

**Carleton University
Fall 2021
Department of English**

ENGL 3601A: Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Poetry

Prerequisite(s): Third-year standing or permission of the Department
Lecture 3 hours / week

Location: Online

Format: Online Blended Section (meetings on Wednesdays, 10-11am)

Instructor: Professor Jody Mason

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1-3 pm (zoom, by appt.)

I. Course Description

This section of Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Poetry is entitled “Mining Language for What ‘We Have Not Seen, Have Not Heard’: The Poetry and Critical Thought of Dionne Brand.” Born in 1953 in Guayaguayare, Trinidad and Tobago, Brand came to Toronto in 1970. Her poetry career spans more than four decades: her first collection, *Fore Day Morning*, was published by Khoisan Artist Books—a small-press publisher dedicated to producing “Third World Literature” for use in Canadian schools—in 1978. Brand has worked in many genres—documentary film, oral history, the short story, the novel, the critical essay—but, arguably, her most sustained commitment has been to poetry. Author of eleven poetry collections; winner of Governor General’s Literary Award (for the 1997 collection *Land to Light On*), the Griffin Poetry Prize (in 2011, for *Ossuaries*), and the international Windham-Campbell Prize (2021); a former Poet Laureate of Toronto; and former poetry editor at McClelland & Stewart (from 2014 to 2021), Brand’s influence on poetry in Canada has been enormous. She is equally recognized as a major poet of the Americas who is in particular dialogue with poets of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora and the Black diaspora more generally.

Together, we’ll be reading whole collections by Brand in order to track the thematic and formal concerns that animate her poetry. These range widely, from the early Marxist critique of *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984) to the lesbian poetics of *No Language Is Neutral* (1990) to her later poetic sequences, which explore police violence against black men, environmental destruction, the relation of borders to racialization, and the role of the poet in apocalyptic times, among other themes. Alongside this reading, we’ll be exploring Brand’s critical essays, her documentary film work, and her labour as activist, while also considering some aspects of her writing career, including the publishers she’s worked with; her

engagement with the work of other diasporic Afro-Caribbean poets; and her influence on contemporary poetry as an editor and anthologist.

This is a blended course. Weekly modules will be published every Monday morning by 9 am. Each weekly module comprises one lecture capsule and discussion prompts. NB: There are no discussion prompts (and thus no posts due) in weeks 1, 11, and 13. For additional assignments through the term, please see below. Weekly reading / viewing, modules, and discussion questions (if applicable) must be completed each Wednesday before our meeting at 10:00 am ET. Our weekly meeting will take place on zoom between 10-11 am ET.

II. Learning Outcomes

This third-year course prepares students to: read poetry (its form, its language, its rhythms, its contexts); analyze the complex contexts and politics of the oeuvre of a single poet in order to understand how it relates to broader artistic and political questions (twentieth- and twenty-first-century Afro-Caribbean poetry; black diasporic art; lesbian and queer poetics; the intersections of class, race, and sexuality); use both oral and written forms to formulate arguments about poetic texts; employ secondary research skills in the construction of a literary essay.

III. Texts

All course texts listed below can be purchased at Haven Books (43 Seneca St., K1S 4X2, 613.730.9888). This is a student-run bookstore and it's worth supporting! Walk east on Sunnyside from campus until you reach Seneca (about a ten-minute walk). You may also order online and have the books shipped to you anywhere in Canada or the United States: www.havenbooks.ca. You may purchase used copies of the texts below, but keep in mind that if the ISBN number is different, the pagination may be different (this can be confusing!).

All other readings in the syllabus are available through Ares (accessible from the Bright Space course page). To make it easier to identify these readings in the syllabus, they appear in red font.

