago, might have seemed to many like a dystopian future. And, yet, while this crisis is felt by all, the severity of struggle is not experienced evenly across the world or even within the same nation: geopolitics, economics, class, ability, and “race” shape who is rendered particularly vulnerable and exposed to harm.

What might reading and thinking about dystopias, apocalypse, and survival offer at such a turbulent time? How might such critical engagements elucidate asymmetries of privilege and precarity while also inspiring hope for solidarity and for social and political change? This seminar will take up such questions by engaging specifically with contemporary Indigenous speculative storytelling across a range of genres from literature and drama to film. While this work has at times been received by non-Indigenous audiences as a new innovation, many

Indigenous artists have long asserted that some of the key tropes of speculative fiction, such as alien invasion and post-apocalyptic struggles, are familiar terrain for Indigenous peoples. As Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice asserts, “Indigenous and Black folks understand apocalypse—our peoples have lived it. For populations that faced eighty-percent mortality and higher due to European-inflicted disease, displacement, starvation, military action, and internment policies over just a few centuries—and in some cases mere decades—the ‘end of days’ isn’t just the stuff of ... science fiction, but of historical memory and lived experience” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 166-67). With this vital recognition at the forefront, our course will grapple with the historical, social, and political contexts of settler colonialism that have created radically uneven worlds that are experienced as apocalyptic for some while generating privilege and prosperity for others.

While Indigenous speculative storytelling is often used as an imaginative response to colonization, such stories are also rich with Indigenous knowledges and practices that exceed colonialism’s reach. Indigenous stories are thus key to imagining alternative worlds beyond apocalypse, worlds of Indigenous resurgence and regeneration. Attending carefully to the articulation of these worlds and the knowledges they are built upon, our course will engage with the culturally-specific epistemologies and storytelling traditions represented in each work. At the same time, we will also consider points of connection amongst Indigenous artists who are drawing upon their nations’ philosophies to envision decolonial futures.

Course Objectives:

- To introduce students to and/or enrich their knowledge of Indigenous literary and cultural production on Turtle Island.
- To consider how the study of Indigenous literary and cultural production is enhanced by an attention to Indigenous ways of knowing and, in particular, Indigenous practices of storytelling and their vital importance to many Indigenous communities.
- To consider the complex relationship between socio-historical contexts and Indigenous literary and cultural production.
- To re-consider conventional literary categories and genres from the perspective of Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous practices of storytelling.
- To reinforce and further hone students’ critical thinking skills through substantial in-class discussion and dialogue.
- To strengthen and enrich students’ academic writing skills through the provision of ongoing assessment and feedback.
- To foster the development of students’ distinctive intellectual voices through the practice of engaged listening, thoughtful class participation, and leadership of seminar presentations.

Course Texts

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Yvette Nolan, *The Unplugging*

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Custom Course Book available at the University Bookstore

- All other readings are available either online at the URLs provided in this syllabus or via the course OWL site.

Assignments

- Two 3-4-page response papers [**12.5% each for a total of 25% of final grade**]
- One 20-minute seminar presentation [**30% of final grade**]
- One original research paper 8 pages in length [**35% of final grade**]
- Participation in class discussion (please see guidelines described below) [**7% of final grade**]
- Three (1 x 3 different weeks) written discussion questions submitted via email to the Professor **at least 30 minutes** before the class for which the question is intended [**3% of final grade**]

Guidelines for Class Participation

- The participation grade for the semester will take into account attendance and attentiveness in class meetings, evidence of preparedness for class (i.e. demonstrated detailed engagement with the readings, questions about readings brought to class), as well as the quality of verbal contributions to class discussion.
- Students should have carefully read and thoughtfully engaged with the assigned readings prior to class.
- At the 4000 level, students are encouraged to assume the stance of professional learners—ones who have the critical maturity to be open to broadening their intellectual horizons and to engaging with a diverse range of scholarship.
- Effective participation in a seminar involves being open to asking questions about things one doesn't understand, thoughtfully engaging with the course readings, remaining attentive to the comments of other class participants, and debating ideas with respect and sensitivity to both the subject matter and all participants in the discussion.
- The quality of a student's contributions is more important than sheer quantity, though speaking regularly in class is a goal to work towards. At the same time, effective participation in a seminar course also, in certain cases, means learning when one has contributed enough to a particular discussion and providing opportunities for others to share their thoughts.

