

English 9199B

Writing Diaspora in Theory and Practice: Dionne Brand's Prose

Location: UC 4401, except on January 6, 2022, when we will meet in UC 3415

Time: Thursdays 3:30-6:30pm

Note: the instructor reserves the right i) to conduct class synchronously via Zoom; and ii) to use the traditional 2-hour timeslot for graduate courses if numbers in the course remain low enough to accommodate everyone's seminar presentations within that timeframe.

Instructor: Professor D. Palmateer Pennee, UC 3432, Ext. 85825, dpenn@uwo.ca

Note: e-mail is my preferred method of contact for quick questions of clarification and for booking appointments for more substantial conversations. E-mails will be responded to in a timely way Monday to Friday but may not be read or responded to on weekends. Graduate students should also reserve weekends for necessary time away from e-mail ☺

Office Hours: tbd

Note: the instructor reserves the right to hold office hours via Zoom only.

OWL Course Site: The OWL course site will be our main information hub: the course outline and weekly schedule, "handouts" for assignments, and other resources to be added or shared from time to time, will all be found here. Note that all written assignments are to be submitted to the OWL Course Site's Drop Box: you do not need to download any apps or programs; this Drop Box is IN the OWL course site ☺

Course Description:

This course will study selected prose works by Dionne Brand for their theory and practice of diaspora and diaspora's intersection with a range of other key terms in contemporary cultural and literary studies, such as geography, nation, hemisphere, space; form, reading, embodiment, affect; autobiography, historiography, memory, phenomenology; race, gender, sexuality, class, language. We will aim to understand how creative work is a form of theory and theorizing as well as conceptual and aesthetic practice.

Although the course's primary texts will be drawn largely from selected prose works by Brand, we will begin the course with her 1990 poetry collection, *No Language Is Neutral*, for its early and incisive modelling in miniature, as it were, of matters to which she returns in her prose. 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 of slavery and its afterlives created by white supremacy for people of Black African origins? How might we understand her work as “a map” to this “door of no return”? How does her work facilitate our understanding of “this inexplicable space”? How does her work represent being in this space?

While attending to the specificities of Brand’s engagements with “diaspora” and related terms, we will also consider methods called for by those engagements, some demonstrated in her own work, some evident in scholarship, others yet to be invented—perhaps by participants in this course. Understanding and analyzing methodology 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.

Accordingly, students will be required to read selected Brand texts alongside a range of journal articles about Brand’s work and/or about key terms. Scholarly monographs (or parts thereof) for required reading will include Lisa Lowe’s *The Intimacies of Four Continents* and Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*.

The course will proceed as much as possible as a seminar, which is to say with significant informed participation by all members of the class. The honing of abilities to speak about the materials read is a significant objective of the course, not only to communicate clearly and in detail, but also to be able to speculate, 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 be able to engage readily in discussion informed by details drawn from the readings. Assignments are designed for just such purposes of professional communication skills that draw on informed analyses of the readings. The final assignment, an essay of article length, 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 contributing to scholarly conversations about the course materials. You may wish to make it a personal goal for yourself to plan to submit your research paper to an appropriate journal after the end of the course.

Course Materials:

Required Texts:

Western’s Book Store will have ordered the most recent new editions of the titles below, but note that where ebook versions are available, no hard copy will be ordered by the Book Store. As a well-known author in Canadian, Black, and Women’s literatures, Brand is often taught, so hard copies of her work may be available in used bookstores. You are not obligated to have the most recent editions.

Dionne Brand, *No Language Is Neutral* (1990)

---. *In Another Place, Not Here* (1997)

- . *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (2000)
 - . *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2001)
 - . *What We All Long For* (2005)
 - . *An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading*. (2020) (Note: This is a lecture in the CLC Kreisel Lecture Series and is available online via Western Libraries)
 - . Selected essays (tbd, available via Course Readings, Western Libraries)
- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke UP, 2016)

Other required readings are as identified (or tba) in the Weekly Schedule and are available online through Western Libraries: students will be responsible for getting their own copies for their own educational use, as per copyright regulations.

Methods of Evaluation:

Note: Each member of class must consult the instructor in advance on the topic of their seminar presentation and research paper. For the research paper (and as explained in more detail below), you will be creating your own schedule of due dates for the various stages of required work leading to the completed paper. Plan accordingly and within the deadline stipulations below (draft schedule due not later than 4 March 2022; final paper and abstract due not later than 15 April 2022).