Brand, Dionne. *No Language is Neutral*. 1990 (McClelland & Stewart, 1998, ISBN 9780771016462)

———. *thirsty*. (McClelland & Stewart, 2002, ISBN 9780771016448)

———. *Ossuaries*. (McClelland & Stewart, 2010, ISBN 9780771017346)

———. *The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos* (McClelland & Stewart, 2019, ISBN 9780771001543)

IV. Course Calendar (some adjustments will be made before the start of term)

Week One (week of Sept. 8th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, [“On Narrative, Reckoning, and the Calculus of Living and Dying”](#) (*Toronto Star*, Sat. July 4th, 2020)

Module: Course Introduction

Discussion: Wed., Sept. 8th (10-11 am)

Due: n/a

Week Two (week of Sept. 13th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *Winter Epigrams & Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defence of Claudia* (“Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defence of Claudia”); Pauline Butling et al., *Poets Talk* (“Dionne Brand on Struggle and Community, Possibility and Poetry”)

Discussion: Wed., Sept. 15th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 1 (on or before Wed., Sept. 15th, 10 am)

Week Three (week of Sept. 20th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *No Language is Neutral* (“No Language Is Neutral”); Derek Walcott, “Midsummer”

Discussion: Wed., Sept. 22nd (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 2 (on or before Wed., Sept. 22nd, 10 am)

Week Four (week of Sept. 27th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *No Language Is Neutral* (“Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater”); Brand, [“An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading”](#) (2019 Kreisel Lecture, listen to part one: 17:40-27:36)

Discussion: Wed., Sept. 29th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 3 (on or before Wed., Sept. 29th, 10 am)

Week Five (week of Oct. 4th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *No Language Is Neutral* (“Hard Against the Soul,” I-X); Brand, *Bread Out of Stone* (“This Body for Itself”)

Discussion: Wed., Oct. 6th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 4 (on or before Wed., Oct. 6th, 10 am)

Week Six (week of Oct. 11th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand (dir.), Signe Johansson and Ginny Stikeman (prod.), *Listening for Something: Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation*

Discussion: Wed., Oct. 13th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 5 (on or before Wed., Oct. 13th, 10 am)

Week Seven (week of Oct. 18th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *thirsty* (I-XIV); Brand, (from) *A Map to the Door of No Return*

Discussion: Wed., Oct. 20th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 6 (on or before Wed. Oct. 20th, 10 am)

Oct. 25th-29th: Fall Reading Break (No Classes)

Week Eight (week of Nov. 1st)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *thirsty* (XV-XXXIII); Leslie Sanders, *Fierce Departures: The Poetry of Dionne Brand* (“Introduction”)

Discussion: Wed., Nov. 3rd (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 7 (on or before Wed., Nov. 3rd, 10 am)

Week Nine (week of Nov. 8th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *Ossuaries* (“ossuary I”-“ossuary X”)

Discussion: Wed., Nov. 10th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 8 (on or before Wed., Nov. 10th, 10 am)

Week Ten (week of Nov. 15th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *Ossuaries* (“ossuary XI”-“ossuary xv”); Kaie Kellough, “alterity”

Discussion: Wed., Nov. 17th (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 9 (on or before Wed., Nov. 17th, 10 am)

Week Eleven (week of Nov. 22nd)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *The Blue Clerk* (“verso 1”-“verso 15.2”)

Discussion: Wed., Nov. 24th (10-11 am)

Due: Research Essay Proposal (on or before Wed., Nov. 24th, 10 am)

Week Twelve (week of Nov. 29th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, *The Blue Clerk* (“verso 16”-“verso 33.1”)

Discussion: Wed., Dec. 1st (10-11 am)

Due: Discussion Question 10 (on or before Wed., Dec. 1st, 10 am)

Week Thirteen (week of Dec. 6th)

Reading / Viewing / Listening: Brand, [“An Autobiography of the Autobiography of Reading”](#) (2019 Kreisel Lecture, listen to parts two and three: 27:36-end)

Discussion: Wed., Dec. 8th (10-11 am)

Due: Research Essay (on or before Wed., Dec. 8th, 11:59 pm)

V. Evaluation

Note that all term work must be completed in order to pass the course.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Note that fuller instructions for each assignment are available on Bright Space. The syllabus includes deadlines for each assignment.

