English 322 “Postcolonial Literatures of the Americas”
Tues/Thurs 11:30 am-12:50 pm
AL 124

Professor Heather Smyth
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Office Hours: Tues 1-2 pm, Thurs 3-4 pm or by appointment

Aims of the Course:

This course introduces students to key themes and reading strategies in postcolonial literatures through a comparative study of selected Caribbean, Canadian, and U.S. literatures. We will focus on both written and oral genres and discuss how language practices adapt to and are created in colonial and postcolonial environments. The course is organized, in part, to establish literary and cultural contexts for comparing writers and texts from a range of historical and social positions, including colonial, postcolonial, diasporic, and First Nations/Native American writers, from 1492 to the present. Issues to be discussed will include national identity and belonging, resistance and creativity, gender and sexuality, and migration and multiculturalism. The core texts will be literary, but we will also explore the importance to postcolonial cultures of music, dance, storytelling, and public performance. The course readings kit includes several essays introducing students to issues in postcolonial literary theory.

The format of the course will include lectures, class discussions, and student-led group presentations.

Texts (required):

Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms* (NeWest Press)
Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (Faber & Faber)
Leonard Peltier, *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance* (St. Martin’s)
Fred Wah, *Diamond Grill* (NeWest Press)

Course Readings (in Campus Bookstore): includes the novel *Myal* by Erna Brodber and poetry, short fiction, and essays (indicated as “CR” on schedule of readings)

Assignments

Class participation 10%
Group presentation and report 15%
Essay 40%
Final exam 35%

Class Participation (10%): You are expected to attend class punctually, to do the readings thoughtfully and ahead of time, and to participate fully in the class discussions. I may assign in-class writing exercises or quizzes, which will be incorporated into this part of the final grade.
Group presentation and report (15%): Students will be placed in groups of 3 to complete a project with three parts: a) research and select a critical article on their assigned text from the course; b) present (as a group) to the rest of the class a summary of the main ideas in the article, a critique of the article, and some brief suggestions of how the article might assist the class in studying the course text (10-15 minutes); c) as individuals, each group member will hand in a 2-3 page summary and critique of the article (do not write these together: it must be your own work). Grades for each student will be weighted equally between (b) and (c), taking into consideration the strengths of the ideas, organization, and performance of the group presentation, and the clarity, writing quality (including grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc), and analysis of the written report.

Outline and Suggestions:

- When you have selected an article, someone from the group must contact me to confirm that another group has not picked the same article (and to get permission). If two groups pick the same article, the first ones to contact me and get confirmation will be able to use the article. To avoid losing time, I suggest you search for and decide on an article as soon as possible, and contact me immediately when you have done this.
- Try to get an article that you find thought-provoking and original and that will add some new perspective to the study of your text.
- Work together as a group: decide how often you’ll need to meet (in person or via email), if you will divide up the tasks, and how. Be responsible to each other and share the workload equally. The portion of the grade relating to the group component of the assignment will be the same for each member of the group.
- Write the full bibliographical information of the article on the board when you present.
- When summarizing the article, be very selective. Do not try to present all the ideas in the article to the class. Pick no more than 3 main arguments to outline to the class and present your ideas in an organized way. I will do a presentation of an article early in the term to offer a possible model.
- All three group members should take part in the spoken part of the presentation.
- “Critique” can involve many things: explaining what kinds of theoretical or critical ideas are underlying the author’s arguments (for example, is the writer examining Wide Sargasso Sea from the perspective of a Brontë critic, a Caribbean critic, a psychoanalytic critic, a historian? You might want to research the writer of the article briefly to position him/her); stating clearly what you find to be the article’s strengths, weaknesses, best insights, most obvious gaps; and explaining how the article’s ideas complement or modify the themes discussed in the course. If you felt the writer didn’t explore one or two ideas fully enough you can offer your own extension of these ideas. Group members are free to disagree with each other in their critique and presentation to the class.
- Remember your listeners: keep things moving, use visual aids if you like (let me know a week in advance if you have special AV requirements), and speak with energy (humour often helps). Try not to read from a script or essay. Keep to the 10-15 minute limit.