Guidelines for Discussion Questions

- On **three separate weeks** throughout the semester, students are required to submit **one question** about the week's readings designed to be shared in class and to prompt discussion and debate.
- These questions must be emailed to the Professor **at least 30 minutes prior to the class in which the readings will be discussed.**
- Students cannot submit such questions on the same weeks in which they submit response papers or in which they present seminars.

Guidelines for Response Papers

- Over the course of the semester, students are required to write **two** 3-4-page response papers for the assigned readings for the week.
- Students are able to choose which weeks they would like to submit their response papers. Please note, however, that students are not eligible to submit a written response paper on the readings for which they have agreed to present a seminar. **The weeks for which students**

submit a written response paper must be different from the weeks that students submit a discussion question.

- Response papers should be submitted via email (as Microsoft Word or RTF attachments) to pwakeham@uwo.ca no later than **24 hours** prior to the class in which the texts will be discussed. Response papers for the assigned readings for the week will not be accepted after this deadline.
- The goal for these papers is not to offer a comprehensive summary of all the points expounded in the readings. Instead, the responses should succinctly outline the main argument of at least two assigned readings for the week (where applicable) and then proceed to critically analyze the texts and draw connections or reflect on points of divergence between them. In this sense, the goal is to put the assigned readings for the week together in critical conversation. Students may also wish to raise a question or two for further thought or discussion, but this is not a substitute for the submission of four separate discussion questions throughout the semester.

Guidelines for Seminar Presentations

- Seminar presentations should succinctly and briefly outline the arguments developed in the critical essays and analyze key themes and strategies of the readings assigned for the day. A strong presentation, however, should go much further than merely rehearsing the articles' arguments or the plot and structures of a cultural text. Seminar presentations should engage thoughtfully and critically with the readings, analyzing the connections and points of divergence between the texts as well as reflecting upon the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments.
- In other words, a seminar presentation should have an argument—a nuanced and thoughtful analytic position on the readings/cultural texts assigned for the week. Linking the readings to previous texts studied in the course and/or previous class discussions is also a useful strategy.
- Presentations should also consider how the arguments expounded in the readings could be developed further and, most importantly, how the texts relate to the broader questions under investigation throughout this course. Lastly, presentations should conclude with at least two thoughtful and engaging questions for class discussion.
- Please also note that your presentations will be timed and should not exceed 20 minutes.
- Students will be asked to submit a hard copy version of their seminar presentation notes (whether they be just point form notes or a scripted paper—if you like to talk without a set script, that is certainly fine and can make for a very engaging seminar) to the Professor on the same day that their presentation is given orally.
- **Please note that plagiarism rules apply to oral presentations. Oral presentations should clearly signal when a speaker is quoting someone else's words. The majority of a presentation should be offered in the speaker's own words.**

Important Information Regarding Assignments

- Any assignments submitted after the scheduled due date will be assessed a late penalty (2% per day, including weekends). Assignments should be submitted electronically as Word documents via email.
- Extensions will be granted only with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances and should, when possible, be arranged in advance.
- All assignments should be submitted on 8.5" x 11" paper, with 1" margins, double-spaced, and in a 12-point font (preferably Times New Roman). The title page should include the following information: the title of the essay, your name, the course number, and the date.

- All assignments may be submitted electronically to the professor via email to pwakeham@uwo.ca.
- All bibliographic notation should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation and essays should be accompanied with a Works Cited page.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate, if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

Western University's policy on Consideration for Student Absence is available here: [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

Western University's Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is available here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor

if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf.

