

**ENGLISH 581**  
**Studies in Commonwealth and**  
**Postcolonial Literatures**

Introduction to Caribbean Literature  
Traces of the Creole Garden: the Wild, the  
Tangled, and the Tended

Spring Semester 2009  
R 2:30-5:20 PM — ECSB 128  
CRN 23081

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In addition to surveying some of the major cultural, historical and intellectual trends associated with Caribbean literature(s) in the twentieth century, a central preoccupation of this seminar will be to examine the relation between Caribbean literary nationalism and apparently countervailing efforts to textually and conceptually frame the West Indies as a diverse whole, or in Edouard Glissant's phrase, a "tout-monde." We shall consider the resources available to Caribbean writers for expressing a sense of Caribbeanness or *Antillanité*, as well as the significance of gestures of political or cultural allegiance to a specific society or set of cultural traditions. We shall look closely at how creolization has influenced literary conceptions of identity and where the creolizing impetus has tended to obscure other cultural formations and marginal identities. We shall explore different responses to neocolonial impositions, whether explicitly political (as in the departmentalization of the francophone Caribbean) or supernational, such as the tourist industry, the drug trade, the global response to the AIDS epidemic, the extensive destruction of natural habitats

by development, and the cultural homogenization and economic stratification imposed by multinational capitalism. We shall also try to understand the dialogue between Caribbean literary production and textual criticism and trends beyond the archipelago itself: can there be a relation of intellectual mutuality in the face of the obvious disparities of power that have defined these relationships in the past?

Among the questions we shall pose in addressing these texts: What is the emerging relation between different historical and linguistic traditions in the Caribbean? How have Caribbean intellectuals and artists living in the traditional metropolitan centers of Europe and North America framed their relation to the Caribbean archipelago and specific Caribbean nations? How does the complicated, often ambivalent process of cultural hybridization in the postcolonial Caribbean facilitate and/or subvert the globalizing forces of postmodernity? How have Caribbean revolutionary and anti-colonial activity, as well as historical independence movements in different contexts, served to inspire Caribbean intellectuals and to influence their texts? How have the legacies of the diverse tactical responses to colonialism variously affected (and effected) the corresponding Caribbean literary cultures and movements? What authorizing claims to memory signify politically in the aftermath of independence and in the shadow of neocolonialism?

Students in the seminar will gain an advanced introduction to the field of twentieth century Caribbean literature through reading and discussing novels, poetry, essays, stories and seeing films by many of the major literary figures in the field, and by reading theoretical and historical texts that offer specific cultural

grounding, refutation, or problematization of such theoretical approaches. Students will gain an understanding of the field's critical and theoretical impulses in historical terms, and synchronically in terms of vital intellectual debates that extend and complicate the discourses associated with cultural studies. Students' familiarity with course materials will be evaluated through oral presentations and written essays.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953; 314 pp.)

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; 103 pp.)

Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987; 208 pp.)

Earl Lovelace, *Salt* (1996; 272 pp.)

Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996; 270 pp.)

Much of the course content will be available as part of the course reader. These materials *must be printed out and brought to the seminar* on the due dates. Printing costs for these materials may be considered part of your book costs for the course.

### COURSE GRADES

Final course grades will be determined as follows (as a percent of the final grade):

1) CLASS PREPARATION,  
PARTICIPATION: 20%

2) TWO ORAL PRESENTATIONS, ONE  
OF WHICH TO BE WRITTEN UP (6-8  
pp.): 30%

3) FINAL RESEARCH ESSAY (6000  
words [apx. 20-25 pp]): 50%

Grades will be assigned according to the following English Department guidelines:

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	76-79
B	68-75

Assessment of student research essays: Most of the same basic elements of excellence in writing apply to essays at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as George Orwell might have affirmed. I have described how I assess these writing elements of student essays in "Assessment Criteria for Student Research Essays" at [www.practa.com](http://www.practa.com) » Assignments, also located at <http://tinyurl.com/2nsj42>. While this document is intended primarily for an undergraduate audience, it may be worth your time to review it, because I grade graduate student essays with many of the same concerns in mind. In addition, Stephen Ross, the Department's graduate director, has provided a set of grading scales and corresponding rationales that I advise you to review. I've posted his scales, in slightly edited form, in a separate document at [www.practa.com](http://www.practa.com) » Assignments, or at <http://tinyurl.com/22wskq>.

