

Caribbean Literature  
Fall 2017

Instructor: Dr. Belinda Edmondson  
Graduate Assistant: Mr. Drew Ciccolo  
Class time: MW 10 – 11:20 am  
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Course Description:

This course introduces students to some of the primary canonical writers and texts of Caribbean literature from the mid-twentieth century to the present. Reading widely from the literature of the Spanish-, French-, and English-speaking Caribbean, we shall investigate the common themes, as well as the dissimilarities, that emerge in the writings from these ethnically and linguistically diverse societies. Students will become familiar with influential Caribbean arts movements and be able to define key words and terms associated with literature of the Caribbean.

Learning Outcomes:

By connecting Caribbean literature in its broadest sense to the historical and political forces that have produced its multi-ethnic societies, this course improves students' ability to understand how literature and other cultural artifacts both reflect and produce social relationships.

As a consequence, students who successfully pass the course will be able to identify and speak knowledgeably about the Caribbean beyond regional stereotypes. They will be able to identify some of the major authors in all three major linguistic territories of the region, identify major historical events and social issues that have shaped and animated Caribbean fiction, and be able to define key words and themes in Caribbean literary criticism.

Basic skills in literary analysis—the construction of an argument, the use of literary devices such as irony, inference, metaphor, and so forth—will be developed and used across a range of media. Finally, students will understand the meaning of Caribbean popular culture in its various forms as forms of art, and not merely as entertainment.

Course Requirements:

- 1) You shall be required to take four examinations. Exams One and Two together will comprise your midterm examination, and will cover Part One of the course. Exams Three and Four together will comprise your final examination, and will cover Parts Two and Three of the course. The exam format will consist of roughly seven questions requiring detailed and concise answers on a specific reading, poem or film. The questions will usually involve comparative analysis of two or more items. Your responses must be in full sentences and grammatically correct; points will be taken off for poor grammar. In the case

- of exceptionally poor grammar, you will receive no points at all.
- 2) Students shall give an oral presentation to the class on some aspect of the course materials, some of which may require outside research. The presentation *must* be written beforehand and uploaded to SafeAssign prior to presentation. (A sign-up sheet will be available the first and second days of class.)
  - 3) From time to time, without notice, pop quizzes will be given on material recently covered. These will not take much longer than ten minutes of class time and will consist of, at most, one or two questions. A grade of A or B+ on each pop quiz will result in 2 extra points added to the student's final grade; a grade of B will result in 1 extra point; a grade of C+ or C will result in no extra points. One point will be **deducted** from the student's final score for a grade of D or F. Students who are absent for a pop quiz will automatically receive an F for it unless they have a documentable excuse for their absence.
  - 4) Proper note-taking is a critical component in writing a good exam; therefore, we will periodically review our notes for the course and discuss ways in which to take better notes. Students will be asked at various points during the class to read out their notes on a preceding lecture. If you are absent for a class, you are still responsible for the notes on that class. Remember: The purpose of note-taking is not merely so that you can recall information, but, more importantly, so that you can recall key points of analysis on that information. Therefore, your notes may record not only my ideas, but also the conflicting opinions within the class on that subject. Typically I reserve the last five minutes of class time for note-taking.
  - 5) Generally I offer a couple of essay-format extra credit options throughout the semester. If you wish to take advantage of the extra credit essay option you must notify me in advance. I post the essay questions on Blackboard; you must upload your essay to Turnitin, the anti-plagiarism detection software.

### Grading Rubric and Policy

I use an alternate grading system so that I have more latitude in issuing grades. Under this system, exams are marked on a scale of 100 points: under 40 is a Fail. 40-49 is a D. 50-59 is a C. 60 – 63 is a C+. 64 - 74 is a B. 75 to 79 is a B+. 80 and over is A. While on your exams and papers I will note whether a paper is an A+ (90 and above), or that your paper is in the B-/C+ territory, the grade that will be recorded is the one that corresponds to the actual percentage grade (for example, a 64 may be a B-, but on your final grade score I will record it as a B, etc.)