Where to submit your written work:

All written work must be submitted to *the OWL course site's Drop Box*. This method ensures that the instructor cannot lose any of your work ☺ Handouts on the assignments will be available in OWL Resources in a folder entitled "Assignments." Other Resources may be added to OWL from time to time; you will be notified by e-mail from the OWL Messages server. Do note, however, to always send e-mails to the instructor NOT through OWL Messages but directly to dpennec@uwo.ca (to ensure I see the e-mails in a timely way).

10% 2-page, double-spaced paper on *No Language Is Neutral*, in which you reflect on how this poetry collection "maps" diasporic experience or "being" (up to you to define the verb "maps" for yourself in relation to your understanding of the collection ☺)

DUE not later than 11:55pm Wednesday 12 January 2022

10% Preparing for, taking the lead in, and reflecting on, discussion of an assigned article. Each member of class will be asked to fill in a (ready-made) research design template for the assigned article as preparation for taking the lead in discussing the article in class; the completed template will be due prior to leading the discussion. *After* the class discussion, reflect on the discussion, review the completed template, and prepare and submit a revised version accordingly. There will be opportunity for a practice run at this assignment before it is due for marks.

DUE dates will vary according to contents of the Weekly Schedule. Sign up for slots, please.

25% 1 25-30 minute seminar presentation with a 2-3 page follow-up. This follow-up is not a "paper" version of your seminar; rather, the follow-up, due not more than 1 week after your seminar, is an opportunity to reflect in writing on the seminar's strengths and areas for improvement, and to identify matters arising that you think are worth pursuing and why. The follow-up should be 2 to 3 pages, double-spaced.

DUE dates for the seminar presentation will vary for each student; due dates for the 2-3page follow-up will be one week after your seminar presentation.

15% 1 contextualized question on the primary text for each classmate's seminar presentation

DUE dates will correspond to seminar slots in the Weekly Schedule. Your contextualized question (not more than one page of double-spaced writing) is DUE in written form to the instructor not later than 11:55pm the day before each seminar presentation; you will pose your question orally in class immediately after the seminar presentation. Do not share your question with the seminarist in advance of the seminar: we want to create as nearly as possible the circumstances of giving a conference presentation and responding to questions on the spot.

40% 1 research paper of 6,500-8,000 words inclusive of notes and Works Cited (this length is typical for articles). To allow for depth of engagement, you may write your research paper on the same text on which you presented a seminar. To allow for range of engagement, you are welcome to write your research paper on a text other than the text chosen for your seminar presentation. Either way, the research paper component of the course includes the following *required* stages of work:

- Identification of primary text and topic to be pursued in consultation with the instructor
- A Preliminary Bibliography of not fewer than 12, not more than 15 sources
- A Critical Annotated Bibliography of not fewer than 2, not more than 3 sources with which you anticipate your paper to be most in conversation
- An Abstract of your paper of not less than 150 words, not more than 200 words (typical length requested by journals for article publication), due with the Research Paper
- The Research Paper itself (6,500-8,000 words inclusive of Notes and Works Cited), prepared according to MLA 8th or 9th edition (some journals are still working with the 8th edition, some have moved on to 9th) (and we will all pray to our respective sources of benevolence and help that MLA does not come out with a 10th edition before our course finishes 😊)
- A cover page that identifies any significant changes in direction for your paper as a result of further research and thought, i.e., if your paper turns out not to be in conversation with the papers you anticipated in the Critical Annotated Bibliography stage of the research-writing continuum, use this cover page to identify how the change came about and identify the newer resource(s)

Due Dates: With the exception of the due date for the Abstract and Research Paper itself (and cover page if necessary), which will be 15 April 2022, each student must work out their own schedule for completion of the required components of the Research Paper not later than 4 March 2022 (1 week after Winter Break): send the schedule in writing to the instructor via attachment to dpennee@uwo.ca. Once the schedule is approved (e.g., for turnaround time between components of the work), upload the schedule to your OWL Drop Box. Everyone must stick to their schedule as finalized unless documented reasons arise for delays for which you need consideration for lateness.

You are strongly encouraged to maintain a research journal or diary (if you do not already do so), in which you record your thoughts in development, your search terms, instances of problem-solving when you can't find what you're looking for, etc.

A Weekly Schedule will become available via the OWL course site for the start of the winter 2022 term. For now, note that our first reading will be for the second week of term: Brand's *No Language Is Neutral*

Statement on 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 the following website: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Graduate Course Health and Wellness:

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.