



English 659 Readings in Postcolonial Literature and Theory: Race, Indigeneity, and the Postcolonial Australian Novel

Fall 2025

Professor Jason Rudy

The 21st century has seen an extraordinary flourishing of creative fiction from Australia, with particular energy among its Indigenous writers. This seminar will read some of the greatest contemporary Australian novels within the frame of the continent's history of invasion and colonialism. Readings will center around Indigenous-authored novels such as Alexis Wright's *Praiseworthy* (2023), Tony Birch's *Blood* (2011), Melissa Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* (2018), and Kim Scott's *Taboo* (2017), with other novels that challenge Australia's self-identification as a European colony: work by Thea Astley, Andrew McGahan, and Charlotte Wood. Secondary readings in postcolonial theory will accompany the fiction.

Week 1 (Sept 4): Introductory

We will introduce ourselves and begin a conversation about Indigenous Studies and the contested history of British invasion and Indigenous dispossession. In advance, please view Baz Luhrman's *Australia* – a film that, in its failures, showcases the difficulties Australia has had in negotiating its own history of racism and racially motivated violence. The reviews by Langton and Greer (two prominent Australian thinkers) will guide our conversation, as will Tuck and Yang's foundational essay, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor."

View: *Australia*, dir. Baz Luhrmann

Marcia Langton, review of *Australia*: "Faraway Downs Fantasy Resonates Close to Home"

Germaine Greer, review of *Australia*: "Once Upon a Time, in a Land Far, Far Away"

Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor"

Week 2 (Sept 11): Massacre, Trauma

Kim Scott's novel *Taboo* is about truth-telling: acknowledging the horrific violence of the past and finding ways, as a community, to navigate those truths in the present.

Kim Scott, *Taboo* (2017)

Vanessa Whittington, "Memorialization, Reconciliation, and Truth-Telling"

Week 3 (Sept 18): Speculative Fiction

A brilliant work of speculative fiction, Claire G. Coleman's *Terra Nullius* assesses the history of British invasion by imagining a future with frightening echoes of the past.

Claire G. Coleman, *Terra Nullius* (2017)

Miasol Eguibar-Holgado, "Indigenous Diasporas in Speculative Fiction"

A: Michael Cook, "Invasion: Kangaroo" (2018)

Week 4 (Sept 25): Theoretical Framings

This week we'll discuss a series of essays designed to offer theoretical frameworks for the semester. We'll focus especially on anticolonial strategies of resistance in the literary world, and specifically how genre may be used to resist the work of colonization. We will also discuss Warwick Thornton's film *Sweet Country*.

Franz Fanon, from *The Wretched of the Earth*

Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept"

Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly, from *Songlines: The Power and Promise*

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects"

Tyson Yunkaporta, from *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*

View *Sweet Country*, dir. Warwick Thornton (2018)

A: Karla Dickens, "To See or Not to See" (2022)

Week 5 (Oct 2): Violent Histories

This week we'll venture back to the twentieth century to read one of the most important novelists from that period in Australia. Astley's *A Kindness Cup* is historical fiction, looking back to the nineteenth century to envision the aftermaths of a massacre within a community in Queensland. The novel was groundbreaking in its day, and remains a powerful indictment of colonial culture.

Thea Astley, *A Kindness Cup* (1974)

Essay #1 due Oct 5th



Week 6 (Oct 9): Childhood

Blisteringly real in both content and style, Tony Birch's first novel challenges its readers to see distinctly the ways colonial structures continue to shape Indigenous Australian lives.

Tony Birch, *Blood* (2011)

Aníbal Quijano, from *Foundational Essays on the Coloniality of Power*

A: Gordon Hookey, "Defy" (2010)

Week 7 (Oct 16): Feminist Dystopias

Set in a remote prison in the outback, Charlotte Wood's haunting novel examines structures of power in postcolonial Australia. While not explicitly about either colonialism or Indigenous politics, we will use Toni Morrison's essay "Black Matters" to consider more expansive readings of Wood's dystopian narrative.