Plagiarism

It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If you use a concept, idea, or phrasing from another source, it is imperative to signal the direct borrowing of words with quotation marks and to register the borrowing of ideas and concepts via the use of explanatory footnotes and parenthetical citations (or verbal explanation in the case of seminar presentations). When in doubt, please cite your source rather than leaving it out! Please also note that the same standards of proper crediting of sources apply to oral presentations. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

For English Department regulations regarding term work, exams, faculty office hours, academic relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please refer to the “Information for Students” on the departmental website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Online Etiquette

If this course changes to an online synchronous seminar format, students will be asked to mute their audio when not speaking but to keep their video on at all times. This is due to the specific nature of our seminar course, which involves a small number of students who should be present and engaged throughout each class.

To ensure the best experience for both you and your classmates, please honour the following rules of etiquette:

- please “arrive” to class on time
- please use your computer and/or laptop if possible (as opposed to a cell phone or tablet)
- ensure that you are in a private location to protect the confidentiality of discussions in the event that a class discussion deals with sensitive or personal material
- to minimize background noise, kindly mute your microphone for the entire class until you are invited to speak, unless directed otherwise
- unless invited by your instructor, do **not** share your screen in the meeting

The course instructor will act as moderator for the class and will deal with any questions from participants. To participate, please consider the following:

- if you wish to speak, use the “raise hand” function and wait for the instructor to acknowledge you before beginning your comment or question

General considerations of “netiquette”:

- Keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course.
- Be courteous toward the instructor, your colleagues, and authors whose work you are discussing.
- Be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. “Flaming” is never appropriate.
- Be professional and scholarly in all online postings. Cite the ideas of others appropriately.

Note that disruptive behaviour of any type during online classes is unacceptable. Students found guilty of Zoom-bombing a class or of other serious online offenses may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

Schedule of Readings

Please Note: The Professor reserves the right to make minor changes to the schedule throughout the course of the academic term. Any changes will be announced in class with ample prior notice.

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS, HISTORIES, CONTEXTS

September 9: Introductions

September 16: Indigenous Literatures: The Ethics and Politics of Engagement

Hilistis Pauline Waterfall, “For First Nations, These are Precedented Times” (available here: <https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2020/05/22/First-Nations-Precedented-Times/>)

Daniel Heath Justice, “Introduction: Stories That Wound, Stories That Heal” and “Chapter 3: How Do We Become Good Ancestors?” (pp. 113-16 and 139-156)

Métis in Space Podcast, Season 1, Episode 5, “Montreal ComicCon Special” (available here: <http://www.metisinspace.com/episodes/2016/4/2/mtis-in-space-ep5-montreal-comiccon-special>)

Supplementary: Greg Younging, “Chapter 6: Terminology”

September 23: Indigenous Speculative Storytelling: Decolonizing Genre, Re-Claiming History

John Rieder, “Colonialism and Postcolonialism”

Thomas King, “Where the Borg Are”

Government of Canada, from “The Indian Act”

Marianne Nicolson, “In Order to Survive We Create”

Sonny Assu, “Interventions on the Imaginary” (please view all the images in the gallery and read the artist’s statement here: <https://www.sonnyassu.com/pages/interventions-on-the-imaginary>)

September 30: Indigenous Futurisms

Rebecca Roanhorse et. al., “Decolonizing Science Fiction and Imagining Indigenous Futures: An Indigenous Futurisms Roundtable” (available here: <http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/decolonizing-science-fiction-and-imagining-futures-an-indigenous-futurisms-roundtable/>)

Jason Edward Lewis, “A Better Dance and Better Prayers: Systems, Structures, and the Future Imaginary in Aboriginal New Media” (available via the “Course Readings” folder on OWL)

Skawenatti, “She Falls For Ages” (please watch the entire video prior to class available here: <http://www.skawennati.com/SheFallsForAges/>)