Midterm Exam (combined): 35 percent of total grade

Exam Three: 30 percent of total grade

Final Exam: 35 percent of total grade

Participation: Superior rating—3 points to final score. Average rating—no points.

Presentation: Superior rating—3 points to final score. Average rating—no points.

Pop quiz(zes): A or B+ average—2 points added to final score.

Note: You may receive 3 points for a superior presentation OR superior participation, but not for both.

All exams and papers are evaluated in three key areas: content, grammar, and logic. Content is the most important of the three areas (a student may fail an exam or paper for lack of content, for example, even with good grammar and logic) but one cannot attain a grade of C or higher without at least marginally competent grammar and logic.

To attain a grade of A an exam/quiz/essay must attain a superior rating in all three areas. In other words, it must rank as excellent on all three counts, free of grammatical mistakes, with a seamless logical flow from one idea to the next, and with some original interpretation.

B+ is given for an above-average analysis which shows some level of excellence in content and logic with very good or excellent grammar, but has some minor flaws in grammar and logic.

A grade of B is achieved by above average analysis in content with competent grammar and logic.

A grade of C+ is achieved if the analysis is better than average—more than half of what should be there—but with less than competent use of grammar and logic.

A grade of C is achieved if the analysis is middling—roughly half of what should be there—with less than competent use of grammar and logic.

A grade of D represents subpar content—if less than half of the necessary content is present. A grade of D may also represent excessively poor use of grammar and logic, to the point of near-incomprehension.

A grade of F is given if there is no content or almost none. An F is also achieved by extremely poor grammar—to the point of incomprehensibility—and lack of logic. Finally, an F can be given for a late or missed paper or missed exam.

### Electronics Policy

Electronic media is a welcome tool to aid learning in the modern classroom. However, used irresponsibly it can also be detrimental to learning when students lose the ability to focus on lectures or distract other students with it. Use of electronic media is therefore a student privilege, not a right, and may be revoked by the instructor under certain conditions. During class time certain electronic media—laptop computers and tablets, not cell phones—may be used only for the following purposes:

- 1) to read required course texts (E-books or texts posted on Blackboard)
- 2) to type notes on lectures and classroom discussions
- 3) for all in-class exams, provided the student has first downloaded Respondus

Electronic media may NOT be used to browse the internet, answer email, check social media, or for any use that is not directly related to the course. If any student is found to be in violation of the electronics policy—as witnessed by the instructor, the graduate assistant, or as reported by fellow classmates—that student will be banned from using any electronic media for the remainder of the course. If the student continues to use electronic media despite the ban, his or her final grade will be reduced a full letter grade at the conclusion. In extreme cases I reserve the right to ban the student from the classroom altogether. The student will be notified in writing if s/he has lost the privilege of

using electronic media. Cell phones must be turned off during class time or set to “vibrate”.

### Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, for which a student may receive a range of punishments, including failing the course, a permanent record on his or her final transcript, suspension or even expulsion from the University. Please familiarize yourself with the University’s definition of plagiarism by reviewing the Rutgers University Policy on Academic Integrity, here: <http://wp.rutgers.edu/courses/plagiarism>.

Some plagiarism is unintentional. Therefore, for the purposes of this class no secondary sources should be used, either through direct quotation or substantial paraphrase, in any student presentation, exam or essay without prior permission of the instructor. If you have been given permission to use secondary sources in your submitted work, please follow the appropriate methods of attribution.

If I suspect any student of plagiarism I will bring it to his/her attention and report it to the administration. We faculty have a professional obligation to report all instances of plagiarism in our classes. Failure to do so promotes inequity among the student body, given that honest students have not had the advantage of using external sources in preparing their work.

Please read the attached Academic Integrity Policy, and sign and return the attached Rutgers Integrity Pledge.

### Disability Services and Accommodations

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus’s disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>. For more information please contact Kate Torres at (973)353-5375 or in the Office of Disability Services in the Paul Robeson Campus Center, in suite 219 or by contacting [odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu).