Note: Students will be given adequate notification should it become necessary to alter the schedule of assignments or reduce the number of assigned readings.

Students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. If you require such accommodation, please register at the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability and inform me of your needs at the outset of the semester.

### ORAL PRESENTATION

During the course of the semester, you will be asked to present two ten-minute oral presentations. These presentations may focus on a course-related topic you wish to

explore further and to write up as your research essay. These presentations will begin early in the semester, so by necessity, earlier presentations will be more open-ended than presentations delivered later in the semester. These presentations may (but need not necessarily) be used as rough drafts of your final research essay.

The oral presentation may include multimedia elements (such as PowerPoint slides or other demonstrations). It is intended to allow you to discuss at least one primary text (of whatever genre) and the theoretical, historical, and/or critical perspectives that might warrant further research for an extended consideration of the text. You may discuss one or more of the texts we are using for the course (please do so no earlier than one class *after* we have finished reading it), or a text we are not using for the course; in the latter case, you will want to spend a few minutes summarizing any text that other seminar members may not have read. Your task is to connect the text you discuss to the topic of the course, and to argue for a certain view of the text in the context of Caribbean literature(s) more generally.

During your presentation, in addition to discussing your primary text(s), you will probably want to mention the secondary sources or critical-theoretical apparatus you are using to make your claims. After one of your presentations, you will have one week to submit a six- to eight-page write-up of your presentation that summarizes your discussion, connects it to the topic of the course, presents and annotates useful secondary sources, and responds to any relevant feedback you may have received during the oral presentation. This write-up may take the form of a rough draft of your final research essay, or it may present a discrete analysis; it will be graded, as will be

your final research essay, on the basis of your ability to explore, think through, and develop a thesis on a question of relevance to the course.

Presentations delivered earlier in the semester will be understood, once again, as necessarily more open to revision and rethinking than later ones, but none of the presentations should foreclose the possibility that you will develop new ideas in the methodology, argument, or conclusions of your final research essay. Consider your oral presentation, then, as simply a rough draft of, or project proposal for, your final research essay. Grades for the oral presentations and the write-up will be separated, but in each case, your work will be evaluated on the basis of its creativity, research initiative, and the overall persuasiveness of your argument.

#### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Because this seminar meets weekly, I expect that you will attend all of the class meetings, except in extraordinary circumstances. More than two unwarranted absences shall result in a grade reduction of 1/3 letter grade per absence.

#### **COMPUTER USE POLICY**

Please refrain from using computers during class meetings, except for specifically designated assignments. Students with documented disabilities who require a computer for note-taking are excluded from this policy if they present proper documentation.

#### **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy, located at:

<http://tinyurl.com/35rptl>. Please alert me if you have any questions about this policy and its application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/37x2mc>. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

### **ESSAY FORMAT**

All written work must be submitted to me in *both* electronic and printed form. Research essay topics need to be approved by me. Citations in your essays should conform to the MLA in-text citation format. The electronic version of your essay should be sent to me as an email attachment in MS Word or RTF format only; *please include your last name in the file name you choose*. Students are responsible for retaining a copy of all submitted materials; failure to do so will result in denied credit should the submitted materials be lost.

### **LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Requests for assignment extensions must be negotiated at least two weeks *in advance* of the due date, otherwise submitted work will be considered late and the grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter grade per day. Students are required to complete all assigned course work in order to receive a passing grade for the course.

## SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Students are expected to have read the material assigned before they come to class, and to arrive prepared to discuss all the material for the day.

### Thursday, January 8

Course introduction  
Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, selections  
Derek Walcott (b. Saint Lucia), "Goats and Monkeys" and "The Sea is History"  
Selected poems from the 1920s and '30s

### Thursday, January 15: Négritude

Aimé Césaire (b. Martinique), *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939)  
Nick Nesbitt, Chapters 2 and 3, in *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature*, pp. 76-117.  
"1930-1949: Introduction," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Walsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Studies* (1996), pp. 107-127, and selected historical texts.

