



Liminal Spaces in Anglo-Canadian Literature



Room and time: Seminar Room (Attems-gasse 25, Top Floor, SR 34.D2), Wednesday, 15:15-16:45

First session: March 9, 2016 · **Course number:** 512.250

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · **Office hours:** Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. (Room DG-0036) · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: This course will deal with the complex interrelation between Anglo-Canadian writing and the environment. Since Northrop Frye's dictum in 1971 that Canada's poetry was marked by "a tone of deep terror in regard to nature," a corpus of literary and theoretical texts has emerged in which this apparent distance of Canadian literature from the theme of wilderness is discussed. Thus, Margaret Atwood has claimed in her non-fiction book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) that Canada's literary imagination was characterized by a sense of resistance to an inhospitable and indifferent environment. The following questions will be of relevance in the seminar: How have influential Canadian autobiographers, poets, novelists, and short story writers approached the landscape motif in their texts? Which role do the discourses of cartography and spatialization play here? Influential writers to be discussed in class will include James K. Liston, Frederick Philip Grove, Sinclair Ross, Sheila Watson, Aritha Van Herk, Margaret Atwood, and Alice Munro. Canada will be examined as both a 'site of contestation' and as a 'liminal space'; special emphasis will be put on literary texts representing the following 'boundary' regions: Niagara Falls/St. Lawrence River, the Prairies, British Columbia, Québec/Nova Scotia, the North. The main theoretical approaches used in the seminar will be ecocriticism and geocriticism. There is a close cooperation with the conference "In-Between – Liminal Spaces in Canadian Literature and Culture" (2-4 June, 2016), which course participants are supposed to attend.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their questions for the discussion forum 6 days in advance!

Materials: All texts will be made available on **Moodle**. Please watch films and TV episodes in the **Media Archive!**

Aims: The course will familiarize participants with key texts of Canadian literature, focusing on the theme of liminality (with respect to composition, background, and effect).

Assessment: **A) Regular attendance** (no more than 2 absences!); **active in-class participation**; **7 discussion forum entries (1/3)**;
B) Presentation as part of an **expert session** plus 3-page **handout** and **forum questions** for your session **(1/3)**;
C) Summaries of two conference lectures/panels (½ page each), **research proposal** (2 pages), **final paper** (8 pages) **(1/3)**.

Deadline for Final Papers: Wednesday, June 29, 2016, in class. There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus

09 March Introduction – Liminal Spaces in Anglo-Canadian Literature

Basic texts:

Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada" (1965). [Moodle]

Marshall McLuhan, "Canada as Counter-Environment" (1964). [Moodle]

16 March The Environmental Imagination – Ecocriticism as a New Discipline

Main text (reading required):

Peter Barry, "Ecocriticism" (2002). [Moodle]

Additional texts (optional):

Lawrence Buell, "Introduction" to *The Environmental Imagination* (1995). [Moodle]

Robert Tally, Jr., "Geocriticism," from *Spatiality* (2013).

Keywords: Ecocriticism; Environment; Ethical Responsibility; Geocriticism; Green Studies; Re-Reading.

13 April The Terrible Sublime – Niagara Falls and St. Lawrence River as Liminal Spaces

Main text (reading required):

James K. Liston, "Niagara Falls: A Poem, in Three Cantos" (1843). [Moodle]

Companion text (optional):

Judith Julia Farley, "The St. Lawrence River" (1906). [Moodle]

Keywords: Beauty; Frontier Imagery; Immigration; Liminality; Sublime; US/Canadian Border.

20 April Homeground, Foreign Territory – Mapping Canadian Identity

Main text (reading required):

Margaret Atwood, ch. 1 from *Survival* (1972). [Moodle]

Companion texts (optional):

Margaret Atwood, "What, Why, and Where Is Here?"; "Death by Landscape" (1991). [Moodle]

Keywords: Canadian Identity; 'Garrison Mentality' (Frye); Obstacles; *Surfacing* (novel); Survival; Victimization.





