

Indigenous Futurisms
English 9211A, Fall 2022
Department of English and Writing Studies
University of Western Ontario

Contact Information:

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Class Meetings: Tuesdays from 9:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.

Class Location: University College Room 4401

Office Hours:

Tuesdays from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. in University College Room 4413
Thursdays from 12:30 – 1:30 p.m. in Social Sciences Building Room 3207 (the Indigenous Studies Program Office boardroom)
Thursdays from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. in University College Room 4413

Course Description:

What role does Indigenous storytelling in its varied forms play in envisioning—and building—futures beyond colonization? Guided by this question, our course will engage with a range of literature, drama, and film that challenges settler colonialism’s longstanding efforts to relegate Indigeneity to the past. While a growing body of Indigenous speculative storytelling and science fiction has been generated in recent decades, such artistic visions of the future are not a new innovation amongst Indigenous nations of Turtle Island (North America). 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).

While Indigenous speculative storytelling is often used as a creative and critical response to colonization, such stories are also rich with Indigenous knowledges and practices that exceed colonialism’s reach. As Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon avers, “incorporating time travel, alternate realities, parallel universes and multiverses, and alternative histories is a hallmark of Native storytelling tradition[s], while viewing time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream is central to Native epistemologies.” In this way, Indigenous futurisms builds upon the longstanding knowledges, stories, and creative brilliance of Indigenous nations to inspire futures of resurgence. 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 sovereign Indigenous futures.

Course Texts:

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Additional course readings are available via OWL and Western Libraries. The course instructor will provide further information about accessing these materials.

Assignments:

- Two 4-page response papers [**12.5% each for a total of 25% of final grade**]
- One 30-minute seminar presentation and subsequent leading of class discussion [**30% of final grade**]
- One original research paper 14-16 pages in length [**35% of final grade**]
- Participation in class discussion (please see guidelines described below) [**10% 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 graduate 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 across multiple disciplines.
- Effective participation in a graduate course 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 Response Papers:

- Over the course of the semester, students are required to write **two** 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.
- 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 each assigned reading 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 might also wish to raise a question or two for further thought or discussion.

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 30 minutes.
- After the presentation, the seminar presenter will also be responsible for leading the ensuing class discussion for about 15 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 (with the exception of the response papers) must be submitted in hard copy. Email will not be accepted.
- 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.
- Please retain one hard copy and one electronic version of each essay you submit in this class. As well, please retain all returned, marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.
- All bibliographic notation should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation and essays should be accompanied with a Works Cited page.

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: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf
- It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If a writer uses 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).

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. 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.

Student Accessibility Services:

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating for, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate program (normally their Graduate Chair and/or course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Schedule of Readings

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS, HISTORIES, CONTEXTS

September 13: Introductions

September 20: Indigenous Literatures: The Ethics and Politics of Engagement

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 only)

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 27: Indigenous Speculative Storytelling: Decolonizing Genre, Re-Claiming History

Grace Dillon, “Imagining 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/>)

John Rieder, “Introduction: The Colonial Gaze and the Frame of Science Fiction”

Drew Hayden Taylor, “I Am...Am I”

October 4: 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)

Danis Goulet, *Night Raiders* (Please view this film prior to class via online access here:

<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=https://stream.mcintyre.ca/westernu2020/title/25630>)

October 11: 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 18: Re-imagining Origins, Re-storying Futures: Sky Woman Goes Digital

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”

UNIT 2: IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE FUTURES AND SOLIDARITIES

October 25: Environmental Apocalypse and Restoring Good Relations

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

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

November 1: Class Cancelled for Fall Reading Week

November 8: 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”

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>)

Helen Haig-Brown, *The Cave* (view here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHZsdgfo1lw>)

November 15: 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*

Kai Minosh Pyle, “How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls”

Darcie Little Badger, “NÉ ŁE!”

Chelsea Vowel, “Āniskôhócikan

November 22: Black and Indigenous Solidarities

Leanne Simpson, “Constellations of Co-Resistance”

Alondra Nelson, “Future Texts”

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

November 29: Black and Indigenous Solidarities (continued)

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

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

December 6: Global Indigenous Futurisms

Daniel H. Wilson, “A History of Barbed Wire”

Mykaela Saunders, “Overture”

Mykaela Saunders, “Terranora”

Ellen van Neerven, “Water”