

Writing the Caribbean Diaspora

Professor Jenna Sciuto

Paper length: 3 pages, typewritten, double-spaced

Reading Literature through Martí

José Martí, a central literary, cultural, and political figure to Cuba and the Cuban Diaspora, wrote widely from New York in the 1880s and 1890s. While with good reason, many scholars position him as ahead of his time in many ways, he is also a product of his period and the spaces in which he circulated. This assignment asks that you work both intertextually and transhistorically to use writings by Martí as a lens through which to read contemporary Cuban-American literature. For instance, Pilar states in *Dreaming in Cuban* that art “is the ultimate revolution” (235). How does this concept relate to the relationship between revolution and writing or language in Martí’s texts?

Your discussion should center on a particular theme or topic of interest to you that might serve as a connection between Martí’s writing and the fiction of Cristina García and Achy Obejas, such as race relations, gender dynamics, class structures, performativity, neo-imperialism/expansion, violence, social hierarchies and inequalities, Inter-American relations, or art and revolution. Be sure to contextualize your discussion, leaving space for the particulars of each writer’s situatedness.

- 1) Select a theme or topic discussed in the writings by Martí that relates well to your understanding of García’s and/or Obejas’s fiction.
- 2) Identify direct passages from each text that demonstrate this connection. You must quote from each writing, but the balance is up to you.
- 3) Analyze the passages as evidence for your connection, and close read the language of the texts: what specific words or phrases led you to the ideas you express?
- 4) Consider the broader significance of this theme or topic for each text as a whole: why is this theme important for your understanding of the literature in particular?

Close reading instructions:

Select a single passage of less than 250 words from any of the works we have read thus far for an extended *explication* or analysis. The passage should seem important to you or illuminating, puzzling, troubling, or otherwise memorable. Read the selection closely and focus on the details. In your analysis, open up the passage and tease out the dynamics of its position and assumptions by closely analyzing its constitutive elements, such as tone, language, imagery, and other rhetorical devices. Pay attention to the relationship of the passage to the broader text. Use the evidence you have uncovered in your explication to make an argument about the meaning, function, or significance of the passage and the

larger text from which it comes. This assertion must be something that you can argue for and prove in your essay.

Requirements:

- Format:
 - A descriptive paper title
 - Double-spaced throughout
 - 1 inch maximum margins
 - Page numbers
 - 12-pt maximum font size
- Information from elsewhere and quotations from texts must be cited using MLA documentation system.
- A thesis is necessary: as with any paper, you should attempt to prove an argument or perspective regarding your reading and analysis of the text at hand. Your essay should begin with a question or thesis that is an assertion about the meaning, function, or significance of the passage you've chosen to explicate.

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Short Comparative Analysis

This assignment asks that you draw an insightful, analytic connection between two works with attention paid to both the texts and their contexts. Thus, each paper should incorporate a close-reading of the language, including an analysis of quotations from both texts, in addition to a brief overview of how the texts are situated culturally and historically. The focus of this essay should be a detailed interpretation of a particular theme, symbol, character, or formal/aesthetic technique, but be sure to also expand out, discussing how the parts contribute to the overall effect of the works you select.

In sum, your paper should include a thesis statement, evidence from the text (in the form of direct quotations), as well as an analysis of that evidence and a sense of the context for each work. You may see this as a close reading paper that places two works in dialogue.

Close reading instructions:

Select a single passage of less than 250 words from any of the works we have read thus far for an extended *explication* or analysis. The passage should seem important to you or illuminating, puzzling, troubling, or otherwise memorable. Read the selection closely and focus on the details. In your analysis, open up the passage and tease out the dynamics of its position and assumptions by closely analyzing its constitutive elements, such as tone, language, imagery, and other rhetorical devices. Pay attention to the relationship of the passage to the broader text. Use the evidence you have uncovered in your explication to make an argument about the meaning, function, or significance of the passage and the larger text from which it comes. This assertion must be something that you can argue for and prove in your essay.

Requirements:

- A thesis: as with any paper, you should attempt to prove an argument or perspective regarding your reading and analysis of the text at hand. Your essay should begin with a question or thesis that is an assertion about the meaning, function, or significance of the passage you've chosen to explicate.
- Evidence from the text: what specific words or phrases led you to the ideas you express? Quote them.
- Analysis of that evidence: explain specifically and in detail how you arrived at your interpretation.
- Contextual overview of the work, situating it in terms of time and space
- **Format:**

- A descriptive paper title
- Double-spaced throughout
- 1 inch maximum margins
- Page numbers
- 12-pt maximum font size
- Information from elsewhere and quotations from texts must be cited using MLA documentation system.