### Required Reading

Required Novels: *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys 1966 (Dominica); *Annie John*, Jamaica Kincaid 1979 (Antigua); *Masters of the Dew*, Jacques Roumain 1944 (Haiti).

Required Short Stories and Poetry: “Cloud Cover Caribbean”, Ana Lydia Vega (Puerto Rico); “My Aunt Gold Teeth”, “Titus Hoyte, M.A.”, V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad); “Back to Africa?”, “Cuss-Cuss”,

Louise Bennett (Jamaica); “Ruins of a Great House”, “A Far Cry From Africa”, Derek Walcott (St. Lucia); “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie”, Prologue to *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz (Dominican Republic/US); “my graduation speech”, Tato Laviera (Puerto Rico/US); “They Came in Ships”, Mahadai Das (Guyana); “Elsa’s Version”, Christine Craig (Jamaica).

Required Films: *Sugar Cane Alley* (Director: Euzhan Palcy, Martinique, 1983, based on 1950 novel by Joseph Zobel); *The Last Supper* (Director: Tomás Gutierrez Alea, Screenplay: Gutierrez Alea, Haya and Gonzalez, Cuba, 1976)

Music: “Dan is the Man in the Van” 1965, The Mighty Sparrow (Trinidad)

Films may be livestreamed from Online Reserve, Dana Library. You may buy the textbooks at the University Bookstore. Short stories and poetry will be posted on Blackboard under Course Documents, where you will also find a copy of the course syllabus and a list of class presentations.

### Key Words/Terms

Creole; Kreyol; Indigenism; Afrocubanismo; Négritude; mestizaje/hybridity/metissage; syncretism; diaspora; colonialism; decolonization; independence; emancipation; indentured labor; slavery; Obeah; Vodun; Santeria; Spanglish; communalism/communal identity; individualism; respectability; alienation; immigration; Modernism; mimicry; Back-to-Africa Movement.

### Course Schedule:

9/6: Introduction. Sign up for presentations.

9/11: General discussion on the Caribbean. Finish signing up for presentations

### Part One: Legacies of Colonialism, Slavery and Indentureship

9/13: “Ruins of a Great House”, “They Came in Ships” Key words: slavery, indentureship

9/18: “A Far Cry From Africa”, “Back to Africa?” Key words: diaspora, Back-to-Africa

9/20: *Masters of the Dew* Chs1-5 Key word: Indigenism, Kreyol

9/25: *Masters of the Dew* Chs6-12 Key word: communalism

9/27: *Masters of the Dew* Chs13-14 Key word: Négritude

10/2: Discussion of *The Last Supper* (view online/library before class) Key word: Afrocubanismo

10/4: *Wide Sargasso Sea* Part One Key word: Modernism

10/9: *Wide Sargasso Sea* Part Two Key words: creole, hybridity

10/11: *Wide Sargasso Sea* pp. 164 (“Under the Oleanders...”) – End. Key word: alienation

10/16: *Wide Sargasso Sea* contd.

10/18: review

10/23: **MIDTERM EXAM PART ONE**

10/25: **MIDTERM EXAM PART TWO**

Part Two: Colonial Education and Social Mobility

10/30: Discussion of *Sugar Cane Alley* (view online/library before class) Key word: respectability

11/1: *Sugar Cane Alley* cont’d, “Dan is the Man in the Van” Key word: mimicry

11/6: “Titus Hoyte, I.A.”

11/8: *Annie John* Chs1-3 Key word: individualism

11/13: *Annie John* Chs4-5

11/15: *Annie John* Chs6-8

11/20: catch-up/review

11/22: NO CLASS

11/27: **EXAM THREE**

Part Three: The Hybrid Caribbean and the Immigrant Experience

11/29: “My Aunt Gold Teeth” Key word: syncretism

12/4: “Cloud Cover Caribbean”

12/6: Prologue to *Oscar Wao*, “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie”,

12/11: “my graduation speech”. Keyword: Spanglish

12/13: review

12/18: **FINAL EXAM in class, 11:45 am – 2:45 pm. COMPREHENSIVE.**