SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Discipline: English Literature  
Semester: Maymester ‘12  
ENLT 2552: Special Topics in ENLT – Literary Dialogues between the Caribbean and Central America  
Division: Lower Division  
Faculty Name: Marika Preziuso

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Nurtured by linguistic diversity, ethnic heterogeneity, and cultural and political fragmentation that historically have distinguished the region, multiple definitions of the Caribbean, Latin America and Central America have proliferated since the 1960s. These have been marked by the imprint of colonial legacies reflected in the current cultural, ethnic and linguistic barriers, the persistence of border disputes, and the evident economic differences in size, development stages, and economic potential.

Among others, the countries of Honduras and Costa Rica (along with El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala), obtained their independence from Spain at the beginning of the 19th century, while Belize and other former British colonies in the Caribbean became nation-states in the 1960s. Cuba has perceived itself, and been perceived, both as Caribbean and Latin-American country, due to its history and linguistic identities, while Panama has had a key role in shaping the geography of the Caribbean, the USA and Latin-America.

Considering the historical and socio-cultural complexity of the countries that the voyage will visit, the course wishes to challenge the conventional perceptions of these places that are still residues of the colonial legacies. It will do so through the examination of literary texts from the 20th and 21st centuries, that offer alternative cultural and historical ‘mappings’ of the areas where ‘Caribbean crisscrosses Central America’.

We will read short stories, excerpts from novels and poems by authors from the ports of call that offer interesting and varied portrayals of their countries of origin, but who also describe these countries either in dialogue with or clashing against the wider region of the Americas. Hence, the texts challenge the borders sanctioned by nation-states, by former colonialisms and by physical geography, and take us to cross-cultural sites that have often been under-represented in the literary imagination, even though they have defined the region as we know it.

The literary texts will be complemented with relevant theoretical writings from the region and its diaspora, focusing on issues of cultural identity and ethnic difference, in relation to what critic Edouard Glissant calls the ‘poetics of landscape’. Furthermore, the texts have been chosen also for their exploration of the specific relationships between the identity categories of ‘native’ ‘indigenous’ ‘foreign’ in the countries of
visit, and to what extent, albeit that the area we will travel to shares similar concerns with definitions of identity, each of the above term ‘means’ differently in each country and at different historical times.

We will discuss the attitude toward race that each country has developed in history and how this has often constituted the ground for separation from the other countries despite their geographical proximity. Belizean writers, for example, have often supported the view that in Central and Latin America there is a ‘structural racism’ (Manigat, 1988). We will examine how definitions of race have been one of the most formidable obstacles in the relationship between Central - and Latin - America and the Anglophone Caribbean. At the same time, however, we will test these obstacles against what Kamau Brathwaite calls a ‘submarine unity’, which bonds many of these people beyond racial differences and national identities.

The choice and workings of language in literature will also be one of the themes examined in the course. Even though we will read all the texts in English, in each seminar we will look carefully at the authors’ linguistic choices and trace from them the cultural specificity of the texts and their possibility of ‘traveling’ across the country in which they were born.

The course aims to chart a trajectory also theoretically, a ‘voyage in the voyage’ so to speak. This will cover the main tenets of critical movements such as mestizaje, indigenismo, indianismo, transculturation and creolization, and their role and limits in addressing the socio-cultural realities of the countries in which they have developed.

Some of the texts will provide with a relatively outsider’s ‘look’ upon the countries we will visit, as some of the writers live and work outside the Caribbean and Latin America, while others have traveled extensively and thus blend various perspectives in their writings.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This course will endeavour to situate a text within its context and to examine how text and context become mutually reliant and interactive. We will read a novel or discuss a film from or about the country in which a port of call is situated just prior to pulling into that port. Students will thus get a sense of how a place and its people are transformed into the settings and characters in a novel, respectively. Students will also get a sense of how space may be mapped not only geographically but also cognitively and culturally. The readings in this course will raise important cross-cultural issues in the contemporary context of the countries the voyage will visit. In addition, students will develop their skills as critical readers and thinkers and further their knowledge of significant literary issues in Caribbean Literature. Students will be encouraged to question rather than assent and to analyze rather than describe. Through reading and responding, students will strive to become sophisticated readers, inquiring thinkers and effective writers. Students will also develop their writing and study skills through the required assignments and exercises and by using the resources available to them.

As the course will unfold in a parallel way to the voyage, it will complement, deepen – and hopefully challenge – the students’ experience of these countries, and ultimately help them forge a holistic and multifaceted understanding of them, and appreciate the
contradictions that exist in this part of the world, where ‘borders’ can be both limits and ‘cross-roads’.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

- Arguedas José María *Deep Rivers* chps 1, 6 (1959)
- Zee Edgell *Beka Lamb*
- Frederick, Rhonda D. Col-n *Man a Come: Mythographies of Panama Canal* (Introduction, ch.6)

This material has been scanned and will be provided by tutor on the ship and will also be available in the Voyage Intranet. The movies and documentaries that we will show in class will also be available for independent watching – Details in our first class.

