



# Imagining Toronto

GEOG 4280.3.0  
Department of Geography  
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies  
York University, Toronto, Canada

Summer Term 2013

"There is no city that does not dream from its foundations. The lost lake crumbling in the hands of brickmakers, the floor of the ravine where light lies broken with the memory of rivers. All the winters stored in that geologic garden. Dinosaurs sleep in the subway at Bloor and Shaw, a bed of bones under the rumbling track."

(Anne Michaels, "There is No City That Does Not Dream". *Skin Divers*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999: 16)

## Instructor

Amy Lavender Harris, B.A. (Hons.), M.PL., M.I.R.

E-mail: [alharris@yorku.ca](mailto:alharris@yorku.ca)

Consultations: In or after class, by email (preferred) or appointment (office location: Ross S404A).

## Time and Location

Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm

Location: Stong College 205

## Course Description

This course explores intersections of literature and place in the Toronto region, exposing students to critical and imaginative works on place, culture, and representation. Close readings of a wide selection of Toronto-based literature (fiction, poetry, non-fiction) are paired with critical scholarly works investigating how places are invented, (re)presented and (re)produced. The course is arranged thematically. An introduction to concepts and theories in literary/cultural geography (including representations of place, literary regionalism, issues raised by the modernity/post-modernity dialectic, among others) precedes an exploration of topics including (1) constructing identity and place, (2) immigrant and natives: selves and others, (3) transformations of nature into culture, (4) sexualities and the city, (5) the possibilities and impossibilities of dwelling in the city, and (6) urbia and suburbia. (Source: Department of Geography Undergraduate Calendar, 2012-2013)

## Course Website

Imagining Toronto website [for most course-related materials]: <http://www.imaginingtoronto.com>

Moodle website [for scanned readings only]: log in at <http://moodle.yorku.ca>



## Introduction: The City as Text

In the iconic Toronto novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Michael Ondaatje writes that “before the real city could be seen it had to be imagined, the way rumours and tall tales were a kind of charting.” With vivid language Ondaatje shows us how the city is conjured into being by acts of imagination that flesh out and give form to its physical and cultural terrain. As we navigate the city in restless pursuit of accommodation, commerce and community, we give the city meaning through narrative, through stories that help us chart a course between the concrete, lived city and the city as we understand, fear, remember and dream it. Ondaatje’s words echo urban commentator Jonathan Raban’s observation in *Soft City* that “[t]he city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps, in statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture.” Ondaatje and Raban remind us that the cities we live in are made not merely of brick and mortar, or bureaucracy and money, but are equally the invention of our memories and imaginations. We realize that our cities unfold not only in the building but in the telling of them.

Toronto is a city of stories that accumulate in fragments between the aggressive thrust of its downtown towers and the primordial dream of the city’s ravines. In these fragments are found narratives of unfinished journeys and incomplete arrivals, chronicles of all the violence, poverty, ambition and hope that give shape to this city and the lives laid down in it. Toronto poet Dionne Brand calls these narratives “the biographies of streets,” and adds, “at these crossroads, transient selves flare / in the individual drama, in the faith of translation.” It is here at these interstices that the city’s stories gain their deepest resonance, in the liminal spaces between the pavements and the shadows of the passersby who leave their imprint upon them.

In his story, “The Inner Inner City”, science fiction writer Robert Charles Wilson describes a “paracartographic map” of Toronto in which the visible city is only a mirror of the imagined city, an unchartable labyrinth of hidden avenues laid deep within its core. “There’s a city inside the city,” he writes, “the city at the center of the map.” This course is a pilgrimage into the city within the city. Beginning with the familiar terrain – the ravines, downtown towers, neighbourhoods and inhabitants who give shape to Toronto – it ventures deep into the imagined city, dowsing for meaning in literary representations of Toronto as its inhabitants experience and narrate it. It explores how we arrive and who we become in this city; how we live, love, and make the city home, and how the city changes us even as we alter its contours.

This course is motivated by a conviction that literature, given its unique capacity to confront the most pressing urban concerns -- bigotry, poverty and violence as well as tolerance, asylum, desire and ambition -- is uniquely able to help Torontonians transcend difference in this most culturally diverse of cities. In this respect the course is predicated on a belief Toronto’s literature reflects an entirely new kind of city, a city forged not through shared tradition or a long history but rather out of a commitment to the virtues of diversity, tolerance and cultural understanding.

