



MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

ENGL 441-01: Writing the Caribbean Diaspora
Fall 2020
Bowman 201
Monday and Wednesday 3:30pm-4:45pm

Professor Jenna Grace Sciuto

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Office Hours: Monday 12-1pm, Wednesday 1-2pm and 4:45-5:45pm, or by appointment

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course centers around contemporary Caribbean diasporic novels by women writers that are heavily grounded in history and place. Each novel focuses on experiences of relocating from the Caribbean to the United States, as well as the relationship between place and identity. We will investigate the layering of identities—including gender, ethnicity, race, class, and sexuality—in key novels by Cuban-American Cristina García, Dominican-American Nelly Rosario, and Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat. The novels will be paired with historical and theoretical texts, such as writing by Cuban José Martí, Dominican Salomé Ureña, and Haitian Jacques Stephen Alexis, that will serve as another lens through which we will consider the intersections of history, place, and identity. We will explore a diversity of texts (literature, film, music, visual and performance art) in a manner that subverts linear understandings of time to make both transhistorical and cross-cultural connections, accounting for different social, political, and cultural perspectives.

Course Goals

- 1) Students will analyze and interrogate the representations of locally situated histories in various forms of cultural production.
- 2) Students will demonstrate an understanding of the socially constructed and situated nature of identity and be able to apply an intersectional lens to a multiplicity of texts.
- 3) Students will explore a diversity of texts in a manner that subverts linear understandings of time to make both transhistorical and cross-cultural connections, accounting for different social, political, and cultural perspectives.

- 4) Students will recognize the interconnection of nations, histories, and cultures in today's global society.

Department Learning Objectives

1. Students will communicate effectively in oral, written, and other forms of discourse.
2. Students will analyze texts closely and critically, demonstrating how language, style, form and genre create effects and shape meanings.
3. Students will conduct research and use various critical methods and theoretical frameworks in scholarly dialogue with others about the interpretations of texts.
4. Students will articulate an understanding of how cultural, historical, and ideological contexts condition both the creation and the reception of texts across time and in today's complex, diverse world.

Required Texts

Novels

- Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) by Cristina García
Song of the Water Saints (2002) by Nelly Rosario
Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994) by Edwidge Danticat

Short Stories

- "Girl," "In the Night," "The Letter from Home," "Blackness," and "My Mother" from *At the Bottom of the River* (1983) by Jamaica Kincaid
"Kimberle" (2017) by Achy Obejas

Nonfictional Prose

- José Martí "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire" (1892), "My Race" (1893), "The Truth about the United States" (1894)
"Seeing Double: Creative Writing as Translation" (2012) by Nelly Rosario
"Voices from Hispaniola: A Meridians Roundtable with Edwidge Danticat, Loida Maritza Pérez, Myriam J.A. Chancy, and Nelly Rosario" (2004)
Excerpts from *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010) by Edwidge Danticat

Folktale

- "The Tale of Bouki and Malice" (1980) Recorded by Jacques Stephen Alexis and Translated by Sharon Masingale

Poetry

- Selected Poems by Salomé Ureña

Film

- Vers le sud (Heading South)* (2005) Directed by Laurent Cantet

Visual and Performance Art

- Margueriete Hemmings, Myrlande Constant, Louisiane Saint Fleurant, Edouard Duval-Carrié, Scherezade García, Rosalba Hernández, Belkis Ramirez, Lucía Méndez Tania Bruguera, Coco Fusco, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara

Music

Buju Banton, Rita Indiana, Juan Luis Guerra, Boukman Eksperyans, and Emeline Michel

Course Assignments

Canvas Reading Responses: Short responses (100-200 words) to the readings are due the day of each class meeting. Responses should be thoughtful, specific, and detailed and are intended to help you engage and keep with the readings.

Responses must be posted to Canvas by 12pm the day of class.

Intertextual Art Presentation: At the end of the semester, each student will select a work of art that is not primarily literary—such as music, visual or performance art, dance etc.—to present and discuss with the class in connection with course themes and the assigned readings.

Writing Assignments:

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| 1. Reading Literature through Martí (3 pages) | Due: 9/30 |
| 2. Short Comparative Analysis Paper (3 pages) | Due: 10/21 |
| 3. Proposal for Final Project | Due: 11/18 |
| 4. Final Project: Comparative Analysis, Creative, or Translation (5-7 pages) | Due: 12/9 |

****Attendance at a film screening outside of class will supplant exam period****

Grade Distribution

- 20% Canvas Reading Responses and Class Participation (includes attendance and class discussion)
- 30% Two Formal Papers (Reading Literature through Martí and Short Comparative Analysis)
- 10% Final Project Proposal
- 30% Final Project
- 10% Intertextual Art Presentation

Participation Plus for Extra Credit

You have the option of earning extra credit to be applied to your participation grade by engaging in a relevant activity outside of our class meetings and writing a brief 1-2 page response (summarize the event, text, site, film and analyze or critique its value and connection to the material read and discussed in our class). Consider the question: "How does this information, material, event, place enhance/challenge my analysis of Caribbean Diasporic Literature and Art?" Please talk with me to obtain permission before completing your Participation Plus.