**Introduction to the Class: Preliminary Definitions of our Journey through Cultures and Identities**

Caren Kaplan *Questions of Travel* (ch.1)

Dash, Michael J. The Other America, Caribbean Literature in a New World Context London: Virginia University Press, 1998. (Chapter one ‘Tropes and Tropicality’)

Mintz, Sidney ‘The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area’.

Manigat, Leslie 1988 *The Caribbean between Global Horizons and Latin American Perspectives*, in New York: Holmes and Meier. (chapters on Caribbean Immigration to the USA and Caribbean/Latin American relations)
C1 Peru Transculturation and Indigenismo

Introduction to the course and each other. Can literature ‘travel’? Which borders does literature transgress, and which ones does it reinforce? When can a border work as a crossroads thus facilitating cultural dialogues?

Excerpts from *Deep Rivers* by José María Arguedas

Arguedas’s novel reflects on the relationship between memory, history and narration. What do you think are the insights that literature provides, which historical narratives might fail to do?

How does the terminology that addresses ethnic types in countries such as Peru – ‘indio’ being one of them – play within the construction of the national project of the country? How does Arguedas address the limits and problems with the use of race/ethnicity to support a homogenous vision of the nation?

Documentary by Calle 13 (Puerto Rican band) *Sin Mapa/CBS video on Black in Latin America - Peru*

Kokotovik – *The Colonial Divide in Peruvian Narrative* – ch.2, ch.5
Spitta – *Between two Waters* – ch. 1, 5.

C2 Peru through the Eyes of Dominican History

Vargas Llosa’s novel is one of the best examples of how literature can foster cross-cultural dialogues between the Caribbean and Latin America/Central America. The novel focuses on a traumatic page of history of the Dominican Republic and offers a wide range of characters that represent the human variety of the region. Considering the example of Vargas Llosa’s novel, think of and discuss what drives some writers to delve into the historical traumas of other countries other than their own, and how they negotiate between real events and imagined stories in their writing.

– *The Feast of the Goat*, directed by Luis Llosa, 2005/ *In the Times of the Butterflies* (To be played in the TV loop)

Julia Alvarez ‘A Genetics of Justice’ in *Something to Declare*

Julia Alvarez Excerpts from *In the Times of the Butterflies* (1994)

C3 Cuba  The island ‘within’ – a ‘contrapunto’ or ‘aijaco’?

*Our social and cultural memory in Cuba has expressed itself performatively:*
verbally, spatially (carnival; liminally charged spaces), corporeally, all embodying a kind of radical or heretical empiricism, which is process-oriented, participatory, intertextual, built around play and chance, and at the same time highly symbolic, erotic, a space where we dramatize our collective myths and histories.

Nancy Morejon 475 in West Duran

Think of the term ‘performative’ as it has often been used in theories coming from the Caribbean and Latin America. Cuban-American critic Antonio Benitez-Rojo suggests that there is a level of ‘performativity’ in the way people express who they are in the island – Another Cuban critic, Fernando Ortiz also imagined Cubanness as a counterpoint of opposite elements, coexisting rather than destroying each other. What do you think makes Cubanness especially ‘performative’ compared to other national or regional identities – in and outside our area of interest? To what extent is this experience of racial coexistence – supposed or real – a product of the Revolution in 1959?

**PBS Video on Black culture in Cuba**

*Chico y Rita* (animated, 2010)

Jose Marti, ‘Our America’

Nancy Morejon ‘ Race and Nation’ in AfroCuba (Jean Stubbs ed. 2000)

Fernando Ortiz – ‘On Cuban Counterpoint’ from p.97-103.


West-Durán, Alan. ‘Nancy Morejon: Transculturation, Translation and the Poetics of the Caribbean’, *Callaloo*, vol. 28, no 4, Fall 2005, 967–976

**Video in Intranet: Buena Vista Social Club** (Example of Cuban Danzon) (to be played on the intranet loop)

**C4 Cuba today: New Voices and (Tentative) Dialogues**

**Students’ Presentations (2x)**

Reynaldo Arenas *Before Night Falls* (1993) (Excerpts)

Achy Obejas – *We came all the way from Cuba so that we could dress like this?* 1994 (please read the story that gives the title to the collection)

Excerpts from Yoani Sanchez’s blog *Generacion Y*

*Before Night Falls* (2000) (to be watched independently)

Discuss the themes that arise from these narratives – many of these writers reside outside Cuba, and unable (or unwilling) to return. Yet, they are in constant dialogue with the island. In the light of our critical texts, how do you think the latest Cuban writers in the ‘diaspora’ differ from the older generations of expatriates and exiles who left the country during the first waves of emigration after the Revolution? Do you find that these latest writers still express concerns with the ‘homeland’? How do they challenge their assumed ‘betrayal’ of Cuban nation – and especially its revolutionary project?