Charlotte Wood, *The Natural Way of Things* (2015)

Toni Morrison, "Black Matters"

A: Bronwyn Bancroft, "My Woman, My Country" (1995)

Week 8 (Oct 23): Dispossession

Set in modern-day Queensland, Melissa Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* follows an Indigenous family as they confront a developer looking to build on Indigenous land. The novel captures a good deal of what's at stake in the complicated politics around Australian land rights.

Melissa Lucashenko, *Too Much Lip* (2018)

Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "The High Court and the *Yorta-Yorta* Decision"

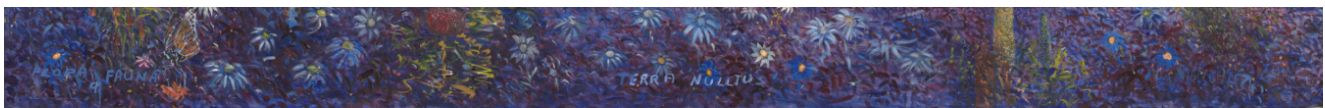
A: Judy Watson, "Our Hair in Your Collections" (1997)

Week 9 (Oct 30): Colonial Gothic

A look at how a modern-day family is haunted by its violent past, Andrew McGahan's novel reflects some of the psychological dislocations of postcolonial Australia.

Andrew McGahan, *The White Earth* (2004)

Essay #2 due Nov 2nd



Week 10 (Nov 6): Aboriginal Realism

Generally understood as the most important contemporary Australian novelist, Alexis Wright's most recent novel will be the culmination of our semester. *Praiseworthy* won nearly every Australian literary prize after its 2023 publication. We will divide it into three roughly even parts to make space for discussing its deep complexity.

Alexis Wright, *Praiseworthy* (2023): "New Gods," "The Censer," and "Moth Opera"
Cornelis Martin Renes, "Alexis Wright's Fiction, Aboriginal Realism, and the Sovereignty of the Indigenous Mind"

A: Gordon Syron, "Terror Nullius" (1997)

Week 11 (Nov 13): The Stars We Do Not See

The National Gallery of Art will host an exhibition of [Indigenous Australian art](#) drawn from the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. We will try to find a time to visit together as a class sometime after the October 18 opening. Everyone must go at some point!

Also: this November 13-16, Georgetown University will host the annual North American Victorian Studies Association conference ([link here](#)). The theme is "Aftermaths," which works beautifully with our seminar; there will be several panels discussing the lingering effects – or aftermaths – of British colonialism in the modern world. *Attendance is not mandatory*.

Week 12 (Nov 20): Climate

We will read the middle segment of *Praiseworthy*. Among other things, we will consider Wright's work as an environmental novelist.

Alexis Wright, *Praiseworthy* (2023): "Goddess of Scales," "Sitting in the Bones"
Dipesh Chakrabarty, from *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*

Week 13 (Dec 4): Conclusion

Alexis Wright, *Praiseworthy* (2023): concluded

Week 14 (Dec 11): Conference presentations

For our final class, students will each present a 15-minute conference paper drawn from one of the three essays written this semester. You are invited to share a revised version of your first or second essay, or to use the presentation as an opportunity for advance feedback on Essay #3. The goal is for everyone to gain some experience with conference presentations, and also to provide an opportunity for everyone to learn about each other's work. Each paper will be followed by a Q&A. These presentations will not be graded, but participation is mandatory.

Essay #3 due Dec 14

Course Requirements

Texts

Thea Astley, *A Kindness Cup* (Text Classics: 978-1925626582)
Tony Birch, *Blood* (First Nations Classics: 978-0702265983)
Claire Coleman, *Terra Nullius* (Small Beer Press: 978-1618731517)
Melissa Lucashenko, *Too Much Lip* (HarperVia: 978-0063032545)
Andrew McGahan, *The White Earth* (Soho Press: 978-1569474419)
Kim Scott, *Taboo* (Small Beer Press: 978-1618731692)
Charlotte Wood, *The Natural Way of Things* (Riverhead Books: 979-8217047383)
Alexis Wright, *Praiseworthy* (New Directions 978-0811238014)

Grading

Professionalism	125 points (25%)
Essays (75, 75, 100)	250 points (50%)
Artwork Presentation	25 points (5%)
Reading Journals	100 points (20%)