Participation Plus will not be accepted after November 23, 2020.

Participation Plus Options:

1. Attending a university-sponsored or local event related to the Caribbean Diaspora
2. An analysis of a relevant outside source, for example, films, music, performances, television shows, internet sites, visual art displays
3. An analysis of a secondary source or scholarly article written about a text or author that we are reading in the course
4. Another option proposed by you

Course Expectations, Requirements, and Policies

The extent to which this course is productive and interesting to you and your classmates will depend upon the insights, questions, and responses of all of us—therefore, your presence and active participation are key.

Teaching Methods: Although I will occasionally lecture, the majority of class-time will be engaged in class discussion, group work, and writing exercises. Please be prepared to contribute to each class meeting. I expect all class interactions and daily Canvas responses to be thoughtful and respectful.

Attendance and Tardiness: Students are expected to attend all of their classes. Canvas takes off points per absence. **More than 3 unexcused absences will lower your grade significantly, however, and more than 6 unexcused absences may result in automatic failure, regardless of class standing.** Whenever possible, students should notify their instructors prior to an absence from class and make up missed work within a reasonable length of time after their absence. Students who expect to be absent from classes for three days or longer should contact the Center for Student Success and Engagement for help notifying their instructors. The complete college attendance policy:

<http://www.mcla.edu/Academics/registrar/policies/index#1C>

It is also important to be in class on time. Chronic lateness is rude to your fellow students and disruptive to the learning process. For every two times you are late it will be counted as one absence. Furthermore, if you are more than ten minutes tardy then you will not receive credit for attending class that day.

Late papers will negatively affect your grade. ****Late papers will receive a failing grade, unless you contact me BEFORE the due date.** If you are having trouble with deadlines or absences, please contact me.

Class Participation is part of the cumulative grade and will be taken into account along with absences and tardies at the end of the semester.

Reading: *Always bring the readings to class* and be prepared to participate. I will expect you to bring specific references, questions, and observations into our meetings, in order to deepen our discussions and directly tie them to the novels. I

strongly encourage you to mark up the texts as you read, which will make it easier for you to contribute significantly.

Canvas and Email: Syllabi, course calendar, and all assignments will be kept current on Canvas. A copy or link to all readings not in the required books will be posted to Canvas. Please check your email regularly. If you email me during the semester, I will do my best to get back to you within one “business day.” Please do not wait until the last minute to email me with any questions or problems.

Technology: Aside from in-class writing assignments and group work, **computers will not be allowed during class time.** If you would like to take notes, I would invest in a paper notebook. It is essential to be fully present for class discussions. Offenders will receive a zero for the day.

Please turn off your cell phones during class. **Texting will not be tolerated. You will be considered absent for the class, if I see you texting.** If you have a legitimate reason for needing your cell phone on, please let me know in advance.

Class assignments will use both Microsoft Word and Microsoft Power Point. All students are required to have the Microsoft Office suite of products on their laptop and to use this software in the submission of assignments. This software is available for free download to all registered MCLA students. You can obtain your free copy of the Microsoft Office Suite by going to MCLA E-Academy (Links to an external site.). If you have difficulties install the software on your laptop, please contact the MCLA Computer Help Desk (Links to an external site.).

Respect

Our literature classroom is a community that thrives on the respect and understanding of all forms of diversity. I would like to stress that all members of our community must respect the work, opinions, and human dignity of others. Expressions of disrespect degrade the community and damage us all, and they will not be tolerated.

Academic Honesty

**** If you plagiarize in my course, you will fail the assignment.** If you do it a second time, you will fail the course. I use Turn-It-In, and there is a high chance I will recognize your plagiarized work for what it is.

A college is a community of students and faculty interested in the search for knowledge and understanding. Essential to that search is a commitment to honesty and integrity. Honesty on the part of every college student has and always shall be an integral part of the plan of higher education at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Acts of dishonesty conflict with the work and purpose of

the entire College and are not merely a private matter between student and instructor.

Violations of academic honesty include but are not limited to:

- Submitting the work of others as one's own
- Plagiarism (as defined below)
- Communication during an examination
- Using crib notes in an exam, except as allowed by the instructor
- Obtaining prior knowledge of examination questions
- Substitution of another student in an examination
- Altering College academic records
- Knowingly using false statements for academic benefit
- Collaborating on material after being directed not to collaborate
- Forging a signature of a College official or faculty member
- Soliciting an official signature under false pretense

Plagiarism - The academic departments of the College have varying requirements for reporting the use of sources, but certain fundamental principles for the acknowledgment of sources apply to all fields and levels of work. The use of source materials of any kind and the preparation of essays or laboratory reports must be fully and properly acknowledged. In papers or laboratory reports, students are expected to acknowledge any expression or idea that is not their own. Students submitting papers are implying that the form and content of the essays or reports, in whole and in part, represent their own work, except where clear and specific reference is made to other sources. Even if there is no conscious intention to deceive, the failure to make appropriate acknowledgment may constitute plagiarism. Any quotation - even of a phrase - must be placed in quotation marks and the precise source stated in a note or in the text; any material that is paraphrased or summarized and any ideas that are borrowed must be specifically acknowledged. A thorough reordering or rearrangement of an author's text does not release the student from these responsibilities. All sources that have been consulted in the preparation of the essay or report should be listed in the bibliography.

