

Department of English & Writing Studies

Seminar in Canadian Literature: Diaspora in the Works of Dionne Brand
English 4570F (001)
Fall 2022

Instructor: D. Palmateer Pennee

Course Day/Time: Th 12:30-3:30pm

Course Location: UC 4401

Delivery Type: Seminar (synchronous if we must move to Zoom online learning)

Prerequisites: 1.0 from English 3000-3999 or permission of the Department.

An Official Message about your eligibility for this course:

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

This course will study selected works by Dionne Brand for their theory and practice of the Black diaspora and for their intersections with a range of other key terms in contemporary cultural and literary studies, such as nation, place, space, temporality; form, reading, embodiment, affect; autobiography, historiography, memory, phenomenology; race, gender, sexuality, class, language. We will study together how creative work is a form of theorizing as well as aesthetic practice, and we will do so across a range of genres, with particular attention to the “poetic” elements of Brand’s work in her prose, including one work of non-fiction prose, *A Map to the Door of No Return*.

Questions to be pursued together include: How does her writing represent what she calls “this inexplicable space” into which slaves and their descendants stepped through “the door of no return,” the space of the diaspora created by slavery and permeated by racism and white supremacy but also by Black resistance and refusal? How might we understand Brand’s (selected) work as “a map” to this “door of no return”? How does her work facilitate understanding of “this inexplicable space”? How does her work represent *being* and *knowing* in this space? How do the formal properties of her work contribute to our understanding of the particularities of “diaspora” for Black people, past and present? How might Brand’s theorizing and practice of diaspora entail futurity for those who live in “this inexplicable space”?

While attending to the specificities of Brand’s engagements with “diaspora” and “the afterlives of slavery” (Saidiya Hartman’s phrase), we will also reflect on methods for reading, discussing, and writing that are called for by Brand’s work. Some of these methods are demonstrated in her own work, some in scholarship about her work, others are yet to be invented—perhaps by some participants in this course. Understanding and analyzing methodology, then, will be a key component of course work both in the classroom and in assignments. Students will be required to articulate their understanding of others’ and their own methodologies as the course progresses and as is appropriate to an honour’s level seminar.

Accordingly, students will be required to read the selected Brand texts alongside selected secondary sources (journal articles, book chapters) about Brand's work and/or about key terms. A scholarly monograph, inspired in part by Brand's work, particularly by *A Map to the Door of No Return*, will be required reading as well: our engagements with this monograph, Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, will help to hone our understanding of methodology as situated approaches to creative and other forms of work. Likewise, reading of selected prose essays by Brand herself will help to illuminate methods in her poetry and fiction.

The course will proceed as much as possible as a seminar, which is to say with significant informed participation during class time by all members of the class. The honing of abilities to speak about the required readings is a significant objective of the course, not only to communicate clearly and in detail, but also to be able to speculate aloud in the classroom, i.e., to consider implications arising from discussion as it occurs. Informed listening will accompany informed speaking, of course.

Everyone is expected, then, to come to class having studied the assigned materials sufficiently to engage readily in detailed discussion. Assignments are designed for just such purposes of developing or improving professional communication skills that draw on informed analytical reading skills. (Analytical reading skills will also be assessed in spoken and written work.) A significant portion of the grade is to be earned through informed participation and oral presentations (from, for example, very short reports on a component of a reading to a 15-minute presentation). The final assignment, a research essay, is designed with similar professional objectives in mind, i.e., to take you through stages of the research-writing continuum and to hone your capacities for writing yourself into scholarly conversations about the course materials.

Note: Seminars require oral work. Students who enrol to be able to study Brand's work but who struggle to speak in class may wish to discuss alternative approaches to assessment with the instructor, though you are also encouraged to use the course as a space to develop your public voice and share your insights with others in a small group setting, grounded as we will be in shared readings. Our collective endeavours can benefit from your input, and your capacity to contribute can benefit from the collective environment.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Know, recognize, understand, and apply selected concepts about diaspora, particularly in relation to slavery and its afterlives;
- Apply, synthesize, and communicate your knowledge, comprehension, and analyses in discussion and in writing
- Evaluate others' analyses of the materials studied and materials similar to what we have studied
- Communicate (in oral and written forms) detailed knowledge of selected works by Dionne Brand (knowledge that may be portable to other writers and works)
- Communicate (in oral and written forms) knowledge of scholarly conversations about diaspora and about Brand's work (knowledge that is portable to other writers and works)
- Conduct advanced searches using Western Libraries information ecosystem
- Write a research essay grounded in skilled searches and an advanced understanding of literary and cultural studies methodology
- Speak professionally and knowledgably in prepared and impromptu contexts
- Appreciate how creative works can theorize their own practices
- Appreciate how analysis deepens or expands appreciation of creative work as technique and art
- Appreciate why Black lives matter, why Black art matters

Course Materials

The following books are required reading. The Bookstore will have ordered the recommended editions; some used copies may be available, but this is the first offering of this course at the undergraduate level, so The Bookstore may not have used copies. If you need to purchase used copies, you are advised to look to used bookstores and/or online book venues. The instructor understands that purchasing used copies is often necessary for financial reasons; just be aware that we may not always be (literally) on the same page during class discussions, given that we may have differently paginated editions of the required readings. Our class should be small enough for us to work easily from different editions if we need to.