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Paper length: 5-7 pages, typewritten, double-spaced

Final Project

The final project is open in nature with three options to accommodate your interests. All three projects should include an MLA-style bibliography that cites all sources referenced.

1) Final Comparative Analysis with Research

2) Creative Project

3) Translation Project

1) Final Comparative Analysis with Research

This essay asks you to engage in a literary analysis of two texts that will be supplemented by secondary/critical research. This essay will make a well-supported, unique argument. Topics will be grounded in or inspired by any of the works that we have read or engaged with this semester.

Select a two or more literary and/or art works to put in conversation with each other. Building on your previous comparative work, draw an insightful, analytic connection between the two or more texts (broadly construed). At least one of the texts selected should be a work you have not written on before. The focus of this essay should be a detailed interpretation of a particular theme, symbol, or formal/aesthetic technique, but be sure to also expand out, discussing how the parts contribute to the overall effect of the works you select. Your paper should include a thesis statement, evidence from the text (in the form of direct quotations), as well as an analysis of that evidence. Be sure to contextualize both texts and leave space for considerations of form, particularly in interdisciplinary projects.

Topic Selection:

You may consider comparing:

- the historical situations of the texts
- the relationship between politics and poetics in the works
- the use of literary techniques, themes, or symbols

- the depiction of class, race, gender, sexuality in the texts
- the relationship between language and history in the texts

I would suggest thinking fully through this connection before you begin drafting your analysis. Why did you pick these two texts? What are your reasons for comparing? What is at stake in your analysis? What can we learn (both about these texts and more broadly) through this comparison? What is significant, productive, or interesting about this comparison? The most successful projects will focus on a specific topic. They will not read like informative encyclopedia articles but will have a central thesis and make an academic argument. It is necessary for you to **analyze and synthesize** the information that you find in service of a persuasive argument or reading that you have developed.

Preliminary Thesis and Outline: Provide a working thesis that you can summarize in a sentence or two and a general overview of the structure of your essay. You do not have to plan out each paragraph, but the intended structure, organization, and key points should be clear.

Secondary Sources: You should use secondary sources to develop and extend your ideas: to provide points of view that you wish to argue against, to suggest refinements or methods of demonstrating your own ideas, to suggest approaches to analyzing and interpreting the literary texts that you are examining. A good way to start is to investigate what has already been written on your topic. Research can help you to effectively provide your reader with a background/overview the critical discussion in which you will engage. The criticism we have read for this course will provide an important foundation: the bibliographies to each work can lead to other sources.

You will find the most current critical approaches in journal articles and online, as opposed to in books because they are published more quickly. You should consult the following databases: MLA (Modern Language Association) Bibliography, Project Muse, JSTOR, and LION (among others).

You should develop your own preliminary thesis and interpretation **before** you begin your research. Once you know what you plan to argue and have an initial outline, then you should research the topic to look for relevant factual information on the language, culture, history, as well as what other critics and scholars have said about the topic. As you incorporate your research into the paper, be sure that your own thesis and argument remain central and that others' ideas (carefully cited) remain secondary. Cite other sources in support of your own points and argue against them but do not let them steal the show!

A Note about Plagiarism: Plagiarism is commonly defined as: (1) Direct quotation without appropriate punctuation and citation of source; (2) Paraphrase of an expression or thought without proper attribution; (3) Dependence upon a source for a plan, organization or argument without appropriate citation. Thus, whenever you

use secondary sources, even if you are paraphrasing the content, you must cite the source properly. This will both bolster your own claims and ensure that you are giving credit where credit is due.

2) Creative Project

This is an open format project—the specifics of which should be determined by the creator in conversation with the professor. Please work in whatever medium you choose to expand on the readings and discussions from this course. You should shed light on an aspect of the material in a new and creative way. Your creative project should be accompanied by a brief essay reflecting on your work and the connections you are making.

Guidelines for final creative project:

- 1) You must directly connect to the themes and material of the course.
- 2) The effort, time, energy should be equivalent to the writing of a 5-7 page research paper.
- 3) The assignment cannot be used towards credit in another course.

3) Translation Project

This assignment is primarily for bilingual and multilingual students. Research a writer, such as Dominican poet Salomé Ureña, who wrote primarily in a language other than English and whose work has not been widely translated. Select 3-5 poems or 1-3 pages of prose to translate into English. As revealed by our in-class discussions, translation involves artistic or poetic license. The translator must make choices in the attempt to retain not only the meaning but also the style of the original text. A brief essay explaining your choices should accompany your translation.