Upon an occurrence of alleged academic dishonesty instructors may exercise **their discretion in imposing a sanction**. Instructors may **further** file charges with the Academic Appeals Committee against students if they believe that additional sanctions would be appropriate. Instructors shall notify the Registrar in writing of any occurrence of academic dishonesty whenever they have imposed sanctions. Such notification shall include the student's name, course title, date of occurrence, type of dishonesty, sanction(s) being imposed, **and any further action requested**. This notification shall be effected within fourteen days after discovery of the incident. A copy of said notice shall be sent to the student involved, including the charges made against the student and the grounds, if proven, that

would justify failure or other academic sanction. If the student involved wishes to appeal the sanction imposed by the instructor, the student must initiate an appeal within two weeks after receipt of this notification. The Academic Appeals Committee shall consider as a basis for a hearing that: a) the student claims not to have been academically dishonest; b) the student claims the instructor imposed an inappropriate sanction; c) the nature of the offense merits further action. In academic dishonesty cases the Committee may receive requests for hearings from students, from individual faculty and staff members, and from the Registrar. The Academic Appeals Committee reserves the right not to hear any appeal in any case where data is not sufficient, the necessary steps have not been followed, and when the committee jurisdiction is not clear.

Further information regarding instructor and student rights and responsibilities and appropriate procedures to be followed in applying this policy may be obtained from the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs or the Registrar.

Students with Disabilities

Any student who feels s/he/they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the Disability Resource Office at 413-662-5318 or stop by CSSE, Eldridge Hall to discuss your specific needs. It is the responsibility of the student to make an appointment each semester to develop the Accommodations Worksheet and deliver it to faculty. Students wishing to utilize accommodations should request them within the first four weeks of each semester. For more information: <http://www.mcla.edu/Academics/csse/index>

Learning Services

Learning Services is open to the entire MCLA community:
<http://www.mcla.edu/Academics/academicresources/learning/>

Writing Studio

For writing feedback and support, visit MCLA's Writing Studio in Murdock 120. There you will find trained Writing Associates who can help you at any stage of the writing process: from understanding assignments and brainstorming ideas to planning, revising and polishing final drafts. The Writing Associates are available Monday through Thursday, from 12:00pm to 1:00pm and 6:00pm to 9:00pm, as well as Sundays from 4:00pm to 6:00pm. For more information and to make an appointment, go to the Writing Studio website at www.mcla.edu/writingstudio.

Tentative Schedule

Introductory Unit

9.4: Art by Margueriete Hemmings; Music by Biju Banton; Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"
9.9: In the Night," "The Letter from Home," "Blackness," and "My Mother" from *At the Bottom of the River* by Jamaica Kincaid; "Voices from Hispaniola: A Meridians Roundtable with Edwidge Danticat, Loida Maritza Pérez, Myriam J.A. Chancy, and Nelly Rosario"

Cuban and Cuban-American Texts

9.11: "Kimberle" by Achy Obejas; Art by Tania Bruguera, Coco Fusco, Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara

9.16: "José Martí "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire," "My Race," "The Truth about the United States"; "Guantanamo" (Song)

9.18: *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina García

9.23: *Dreaming in Cuban*

9.25: *Dreaming in Cuban*

9.30: **Reading Literature through Martí Paper Due**, *Dreaming in Cuban*

Dominican and Dominican-American Texts

10.2: "Seeing Double: Creative Writing as Translation" by Nelly Rosario; Art by Scherezade García, Rosalba Hernández, Belkis Ramirez, and Lucía Méndez

10.7: Poetry by Salomé Ureña; Music by Rita Indiana and Juan Luis Guerra

10.9: *Song of the Water Saints* by Nelly Rosario

10.14 Fall Day

10.16: *Song of the Water Saints*

10.21: **Short Comparative Analysis Paper Due**, *Song of the Water Saints*

10.23: *Song of the Water Saints*

Haitian and Haitian-American Texts

10.28: Excerpts from *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* by Edwidge Danticat; Art by Myrlande Constant, Louisiane Saint Fleurant, Edouard Duval-Carrié

10.30: "The Tale of Bouki and Malice" Recorded by Jacques Stephen Alexis; Music by Boukman Eksperyans and Emeline Michel

11.4: *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat

11.6: *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

11.13: *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

11.18: **Proposal for Final Project Due**, Final Project Workshop; *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

11.20: *Vers le sud (Heading South)* Directed by Laurent Cantet

11.25: *Vers le sud (Heading South)*

Intertextual Art Presentations

12.2: Presentations

12.4: Presentations

12.9: Presentations, **Final Project Due**