### Thursday, January 22: Emancipatory Anti-Colonialism

Frantz Fanon (b. Martinique), "The Fact of Blackness" (1952)  
Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating Fanon" (1994)  
J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998), Chapter 3, "Orphic Explanations: Toward a Caribbean Heterocosm," pp. 61-81.  
George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953; 303 pp.), first half of the novel

In class:

Isaac Julien, *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1995) / a film from California Newsreel ; director, Isaac Julien. Call Number: CT2628 F35F7262

### Thursday, January 29

No class meeting today.  
George Lamming (b. Barbados), *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953; 314 pp.), second half of the novel  
"1950-65: Introduction," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Walsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Studies* (1996), pp. 206-221, and selected historical texts.

### Thursday, February 5

Wilson Harris (b. Guyana), *Palace of the Peacock* (1960; 98 pp.)  
Sam Durrant, "Rites of Communion: Wilson Harris's Hosting of History," in *Postcolonialism and the Work of Mourning* (2004), pp. 53-77.

### Thursday, February 12:

Jean Rhys (b. Dominica), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; 103 pp.)  
J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (1998), Chapter 1, "Tropes and Tropicality," pp. 21-42.  
Kamau Brathwaite, "English in the Caribbean" (1979)  
"1966-79: Introduction," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Walsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Studies* (1996), pp. 282-297, and selected historical texts.

### Thursday, February 19

Reading break  
Derek Walcott, "The Schooner Flight" and other selected poetry

### Thursday, February 26: Antillanité and Créolité

Edouard Glissant (b. Martinique), selections from *Caribbean Discourse* (1981)  
Michelle Cliff (b. Jamaica), *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987; 224 pp.), first half of the novel  
Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant (all b. Martinique).

Eloge de la créolité [In Praise of Creoleness] (1989)

Wilson Harris, "Creoleness: The Crossroads of Civilization?," in *Caribbean Creolization* (1998), Balutansky and Sourieau, eds., pp. 23-35.

Ernest Pépin and Raphaël Confiant, "The Stakes of Créolité," in *Caribbean Creolization*, pp. 96-100.

Maryse Condé (b. Guadeloupe), "Créolité without the Creole Language?," in *Caribbean Creolization*, pp. 101-109.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo (b. Cuba), *The Repeating Island* (1995), pp. 33-81.

Thursday, March 5

~~Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), second half of the novel~~

Jamaica Kincaid (b. Antigua), selections from *At the Bottom of the River* (1984) and *My Brother* (1997).

"1980-89: Introduction," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Walsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Studies* (1996), pp. 361-373, and selected historical texts.

Thursday, March 12: Postmodernism

Earl Lovelace (b. Trinidad and Tobago), *Salt* (1997; 260 pp.), first half of the novel

Helen Scott, "Gateway to the Caribbean," in *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization* (2006), pp. 55-82.

~~Paul Gilroy, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" (1993)~~

Silvio Torres-Saillant, "The Cross-Cultural Unity of Caribbean Literature: Toward a Centripetal Vision" in A James Arnold, ed. *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (1997)

In class:

Maryse Condé: dévoile son coeur / Full Duck Productions ; producer, Ann Armstrong Scarborough ; director, Susan Wilcox. 2003 Call Number: PQ3949.2 C65Z4725

Thursday, March 19: Nationalism

Earl Lovelace, *Salt*, second half of the novel

~~Alison Donnell, "Global Villages and Watery Graves: Recrossing the Black Atlantic," in *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), pp. 77-129.~~

"The 1990s: Introduction," in Alison Donnell and Sarah Walsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Studies* (1996), pp. 438-455, and selected contemporary texts.

Thursday, March 26: Hybridity and Sexual Identity

Shani Mootoo (b. Ireland, raised in Trinidad), *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996; 270 pp.), first half of the novel

~~Helen Scott, "Introduction: Caribbean Women Writers and Postcolonial Imperialism," in *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization* (2006), pp. 1-26.~~

Shalini Puri, "Theorizing Hybridity" (2004; chaps. 1 & 2)

Thursday, April 2

Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, second half of the novel

Alison Donnell, "Sexing the Subject: Writing and the Politics of Caribbean Sexual Identity," in *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* (2006), pp. 181-249.