Final letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following table, rounding applied:

A	469-500 points	B-	397-416 points	D+	334-348 points
A-	449-468 points	C+	384-396 points	D	319-333 points
B+	434-448 points	C	366-383 points	D-	299-318 points
B	417-433 points	C-	349-368 points	F	0-298 points

Writing Assignments

You will write three essays for this class, each roughly 2,000 words (or 6 pages) in length. Each essay should focus on one of the novels from the syllabus, using close attention to the text to develop an argument of your own. I will always be happy to discuss your work with you in advance, and I will read drafts of your essays if you bring them to my office hours. After your first essay I will meet individually with each of you to talk about your work.

Submitting Your Work

Written work is to be submitted via Canvas. On the assignment page, look for the place to upload your Word doc or docx file. Papers are due by 11:59pm on the due date. Late papers will be downgraded. *Extensions must be requested in advance of the deadline.*

Presentation

You will each sign up for a five-minute presentation on a work of art. The aim of the presentation will be to introduce the work of art to the class: who created it, how we might understand the composition, and how we might begin to understand its meanings. You may use notes for your presentation, but you should not read from a script. Practice your presentation to make sure you stay within the five-minute window.

- Wikipedia cannot be the primary source for your knowledge and thoughts. Instead, explore other sources (a minimum of three in all), even if the painting and/or artist is not well known. There

may not be an article on your specific artist, but you may instead find an essay on Indigenous artists more generally. If you need help with this research, please come ask for it!

- **Important:** on the day of your presentation, you will submit on Canvas (on the assignment page for the Artwork Presentation) a bibliography of your sources. This bibliography must include at least one scholarly source found through a peer-reviewed journal. Please remember to upload your bibliography by the end of the day on which you give your presentation.
- See Canvas assignment page for a detailed rubric and construct your presentation accordingly.

Reading Journals

Before most classes you will post to our online Reading Journal. These short entries, no more than 500 words, will usually entail pointing to a specific moment from the reading that you found compelling, and offering an interpretation of that moment. Some entries will ask you to share contextual material relevant to the texts we're reading. The Reading Journal will be a collaborative space, where you'll see your classmates' posts and have the option of responding to them. Consider the Reading Journal an opportunity to engage with classmates in advance of our in-class conversations. The links to all Reading Journal assignments will be available on the homepage of our course Canvas site.

Excused Absences

Students will on *rare* occasion miss class for good reasons. It is your responsibility to inform me of any intended excused absences, including religious observations, in advance of those absences. *In graduate coursework, the expectation is that all students will attend all classes.*

Special needs

If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please talk to me immediately. If you have a disability and have not yet registered it with Disability Support Services in the Shoemaker Building (4-7682 or 5-7683 TTY/TDD), you should do so immediately.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this class, students will be able to:

- understand the history and present-day realities of colonial and postcolonial Australia;
- think critically about the intersection of Indigenous and colonial methodologies;
- distinguish the range of cultural and political uses of various genres within fiction-writing;
- and communicate these ideas both orally and in writing.

Etiquette and Expectations

- Readings for each class must be brought with you.
- Laptop computers are to be used minimally in class, and not for notetaking. You may refer to your screens for course PDFs, but not for browsing the internet or transcribing class conversation. When we are not discussing the course PDFs, laptop computers must be closed; please come speak with me if you have a special need that requires use of technology in the classroom.
- While digital readers (such as Kindles) are permitted, I encourage you instead to use physical books whenever possible. I especially encourage purchasing Wright's *Praiseworthy* given that we will spend three full seminars discussing it. If you are unable to purchase the novels

for this class, it is generally possible to find a copy at McKeldin Library or, if necessary, to recall a copy through Interlibrary Loan (this will require advance planning). Please come speak to me if you are having difficulty locating any of the course materials.

- Cellphones must be turned off for class; smart watches must be silenced and placed out of sight. Text messaging and any other use of electronic devices distracts both you and the others in the room.
- You are expected to be *active listeners* and engaged participants in this class. Show your engagement with the course material by *contributing regularly to the conversation, looking interested, taking notes, and asking questions*. Even if you are not completely interested in the material, it is never acceptable to show your disinterest.
- Please use our Canvas messaging system – in place of email – to contact me. I will always respond to messages sent via Canvas. Messages sent via email may get lost in the flood of other emails.

