2014 Winter Session (2014-2015 Academic Year)

**ENGL 545D: Studies in Canadian Literature (3 credits)**

**Instructor:** Lorraine Weir  
**Section:** 004  
**Term:** 1  

**CATEGORY C** - Literature in English from 1900 to the present  
**CATEGORY D** - Transhistorical/ Cultural Studies  
**CATEGORY E** - Theory, Rhetoric and Language (Students in the MA program should consult Section 4.4 of the Handbook when planning their courses.

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**Testimony as "Rhetorical Survivance": "Trickster Hermeneutics" and the Production of De/colonial "Truth"**

**Course Description:**

This seminar will focus on two different testimonial sites --the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's (CEAA) hearing into the proposed mine at Fish Lake, B.C.-- in order to consider the operations of testimony as genre in rhetorical and narratological terms, to contextualize it in terms of what rhetorician Malea Powell refers to as Indigenous "rhetorical survivance," and to theorize it in terms of a decolonial analysis which calls on Gerald Vizenor's "trickster hermeneutics" to worry the operations of "truth" in the context of "reconciliation" or, as Glen Coulthard has argued, the politics of recognition. While the common themes of the suffering of residential school survivors, on the one hand, and the potential for destruction of the land and the impact of that destruction on language and culture, on the other hand, unify this seminar, no attempt is made to equate the two. Each of these themes is expressive of and determined in relation to the larger impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples.

Testimony is fundamental to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's enactment of its mandate to document the history of the Indian Residential Schools as part of a process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As the TRC's website puts it, the "truth telling and reconciliation process" is at the core not only of documenting the experiences of residential school survivors but also of "put[ting] the events of the past behind us...." How does testimony do this? What are the memory operations at issue here? How is testimony implicated in the archival production of pastness?

What happens when, in contrast, testimony seeks to forestall a possible future, mobilizing the archive in the service of prevention? During environmental hearings, testimony may support or reject the proposed project under review. In the case of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's recent hearings on the proposed open-pit gold and copper mine at Fish Lake, testimony by Tsilhqot'in community members opposed the mine in terms of narratives grounded in Indigenous epistemology relating to the land and to principles of balance and care which are at variance with resource extraction in a place held sacred by Tsilhqot'in people. During the hearings, both traditional genealogies and empirical science were deployed in evidence, the rhetorical differences between the two testimonial
modes heightening their respective truth claims. How does testimony operate here? What are the characteristics of "rhetorical survivance" in CEAA testimony?

Working with material from both testimonial sites, the seminar will analyze some of the characteristic structures of testimony and consider a variety of theoretical approaches to memory and witnessing drawn from Indigenous epistemology, law, and rhetoric as well as from Holocaust and conflict studies. The seminar will be of interest to students of rhetoric, cognitive linguistics, Indigenous literatures and epistemology, as well as theory, environmental studies and law. The seminar will include guest speakers, videos, student presentations, and brief lectures.

**Required Texts (Provisional):**

- Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle"
- Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (selec)
- Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*
- Rosanne Kennedy, Lynne Bell, & Julia Emberley, eds., *Decolonizing Testimony: On the Possibilities and Limits of Witnessing*
- Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*
- Powell, Malea. "Rhetorics of Survivance"

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