- Dionne Brand, *Sans Souci*. 1989. (short stories)
- . *No Language Is Neutral*. 1990. (poems)
- . *In Another Place, Not Here*. 1997. (novel)
- . *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. 2000. (novel)
- . *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. 2001. (non-fiction prose)
- . *What We All Long For*. 2005. (novel)
- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) (scholarly monograph)

In addition to the above titles, required readings in article or book-chapter form will be accessible through Western Libraries at no cost beyond what you already pay in your tuition and fees for access to Western Libraries and the OMNI ecosystem holdings.

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

50% for in-class (primarily oral) work; 50% for written work (including a 2,000-2,500 word research essay)

Due dates for oral work and all of the written work, with the exception of the research paper, will be determined by the order of the readings (i.e., specific assignments will be geared to specific readings). The methods of evaluation and schedule of assignments will be finalized after consultation with the class in Week 1 (and may depend on enrolment numbers).

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory in all classes and tutorials. In cases of excessive absenteeism (e.g. more than 9 unexcused hours for a half course, 18 for a full course), which are not accounted for by either academic consideration or accommodation, students may be debarred from taking the final examination, and will receive an official warning to this effect by or before the course drop date (see Senate policy). In classes with or without final exams, students who do not attend class will receive 0% for course participation grades. Unless other policies dictate a different set of penalties in specific English and Writing Studies programs, this will apply to all department programs.

Intellectual Property/Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Additional Course Policies

Formatting and Handing in Out-of-Class work: All out-of-class written work must be formatted according to the MLA 8th edition. Unless otherwise instructed, all out-of-class written work must be submitted to your OWL Dropbox. You do not need to install anything on your PC or laptop to use the OWL Dropbox: it is already a feature of OWL. (This instructor does not use the Assignments tool in OWL because it is not sensitive to variable due dates for the same category of assignment nor to alternative modes of assessment and weights arranged individually with the instructor, e.g., for those students who are unable to speak in class.)

Late penalties: if you need an extension, ask for it in advance, even if it's just 2 or 3 days in advance. Late work for which no extension has been sought or for which accommodation or academic consideration granted, will lose marks at the rate of 10% of the value of the late assignment per day (or part thereof) late. For example, an essay worth 15% that is submitted 1.5 days late will lose 3 marks (10% of 15% = 1.5 marks; 1.5 x 1 day and part of one day late = 1.5 + 1.5 = 3 marks lost). (Your paper would be worth a maximum of 12% prior to grading.)

Email: the instructor generally responds quickly via e-mail, but will not necessarily respond to e-mails after 6pm or on weekends. (Would you expect to be able to speak by phone with your professor after 6pm or on the weekend? Probably not. Consider e-mail the same way.)

Office Hours: Unless announced otherwise, you do not need to book a time during office hours to meet with the instructor. Just drop in! Office hours are a chance to ask questions that you didn't think of during class, to follow up on a discussion that you wanted to contribute to but didn't feel comfortable speaking in the classroom that day, to seek clarification of ideas that come up in class or in the readings, to help develop your understanding of a topic, an idea, a reading, a figurative device, by "trying it out" on someone else, etc. You can also just stop in to say hello and share how things are going for you during the term. If you have a scheduling conflict with Office Hours, e-mail the instructor to arrange an alternative time to meet.

Laptops/devices: You are advised to bring a laptop or tablet to class for access to course readings that are online (i.e., if you choose not to print secondary readings or prefer to read on screen rather than use paper). You are welcome to take notes on your device, though research has shown that handwriting helps us to remember the material more effectively.

Reminder about Participation: the instructor does not take attendance, but be aware that absenteeism will be observed and will adversely affect your ability to succeed in the course.

Trigger Warnings: Your instructor does not use trigger warnings and is not a trained therapist. Western offers ready access to counsellors for any ongoing needs you may have from incidents in your life that may be triggered by course readings. By definition, critical thinking cannot occur, cannot be developed or accomplished, without encountering unfamiliar things as well as familiar things that become uncomfortable or difficult through a critical encounter with the course readings. Negative affects may arise from our readings, even for those who have not experiences that lead to the expectation of trigger warnings.

See further official departmental and University policies and supports below.

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](#).

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

The full policy is set out here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.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:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major 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.

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/>

Academic Support & Engagement <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.

Timetable

With the exception of the research essay, which is due not later than the last day of classes, the schedule of assignments (short reports, responses to study questions, seminar presentations) will follow the order of the readings. Final determination of numbers and types of assignments will depend on enrolment numbers and consultation with class members in Week 1.