C5 Caribbean ‘Diaspora’ Literature in the 20th century

In class Presentations (2x)

Gad Hauman – chp. 13, 16-17 on contributions of Caribbean culture, literature, arts, music

Junot Diaz – *Drown* (Excerpts), 1996

John Leguizamo *Freak!* (Excerpts), 1997

Excerpts from J. Leguizamo’s live show *Freak!*

Excerpts of *Heading South* (movie)

C6 Caribbean ‘Diaspora’ Literature in the 20th century (continue)

In class Presentations (2x)

Edwidge Danticat ‘Children of the Sea’ (Short Story), in *Krik Krak*, 1996

Jamaica Kincaid – ‘A Small Place’ (excerpts), 1988

Mimi Sheller *Consuming the Caribbean* (Ch. 6 ‘Creolization in Global Culture’)

C7 Panama: Reading ‘Caribbeanness’ through the Panama Canal –

The Colon Man, a West Indian laborer named after one of the Panamanian isthmus’s largest cities, fictionally represents an important historical event in the Caribbean: the construction of the Panama Canal. In thinking about why the figure has been so
attractive to Caribbean writers such as George Lamming, Claude McKay, Michael Thelwell, Eric Walrond, and Maryse Condé, consider how we can articulate a notion of Caribbean subjectivity that complicates the region's history of oppression and exploitation.

Presentations (2x)

Readings from Colón Man a Come: Mythographies of Panamá Canal Migration

PBS documentary on the construction of the Panama Canal

Excerpts from George Lamming In the Castle of my Skin (1970)

Franz Fanon, Black Skins White Masks (1952) (Excerpts)

C8 Costa Rica Ana Cristina Rossi and Carmen Naranjo – Eco-Feminist Imagination from the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica

Presentations (2x)

Ana Cristina Rossi ‘Mad about Gandoca’ (short-story)

The South Carolina Modern Language Review Volume 5, Number 1

16, ‘Postcoloniality in Anacristina Rossi’s Limón Blues’, Sofía Kearns Chalene


Arizpe, Lourdes ‘Interview with Carmen Naranjo: Women and Latin American Literature’, Signs (see bibliography)

Grace Nichols (Guyanese poet) The Fat Black Woman Poems (selected poems will be provided by tutor)

Nourbese Philip Discourse on the logic of Language (poem)
Documentary: *Potomitan: Haitian Women Pillars of the Global Economy*

**C9 Belize – Creole Identity and Social Insecurity**

Presentations (2x)

The place of ‘Creole’ language and ‘indigenous’ culture in Caribbean literature. The case of *Zee Edgell’s Beka Lamb*.

Education in the novel is perceived as a tool to rise above the class and gender limitations Beka experiences, which resemble the limitations of the new-born nation Belize. What are the possible dangers of employing a colonial (British) education while trying to carve one’s own place in an independent country? What are the main features of what Beka’s grandmother calls the ‘Creole High Mind’?

Do you find the matriarchal structure in the Belizean families described by Edgell to be empowering for women?

Start Hall – ‘Negotiating Caribbean Identities’ (essay)

**C10 Belize**

Presentations (2x)

Continuation of the discussion on *Beka Lamb*, in comparison with some of the short – story ‘The Teacher’ by Zoila M. Ellis. The story is in *Snapshots of Belize*.

Think about how the size of Belize, and its geographical location as the only Anglophone country in Central America, have affected the colonial experience of its people.

**Field Lab in Belize – June 12, 2012**

The Field lab intends to present the students with a taste of the cultural and geographical diversity of Belize.

They will visit the sites of Cahal Pech and Xunatunich located in San Ignacio in the west of Belize. Cahal Pech is surrounded by rainforests and the site is also a residential complex (or palace) as opposed to a ceremonial site. Xunantunich is a ceremonial site with much taller temples but the forest does not come as close to the site. Both sites are within close proximity to each other and offer the opportunity to compare and contrast.
Assignments:

The Presentation will count as 30% of the final grade.
The ‘Travel-log’ to be updated regularly during the Voyage, will count as 40% (Details will be given in class by the tutor)
The participation, contribution and assignment on the field lab counts as 30% of the final grade (final exam)

DVDs

1. Sin Mapa (Calle 13) – on Peru –in class
2. In the Times of the Butterflies - in class
3. Before Night Falls - independent watch
4. The Feast of the Goat – in class
5. Black in Latin America (PBS documentary) – in class
6. Potomitan in class
7. Havana Blues –in class (excerpts)
8. Heading South – in class (excerpts)
9. Chico y Rita –in class