Weekly Discussion Posts (5% x 10=50%)

Interpreting Poetry (15%)

Research Essay + Proposal (30% + 5%)

Weekly Discussion Posts (5% x 10=50%)

Due: each Wednesday before 10 am (except Sept. 8th, Nov. 24th, Dec. 8th)

With each weekly module, I will publish discussion prompts. Before we meet each Wednesday at 10 am, you must submit a response to one or more of these prompts. Full instructions and a marking rubric for these posts can be found on Bright Space. Please note that there are no posts for weeks 1, 11, 13. We will use these prompts as the basis for our discussions; please be prepared to talk about your discussion post in our weekly meeting. After each weekly meeting (and before the next week begins), I will evaluate your post and assign a grade. This will ensure continuous feedback throughout the course.

Interpreting Poetry (15%)

Due: sign up for your week in week one; all assignments due Wednesday of the week in question before 10 am

In week one, each of you will choose a poem and a date for this assignment. You may choose to do this assignment in pairs, in which case you agree to be evaluated as a pair. You are asked to perform the chosen poem and to interpret it. Your assignment can be submitted in any form you prefer (video, slide show, podcast, etc.—be creative!). Full instructions for this assignment can be found on Bright Space. This assignment is designed to help you prepare for oral presentations and seminar facilitations in your fourth-year courses.

Research Essay (+ Proposal) (30% + 5%)

Due: Proposal due Nov. 24th before 10 am; Essay due Dec. 8th on or before 11:59 pm

This essay must be 2000 words (roughly eight pages) in MLA style. This is a research essay written in response to a question chosen from a selection I will provide, though you're welcome to develop your own topic in consultation with me. You will find full instructions for both the proposal and the essay on Bright Space.

Email and Office Hours: I encourage you to use my office hours for questions relating to lectures, readings, and assignments. I have two office hours for this course—please see the header on this document. **You must make an appointment on Bright Space in order to meet with me during office hours.** You may also use email for questions requiring brief responses.

Assignments and Late Policy: Assignments must be submitted to Bright Space the day they are due (by 11:59 pm). *Please submit your assignments as Word documents.* Assignments

correct use of MLA style, spelling and grammar. The following percentage equivalents will be used when calculating your final grade for this class:

A+=90; A/A+=88; A=85;A-/A=83; A-=80

B+/A-=79; B+=77; B/B+=75; B=73; B-/B=72; B-=70

C+/B-=69; C+=67; C/C+=65; C=63; C-/C=62; C-=60

D+/C-=59; D+=57; D/D+=55; D=53; D-/D=52; D-=50

F=0-49 (a numerical grade will be assigned for any paper receiving an F)

VII. Plagiarism

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” According to the Department examples of plagiarism include the following:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

VIII. Special Information Regarding Fall 2021 Pandemic Measures

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures and all mandatory public health requirements (e.g. wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory and cough etiquette) and [mandatory self-screening](#) prior to coming to campus daily.

If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately, self-isolate, and complete the mandatory [symptom reporting tool](#). For purposes of contact tracing, attendance will be recorded in all classes and labs. Participants can check in using posted QR codes through the cuScreen platform where provided. Students

who do not have a smartphone will be required to complete a paper process as indicated on the [COVID-19 website](#).

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow guidelines regarding safe movement and seating on campus (e.g. directional arrows, designated entrances and exits, designated seats that maintain physical distancing). In order to avoid congestion, allow all previous occupants to fully vacate a classroom before entering. No food or drinks are permitted in any classrooms or labs.

For the most recent information about Carleton's COVID-19 response and required measures, please see the [University's COVID-19 webpage](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca

Please note that failure to comply with University policies and mandatory public health requirements, and endangering the safety of others are considered misconduct under the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#). Failure to comply with Carleton's COVID-19 procedures may lead to supplementary action involving Campus Safety and/or Student Affairs.

IX. Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the [Pregnancy Accommodation Form](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>