## Evaluation

Grade Breakdown	Description	Due Date
10 %	Regular <b>attendance and participation</b> will be worth 10% of your course grade. Please note that attendance (taken weekly) will comprise part of your participation grade. Attendance is more than simply being present: it also involves actively <i>attending to</i> the discussions, and contributing to the shared research program around which this course is organized.	ongoing evaluation
10%	you are expected to maintain a <b>regular journal</b> engaging informally with and responding to course readings, themes and discussions. In total you are expected to complete at <b>least six (6) entries of not less than 300 words each</b> . Journal installments (each consisting of at least 3 entries) are due on <b>Wed 22 May</b> and <b>Wed 12 June 2013</b> . The journal component is worth 10% of your course grade.	Journal installments due Wed 22 May 2013 & Wed 12 June 2013
40 %	Short essays (2, worth 20% each)  Two short essay assignments (length: 3 to 4 pages each) will invite you to engage thoughtfully with course themes and materials.	Wed 15 May 2013 Wed 5 June 2013
40 %	Research paper (10 to 12 pages)  The research paper will reflect your scholarly investigation of one of more themes, genres, places, periods, or authors encountered during the course.	Mon 17 June 2013
Total: 100%		
<b>Late penalties:</b> Late submissions will be subject to a penalty of 5% per day.		

## Course Readings

Harris, Amy Lavender, 2010. *Imagining Toronto*. Toronto: Mansfield Press. [This book, a work of literary non-fiction, is available for purchase at the York University Bookstore and is also widely available at Toronto-area bookstores.]

Additional required readings (consisting of literary excerpts and scholarly articles) will be made digitally available via the course's Moodle interface.

Additional materials needed to support your reading and research may be found at the York Library, the Toronto Public Library, in new and used bookstores or on-line. A large electronic catalogue of Toronto literary and critical sources is available at <http://www.imaginingtoronto.com/library>

**Schedule and Readings**

Class	Date	Agenda and Readings	Work Due
1	Mon 6 May	<p><b>Introduction: The Imagined City</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Brand, Dionne, 2005. Excerpt from <i>What We All Long For</i>. Toronto: Knopf, 1-5.</p> <p>Michaels, Anne, 1999. "There is No City That Does Not Dream." From <i>Skin Divers</i>. Toronto: McClelland &amp; Stewart.</p> <p>Harris, Amy Lavender, 2010. Chapter 1 (The Imagined City) from <i>Imagining Toronto</i>. Toronto: Mansfield Press.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Bridge, Gary and Sophie Watson, 2000. City Imaginaries. Chapter 1 in <i>A Companion to the City</i>, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, 7-17. Oxford: Blackwell.</p>	
2	Wed 8 May	<p><b>The City as (Archi)Text</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Di Cicco, Pier Giorgio, 1977. "Six Months of the CN Tower." In <i>The Sad Facts</i>. Vancouver: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 14.</p> <p>MacEwen, Gwendolyn, 1972. "House of the Whale." In <i>Noman</i>. Oberon Press.</p> <p>Ondaatje, Michael, 1987. Excerpt ("The Bridge") from <i>In the Skin of a Lion</i>. Toronto: McClelland &amp; Stewart, 23-49.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>: Chapter 2 (The City as Text), pp: 74-116.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Wirth-Nescher, Hana, 2001. Impartial Maps: Reading and Writing Cities. In <i>Handbook of Urban Studies</i>, ed. Ronan Paddison, 52-66. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.</p> <p>Balshaw, Maria and Liam Kennedy, 2000. Introduction: Urban Space and Representation. In <i>Urban Space and Representation</i>, eds. Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy, 1-21.</p>	

3

Mon 13 May

### The City of Neighbourhoods

Film: *Farewell Oak Street* (1953):  
[http://www.nfb.ca/film/farewell\\_oak\\_street/](http://www.nfb.ca/film/farewell_oak_street/)

Film: *Rose's House* (National Film Board, 1977)

Collective reading / performance: selected scenes from  
*Kim's Convenience* (Ins Choi, playwright. Anansi, 2012.)

#### Required reading:

Garner, Hugh, 1968. Excerpt (Chapters 1 and 5) from  
*Cabbagetown*. Toronto: Ryerson.

Maharaj, Rabindranath, 2010. Excerpt (chapters 2, 3 and  
18) from *The Amazing Absorbing Boy*. Toronto: Knopf,

Dearing, Sarah, 2001. Excerpt ("June 4, 1999") from  
*Courage My Love*. Toronto: Stoddart.

Rakoff, Alvin, 2007. "The Banana Man." From *Baldwin  
Street*. Bunim & Bannigan.

*Imagining Toronto*, Chapter 3 (The City of  
Neighbourhoods), pp: 119-125; 135-143; 149-160

#### Recommended reading:

De Certeau, Michel, 1984. "Walking in the City." From *The  
Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of  
California Press, 91-110.