Brian Maracle, “The First Words”

October 7: Defamiliarizing the Past through Speculative Cinema

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, “The History” (pages 43-110, available here:

http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf)

Jeff Barnaby, dir. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (Please view this film prior to class via the online access through Western’s Library System: https://ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991044536950605163&context=L&vid=01OCUL_UWO:UWO_DEFAULT&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=title,contains,rhymes%20for%20young%20ghouls,AND&mode=advanced&offset=0)

UNIT 2: LIFE BEYOND APOCALYPSE

October 14: Beyond Apocalypse: From “Survivance” to “Resurgence”

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Renate Eigenbrod, “‘For the child taken, for the parent left behind’: Residential School Narratives as Acts of ‘Survivance’”

Leanne Simpson, “Nishnaabeg Resurgence: Stories from Within”

October 21: Performing Resurgence on Stage

Yvette Nolan, *The Unplugging*

Leanne Simpson, “Kwe as Resurgent Method”

October 28: Pandemics and the Healing of People and Worlds

Dr. Reg Crowshoe, “Elders Wisdom Series: The Story of Pandemics” (Please read the article and watch the full video available here: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/news/indigenous-storytelling-brings-important-perspectives-pandemic-dialogue>)

Colin Samson, “Regarding the Infection of Others: Pandemics and Colonial Indifference” (available here: <https://www.cost-of-living.net/regarding-the-infection-of-others-pandemics-and-colonial-indifference/>)

Chelsea Vowel, “A Lodge Within Her Mind” (available here: <https://www.cmu.edu/cas/events/social-distancing/vowel-lodge-within-her-mind.html>)

Darcie Little Badger, “Black, Their Regalia” (available here: <https://www.fantasy-magazine.com/new/new-fiction/blacktheir-regalia/>)

November 4: Class Cancelled for Reading Week

UNIT 3: IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE FUTURES AND SOLIDARITIES

November 11: Environmental Apocalypse and Restoring Good Relations

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

Daniel Heath Justice, “How Do We Behave as Good Relatives?”

Mihskakwan James Harper, “Can We Achieve Climate Action and Reconciliation in a Post-COVID 19 World?” (available here: <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2020/06/19/can-we-achieve-climate-action-and-reconciliation-in-a-post-covid-world/>)

November 18: Indigenous Women and Futurity: Gender and Genre

Veronica Hollinger, “Feminist Theory and Science Fiction”

Danika Medak-Saltzman, “Coming to You from the Indigenous Future: Native Women, Speculative Film Shorts, and the Art of the Possible”

Chelsea Vowel, “kitaskînow 2350”

Nanobah Becker, dir., *The Sixth World* (view here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f4Jm0y_iLk)

Sydney Freeland, dir., *Hoverboard* (view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAeq-oJXZNw>)

November 25: Sexualities and Solidarities: Indigenous LGBTQ2S Speculative Fiction

Niigaan Sinclair, “Returning to Ourselves: Two Spirit Futures and the Now”

Qwo-Li Driskill et. al., from “Introduction” to *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*”

David A. Robertson, “Perfectly You”

Cherie Dimaline, “Legends are Made, Not Born”

Darcie Little Badger, “NÉ ŁE!”

December 2: Black and Indigenous Solidarities

Leanne Simpson, “Constellations of Co-Resistance”

Karyn Recollet, “Steel Trees, Fish Skins, and Futurity Cyphers”

Dionne Brand, “On narrative, reckoning and the calculus of living and dying” (available here:

<https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/07/04/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying.html>

Alondra Nelson, “Future Texts”

Wayde Compton, “The Lost Island,” “The Boom,” and “The Outer Harbour”

December 9: Black and Indigenous Solidarities (continued)

Mark Rifkin, “Introduction” to *Fictions of Land and Flesh: Blackness, Indigeneity, Speculation*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*