Professionalism

Expectations are high that you will conduct yourselves professionally in all aspects of this course, taking care of responsibilities independently and contributing meaningfully to the overall project of the class. This includes but is not limited to: turning in work on time; arriving to class punctually; participating in class discussion in a way that demonstrates engagement with the materials and respect for everyone in the classroom; bringing the required books to class discussion; taking notes; practicing active listening while others are speaking (paying attention and generally looking interested); limiting disruptions to class by using the restroom in advance, or at a minimum only when necessary; keeping electronic communications with Professor Rudy professional in their composition and tone, not informal like a text to a friend; and keeping mobile phones silenced and all digital interfaces (phones, computers, smart watches) out of sight for the duration of class, except when permitted. For more details, please see the rubric on the Canvas assignment page under Professionalism.

If you cannot make a class discussion, or if you're having trouble of any sort with an assignment deadline, please notify Professor Rudy *in advance* so that alternate plans may be made. Please also contact Professor Rudy if any of the above items are a cause for concern: for example, if you have a registered disability that requires the use of technology in the classroom.

Health

You are encouraged to stay home from class if you are feeling under the weather. In such cases, I will happily work with you to make up anything you've missed. If you notify me in advance, I can record our class discussion and share it with you, or possibly livestream the course. We have lots of options to work with, and I'm willing to be flexible if it means keeping our classroom safer for everyone.

Diversity and Inclusion

UMD English considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be critical to its educational mission and expects every member of the community to contribute to an inclusive and respectful culture in the classroom, work environment, and at campus events. It is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and learning needs will be well served by this course and that the diversity students bring to class will be viewed as a resource and strength. Dimensions of diversity include intersections of sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, intellectual and physical ability, primary language, faith and non-faith perspectives, income, political affiliation, marital or family status, education, and any other legally protected class. I endeavor to present materials and activities that foster a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual

respect, and non-discrimination. Please let me know of ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or other students or student groups.

If you experience issues related to diversity and inclusion in your English courses or as part of the English department community—or if you have suggestions for improving diversity, inclusion, equity, and access in the department—please contact our Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee at: englishidea@umd.edu.

Plagiarism

I will adhere strictly to University policy with respect to plagiarism. Students who plagiarize will be referred directly to the University's Honor Council. Follow MLA guidelines for citation when quoting passages and when paraphrasing ideas. Do not hesitate to speak with me if you have any questions regarding this matter. Please also keep in mind:

- Any source consulted must be included in a “works consulted” list at the end of your written work. This includes Wikipedia or any other online site, even if you have not quoted it directly.
- Paraphrased ideas must be cited, even if you have not quoted directly from the source.
- Most of what can be found easily online will not qualify as a reputable source for an academic essay. If you have questions about the validity of a source, please ask me directly.
- **Use of artificial intelligence to assist you with your coursework, such as ChatGPT, will be considered a violation of the academic integrity.**

The University Code of Academic Integrity may be found here:

<https://policies.umd.edu/academic-affairs/university-of-maryland-code-of-academic-integrity>

Course Related Policies

I will adhere to University of Maryland policies with regard to excused absences, registered disabilities, incidents of plagiarism and academic dishonesty, and student conduct. Please refer to this website for more detailed information (these are policies through Undergraduate Studies, but they apply to our graduate classroom as well): <https://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>

Really, please do click over and review the university's guidelines. Our course policies will rigorously follow those outlined on the linked page.

Caveat Participes

This course's readings and discussion will deal regularly with graphic material regarding race, colonialism, gender, sexuality, and various forms of violence. If you have particular concerns with any of these topics, please let Professor Rudy know in advance.

NB: The images placed throughout the syllabus are all work by the artist Gordon Syron.

Page 1: “An Aboriginal Perspective from the Lillipilli Tree” (National Museum of Australia)

Page 2: “Redcoats” (Artist's collection)

Page 3: “Where the Wildflowers Once Grew” (National Maritime Museum, Australia)