Micallef, Shawn, 2013. *Regent Park: A Story of Collective  
Impact*. Metcalf Foundation.

#### Recommended viewing:

*Invisible City* (Shine Films / National Film Board, 2010).



4	Wed 15 May	<p><b>Toronto the Wild: Nature and Culture in the Imagined City</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Michaels, Anne, 1996. Excerpt ("The Way Station") from <i>Fugitive Pieces</i>. Toronto: McClelland &amp; Stewart.</p> <p>York, Alyssa, 2010. Excerpt (Chapter 1: The City Book) from <i>Fauna</i>. Random House Canada.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>: Chapter 2 (The City as Text), pp 35-74.</p> <p><b>Recommended Reading:</b></p> <p>Griffiths, Huw, Ingrid Poulter and David Sibley, 2000. Feral Cats in the City. In <i>Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations</i>, ed. Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert. Routledge: 56-70.</p> <p>Korman, Lauren, 2011. Getting Their Hands Dirty: Raccoons, Freegans, and Urban "Trash." In <i>The Journal of Critical Animal Studies</i>, 9(3): 28-.</p> <p>Mays, John Bentley, 1994. Binding and Loosing the Waters. From <i>Emerald City: Toronto Visited</i>. Toronto: Penguin/Viking.</p> <p>Sprin, Anne Whiston, 1998. "Dwelling and Tongue: The Language of Landscape." In <i>The Language of Landscape</i>. Yale University Press, 15-26.</p>	First short essay due
5	Mon 20 May	<b>Victoria Day statutory holiday: no class, no readings</b>	



6	Wed 22 May	<p><b>The Myth of the Multicultural City</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Vassanji, M.G., 1991. Excerpt (Chapters 8 and 9) from <i>No New Land</i>. Toronto: McClelland &amp; Stewart.</p> <p>Birney, Earle Birney, 1969. "Anglosaxon Street." In <i>The Poems of Earle Birney</i>. Toronto: McClelland &amp; Stewart.</p> <p>Bhaggiyadatta, Krisantha Sri, 1981. "Let's Have Some Race Talk." In <i>Domestic Bliss</i>. Toronto: Is Five Press, page 48.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>: Chapter 4 (The Myth of the Multicultural City), pp: 189-212.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>The Canadian Multiculturalism Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. 24.</p> <p>Fish, Stanley, 1997. "Boutique Multiculturalism, or Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech." <i>Critical Inquiry</i>, 23 (2): 378-395.</p> <p>Iyer, Pico, 2000. "The Multiculture" from <i>The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home</i>. New York: Knopf.</p> <p>Potter, Andrew, 22 December 2011. "There's No Such Thing as Canadian Values." <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>.</p> <p>Ley, David, 2007, Multiculturalism: A Canadian Defence. Vancouver Centre of Excellent: Metropolis / Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis Working Paper Series, 07-04.</p> <p>Zizek, Salvo, 2008. "Tolerance as an Ideological Category." <i>Critical Inquiry</i>, 34(4): 660-682.</p>	First journal installment due
---	------------	---	-------------------------------



7	Mon 27 May	<p><b>Going Native: Urban Aboriginal Experience in Toronto</b></p> <p>Film: <i>Tkaronto</i> (2007)</p> <p>Video: <i>I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind</i> (2007)</p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Boyden, Joseph, [2001] 2008. "Painted Tongue." In <i>Born With a Tooth</i>. Cormorant Books, 53-76.</p> <p>Nolan, Yvette, 2009. "Scattering Jake." In <i>TOK: Writing the New City</i>, ed. Helen Walsh. Zephyr Press / Diaspora Dialogues, 169-189.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Newhouse, David R., 2011. "Urban Life: Reflections of a Middle-Class Indian." In <i>Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities</i>, ed. Heather A. Howard and Craig Proulx. Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 23-38.</p>	
8	Wed 29 May	<p><b>Class Fictions I: Dwelling and Poverty</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Bishop-Stall, Shaghnassy, 2004. Excerpt ("December") from <i>Down to This: Squalor and Splendour in a Big-City Shantytown</i>. Toronto: Random House.</p> <p>Capponi, Pat, 2006. Excerpt (Chapter One) from <i>Last Stop Sunnyside</i>. Toronto: Harper Collins Canada.</p> <p>Scrimger, Richard, 1996. Excerpt (pages 1-9; 15-23) from <i>Crosstown</i>. Toronto: Riverbank Press.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>, Chapter 6 (Class Fictions, first two sections), pp: 243-252.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Allen, John, 2001. Introduction from <i>How the Other Half Lives: Representations of Homelessness in American Literature</i>. PhD thesis. Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.</p> <p>Marvasti, Amir B., 2002, "Constructing the Service-worthy Homeless Through Narrative Editing." <i>Journal of Contemporary Ethnography</i>, 31(5): 615-651.</p>	