Essay (40%, due March 25): Essays will be 10-12 pages long (2500-3000 words) and follow standard MLA format. They will be typed/wordprocessed in 10-12 point font with no more than 1 inch margins, double-spaced, and have a title and title page, works cited list, and numbered pages. Essays will make reference to at least one secondary critical
source. Criteria for evaluation of essays include the strength, coherence, and organization of the argument; demonstration of original thinking (distinguish your ideas from your secondary sources); a stylish and polished presentation of your ideas and effective use of evidence; and a firm grasp on the mechanics of writing (they should be free of grammatical, syntactical, and editing errors). Some essay topics will follow in a separate handout. If you pick your own topic it should be relevant to the course and you must discuss your topic with me before writing. Essays are due at the beginning of class on March 25 and late penalties (3% per day including weekends) start being calculated at the end of that class. Medical reasons for lateness require a detailed and satisfactory medical note, and problems must be communicated to the professor as soon as possible. I do not accept essays after the last day of classes.

Final Exam (35%; date TBA): The final exam will take place in the exam period and may consist of short answer questions, sight passages, and essay questions. It will cover the entire course, including assigned readings, class discussions, group presentations, handouts, and lectures.

Note from the Faculty of Arts on avoidance of academic offences: All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offence, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocals/UW/policy_71.html). If you need help in learning how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

Plagiarism is a highly serious offence with serious penalties. It is your responsibility to learn what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid committing it inadvertently (it is an academic offence even if not deliberate). You must avoid plagiarism in any oral or written assignments. Read "How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences: A Guide for Students and Instructors" at:

http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html

Schedule of Readings (subject to change)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan  6</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Jan  8</td>
<td>Columbus, Cartier, &quot;The Requirement,&quot; Las Casas, Brant x2 (59-71 CR)</td>
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<td>Jan 13</td>
<td>Wide Sargasso Sea, McLeod &quot;Colonialism and the Teaching of English Literature&quot; (81-82 CR)</td>
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<td>Jan 15</td>
<td>Wide Sargasso Sea</td>
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<td>Jan 20</td>
<td>Wide Sargasso Sea</td>
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<td>Jan 27</td>
<td>Myal, Senior “Colonial Girls School” (1-57, 111 CR)</td>
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<td>Jan 29</td>
<td>Myal; group presentations begin</td>
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<td>Feb 3</td>
<td>Myal</td>
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<td>Feb 5</td>
<td><em>The Dragon Can't Dance</em>, Brathwaite “Nation Language” (95-97 CR)</td>
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<td>Feb 10</td>
<td><em>The Dragon Can't Dance</em></td>
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<td>Feb 12</td>
<td><em>The Dragon Can't Dance</em></td>
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<td>Mar 2</td>
<td>Diamond Grill</td>
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<td>Mar 4</td>
<td>Diamond Grill</td>
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<td>Mar 9</td>
<td>Diamond Grill / Chorus of Mushrooms</td>
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<td>Mar 11</td>
<td>Chorus of Mushrooms</td>
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<td>Mar 16</td>
<td>Class cancelled: room required for Campus Day</td>
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<td>Mar 18</td>
<td>Chorus of Mushrooms</td>
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<td>Mar 23</td>
<td><em>Prison Writings</em>; Dumont, “It Crosses My Mind” (137 CR)</td>
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<td>Mar 25</td>
<td><em>Prison Writings</em>; essay due</td>
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<td>Mar 30</td>
<td><em>Prison Writings</em></td>
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<td>April 1</td>
<td>Review</td>
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Other Resources


Websites

http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/index.html

Literary Journals

ARIEL: A Review of International English Literatures
Callaloo
Essays in Canadian Writing
Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies
Journal of Commonwealth Literature
Journal of West Indian Literature
MELUS: Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the U.S.
SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures
Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism
Studies in Canadian Literature
WLWE: World Literatures Written in English