

Reconciliation and its Discontents: Theory, Art, Critique
English 9168A / Theory 9328

Department of English and Writing Studies / Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism
The University of Western Ontario

Contact Information:

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Office Hours: Wednesdays from 12:00-2:00 p.m. and Thursdays from 12:45-1:45 p.m.

Class Meetings: Thursdays from 9:30-12:20 p.m.

Class Location: University College Room 4415

Course Description:

In recent decades, the global forum has witnessed the proliferation of events of confession and contrition in the form of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and official apologies from nation-states atoning for injustices. According to philosopher Jacques Derrida, the accumulation of such “scenes of repentance” have resulted in a phenomenon he terms the “‘globalisation’ of forgiveness”—a phenomenon that, according to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, is historically unprecedented, emerging on the “global stage” as “the ultimate horizon of a new historicity.” In 1998, the Government of Canada domesticated this global trend by first addressing its colonial wrongs when it issued a “Statement of Reconciliation” to Indigenous peoples. One decade later, Canada became the first G8 nation to implement a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, summoning the idioms and mechanisms of the field of “transitional justice” and, in so doing, articulating a self-proclaimed liberal democracy to the scene of apartheid in South Africa, civil war in El Salvador, and military dictatorship in Chile.

As “reconciliation” has emerged as a key term in Canadian public discourse—mobilized now by the federal government, corporate media, school boards, and universities alike to address national and institutional harms against Indigenous peoples—it seems more crucial than ever to study the complex theoretical and political genealogies of this concept. This course provides such an opportunity for critical study, engaging with an international and interdisciplinary body of scholarship that grapples with questions of violence, wounding, remembering, forgetting, reparations, and justice. The course will also put theory in dialogue with literature and the arts to ask what kinds of theorizing, contextualizing, and re-imagining does art offer for grappling with injustice and imagining new futures. In so doing, we will put the concept of reconciliation under critical pressure, interrogating its Euro-Western theological underpinnings and teleological thrust towards closure and cure, and in turn open space for alternative conceptualizations of reckoning with violence and fostering decolonization and Indigenous resurgence.

Course Texts:

J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*

Gail Jones, *Sorry*

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

- All other readings are available online or via the course OWL site.

Assignments:

- Two 4-page response papers [**12.5% each for a total of 25% of final grade**]
- One 30-minute seminar presentations and subsequent leading of class discussion [**30% of final grade**]
- One original research paper between 18-20 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 to 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 and faxes 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 first 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. 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.

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.

September 6: Welcome and Introductions

Unit 1: Critical Foundations, Global Contexts

September 13: The Globalization of "R-Words"

Elazar Barkan, "Preface" and "Introduction: Amending Historical Injustices in International Morality"

Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly, "Beyond Coexistence: Towards a Working Definition of Reconciliation"

September 20: Racial Reconciliation in South Africa: The Paradigmatic Case?

Achille Mbembe, "Passages to Freedom: The Politics of Racial Reconciliation in South Africa"
J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace*

Rebecca Saunders, "Disgrace in the Time of a Truth Commission"

September 27: Saying "Sorry" in Australia

"Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology for the Stolen Generations" (available at:

<https://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>)

Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs, “‘On the Border of the Unsayable’: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia”
Gail Jones, *Sorry*

Unit 2: Reconciliation in Canada?

October 4: The Rise of Reconciliation in Canada: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)

Sophie McCall, “‘My Story is a Gift’: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Politics of Reconciliation”

Dale Turner, “On the Idea of Reconciliation in Contemporary Aboriginal Politics”

“Address by the Honourable Jane Stewart Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the occasion of the unveiling of Gathering Strength — Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan” (available here: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725/1100100015726>)

October 11: Class Cancelled for Fall Reading Week

October 18: Settler Colonialism and the Problem of Reconciliation: Transitional Justice in Non-Transitional Societies

Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, "Canada and Settler Colonialism"

Courtney Jung, “Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Transitional Society”

Roland Chrisjohn and Tanya Wasacase, “Half Truths and Whole Lies: Rhetoric in the ‘Apology and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”

October 25: Apologies: 2008 and Beyond

“Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s 2008 Apology re: Residential Schools” (available here: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>)

“Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s 2017 Apology re: Residential Schools to former students of Newfoundland and Labrador” (available here: <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/11/24/remarks-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-apologize-behalf-government-canada-former> and watch video here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42101457>)

Eva Mackey, “The Apologizer’s Apology”

Jordan Abel, “Please Check Against Delivery”

November 1: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Introduction” to *Volume 1 (Executive Summary): Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*

Skim through the TRC’s Calls to Action here:

http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

David Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation”

Janet Marie Rogers, “Final Report” and “Calls to Action”

November 8: Art, Realism, Truth

Please Note: While all of the material we will be engaging with in this course is emotionally difficult and challenging, the readings for this week prompt a very graphic confrontation with the physical and sexual abuse that occurred at residential schools. I wish to provide this advance notice here and am willing to discuss further should any student wish.

Tara Beagan and Andy Moro, *Reckoning*

Guide to the Independent Assessment Process Application, pages 1-19 only (available here: <http://www.iap-pei.ca/media/information/publication/pdf/pub/iapg-v3.3-20180312-eng.pdf>)

November 15: Truth Beyond Realism

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

Lee Maracle, "Conversation 12: Response to empathy from settlers"

Lee Maracle, "Conversation 13: Reconciliation and residential school as an assimilation program"

November 22: Reckoning with Colonial Injustices Beyond Residential Schools

Pauline Wakeham, "At the Intersection of Apology and Sovereignty: The Arctic Exile Monument Project"

"Apology for the Inuit High Arctic relocation" (available here: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016115/1100100016116>)

Arthur Manuel, "Until Canada gives Indigenous people their land back, there can never be reconciliation" (available here: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/views-expressed/2017/01/until-canada-gives-indigenous-people-their-land-back-there-ca>)

Cindy Blackstock, "Reconciliation Means Not Saying Sorry Twice: Lessons from Child Welfare in Canada"

Unit 3: If Not Reconciliation, Then What?: Imagining Alternatives

November 29: Resurgence

Leanne Simpson, "Kwe as Resurgent Method" and "Embodied Resurgent Practice and Coded Disruption"

Leanne Simpson, "Canada Day, Rebecca Belmore, and Me"

(<https://www.leannesimpson.ca/writings/canada-day-rebecca-belmore-me>)

December 6: Decolonization and Alliance

Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, "Decolonization and Dangerous Freedom"

Eva Mackey, "Treaty as a Verb" and "Creative Uncertainty and Decolonizing Relations"