- 27 April** **Swallowed by the Wilderness – Horrors of the Malevolent North**
Main text (reading required):
Margaret Atwood, "The Age of Lead" (1991). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Margaret Atwood, "Concerning Franklin and his Gallant Crew" (1995). [Moodle]
Keywords: Arctic Exploration; Cannibalism; Death; Disappearance; Franklin Expedition; Solitude; Trade Routes.
- 04 May** **Infinity and Closure – The Ambiguous Limits of the Canadian Landscape** (Manitoba, the Prairies)
Main text (reading required):
Frederick P. Grove, "Snow" (1922). [Moodle]
Companion text (optional):
A.J.M. Smith, "The Lonely Land" (1926). [Moodle]
Keywords: Blizzards; Disorientation; Europe-Canada; Manitoba; Pioneers; Prairie Writing; Snow Imagery.
- 11 May** **Cartographies of the Far North – Challenging Ideas of 'Place' and 'Space'** (Alberta & Arctic Circle)
Main text (reading required):
Aritha van Herk, "Edmonton," from *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990). [Moodle]
Additional text (optional):
Rob Shields, "The True North – Strong and Free" (1992). [Moodle]
Keywords: Arctic; Dislocation; Edmonton; Ficto-Criticism; Quest; Place/Space; 'True North'; Utopia.
- 18 May** **Allegoric Landscape – Canadian Nature as Border Fantasy in Canadian Poetry** (Québec et al)
Main texts (reading required):
Al Purdy, "Wilderness Gothic" (1968), "The Country North of Belleville" (1972). [Moodle]
Companion texts (optional):
Al Purdy, "A Handful of Earth" (1978), "On the Food Plain" (1990), "Grosse Isle" (1994). [Moodle]
Keywords: Allegory; Feminization of Landscape; Free Verse; Francophone Canada; Québec; Wilderness.
- 25 May** **Gothic Regionalism and the Return of the Ghosts** (British Columbia)
Main text (reading required):
Ethel Wilson, "On Nimpish Lake" (1961). [Moodle]
Companion texts (optional):
Sheila Watson, excerpts from *The Double Hook* (1959); Ethel Wilson, "The Window" (1961). [Moodle]
Keywords: British Columbia; Canadian Gothic; Lake Imagery; 'Power of Geography' (Wilson).
- 01 June** **No session!**
Participate in conference "In-Between: Liminal Spaces in Canadian Literature and Culture" (2-4 June, 2016).
- 08 June** **The Country and the City – Liminal Identities and the Environment** (Ontario & Ottawa)
Main texts (reading required):
Alice Munro, "Boys and Girls" (1964) & "Dance of the Happy Shades" (1968). [Moodle]
Companion texts (optional):
Reingard Nischik, "(Un-)Doing Gender in Munro's 'Boys and Girls'" (2007). [Moodle]
Keywords: Adolescence; Aging; Dialectic between Female/Male; Gender Identity; Innocence; Youth.
- 15 June** **Transgressing Boundaries – Transculturation and Ethnic Diversity**
Main text (reading required):
Rohinton Mistry, "Swimming Lessons" (1987). [Moodle]
Keywords: Allegories; Asian-Canadian; Cultural Diversity; Ethnicity; Postcolonial Writing; Racism; Stereotypes.
- 22 June** **Conquering Canada – Explorers, Tricksters, and Coyotes in Narratives of Indigeneity**
Main text (reading required):
Thomas King, "A Coyote Columbus Story" (1993). [Moodle]
Companion text (optional):
Rudy Wiebe, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" (1982). [Moodle]
Keywords: Annexation; Columbus; Coyote Figure; First Nations; Trickster.
- 29 June** **Magic, Phantasma, and Avant-Garde Fiction – Winnipeg as Palimpsest**
Main text (reading required):
Guy Maddin, excerpts from *My Winnipeg* (2007, book). [Moodle]
Additional example (optional):
My Winnipeg (2007, film dir. by Guy Maddin).
Keywords: 'Frozen Forks'; Heterotopia; Mock-Documentary; Palimpsest; Sleepwalking; Undead; Winnipeg.



FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY!

Deadline
Research Proposal TODAY!