9	Mon 3 June	<p><b>Class Fictions II: Narratives of Work</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Garner, Hugh, 1968. Excerpts (Chapters 3, 5 and 12) from <i>Cabbagetown</i>. Toronto: Ryerson.</p> <p>Clarke, Austin, 1986. "Canadian Experience" from <i>Nine Men Who Laughed</i>. Toronto: Penguin.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>, Chapter 6 (Class Fictions, final section), pp: 252-268.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Lefebvre, Henri, 1974; trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1991. Excerpt (from chapter 2: Social Space) from <i>The Production of Space</i>. Blackwell, 68-79.</p> <p>Rinehart, James, 1997. Excerpt (chapter 2: "Alienation and its Sources") from <i>The Tyranny of Work</i>. 2nd edition. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 13-24.</p> <p>Christopher, Renny and Carolyn Whitson, 1999. Toward a Theory of Working Class Literature. <i>The NEA Higher Education Journal</i>, Spring 1999, 77-81.</p>	
10	Wed 5 June	<p><b>Desire Lines: Gender and Sexuality in Toronto Literature</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Jones, Daniel, 1985. "Things That I Have Put into my Asshole." From <i>the brave never write poetry</i>. Toronto: Coach House Press.</p> <p>Grube, John, 1997. "Raid" from <i>I'm Supposed to be Crazy and Other Stories</i>. Toronto: Dartington Press.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>, Chapter 5 (Desire Lines), pp: 215-239.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Mort, Frank, 2000. The Sexual Geography of the City. In <i>A Companion to the City</i>, eds. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, 307-315. Oxford: Blackwell.</p> <p>Longhurst, Robyn, 1997. (Dis)embodied Geographies. <i>Progress in Human Geography</i>, 21(4): 486-501.</p>	<b>Second short essay due</b>

11	Mon 10 June	<p><b>City Limits</b></p> <p><b>Required reading:</b></p> <p>Brand, Dionne, 2005. Excerpt (Chapter Five) from <i>What We All Long For</i>. Toronto: Knopf.</p> <p>Young, Phyllis Brett, 1960 [reissued 2007]. Excerpts (Chapters 1 and 4) from <i>The Torontonians</i>. Toronto: Longmans [McGill-Queen's University Press].</p> <p>Maharaj, Rabindranath, 1997. Excerpt (chapter 2) from <i>Homer in Flight</i>. Fredericton, N.B.: Goose Lane.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>, Chapter 7 ("City Limits"), pp: 271-291.</p> <p><b>Recommended reading:</b></p> <p>Hulchanski, David, 2010. The Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization Among Toronto's Neighbourhoods, 1970-2005. Toronto: University of Toronto Cities Centre. Accessible electronically here: <a href="http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/curp/tnrn/Three-Cities-Within-Toronto-2010-Final.pdf">http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/curp/tnrn/Three-Cities-Within-Toronto-2010-Final.pdf</a></p> <p>Forsyth, Ann, 2010. Defining Suburbs. <i>Journal of Planning Literature</i>, 27(3) 270-281.</p> <p>Milton, Paul. Rewriting White Flight: Suburbia in Gerald Lynch's <i>Troutstream</i> and Joan Barfoot's <i>Dancing in the Dark</i>. In <i>Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities</i>, ed. Justin D. Edwards and Douglas Ivison, 166-182.</p> <p>Qadeer, Mohammad, Sandeep K. Agrawal &amp; Alexander Lovell, 2010. Evolution of Ethnic Enclaves in the Toronto Metropolitan Area, 2001–2006. <i>International Migration &amp; Integration</i>, vol 11: 315–339.</p>	
12	Wed 12 June	<p><b>Finale: The City Becoming</b></p> <p>Lee, Dennis, [1968] 1972. Excerpt ("Civil Elegies") from <i>Civil Elegies</i>. Toronto: Anansi.</p> <p>Jonas, George, 1973. "City Elegy," from <i>Cities</i>. Toronto: Anansi.</p> <p>MacEwen, Gwendolyn, 1987. "Sunlight at Sherbourne and Bloor." From <i>Afterworlds</i>. Toronto: McClelland &amp; Stewart.</p> <p><i>Imagining Toronto</i>, Chapter 8 ("Imagining Toronto") pp: 295-302.</p>	<b>Second journal installment due</b>
	Mon 17 June		<b>Term essay due</b>