

**English 624**  
**Texts and Contexts: Caribbean Literature and Cultural Studies**

**Spring 2007**

**Section 901 (Course #12272)**  
**4063 Oliver Hall (Education Building), M 4-6:40 p.m.**

**Instructor:** Dr. Winnie Chan  
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**Office Hours:** T 3-5 p.m., W 12-2 p.m.  
& by appointment

**Description**

The Caribbean has been producing what is arguably the most exciting Anglophone writing of the past half-century. In addition to two Nobel Laureates, this chain of small islands and neighboring nations on the northern coast of South America have produced vibrant literatures that expand the bounds of English and transcend the printed page to include music, textiles, dance, and cuisine. This seminar will introduce students to a sample of this exciting work, with frequent forays into relevant post-colonial theory and culminating in a substantial multimedia research project.

**Objectives**

- To expand your knowledge of Caribbean literary traditions and the cultures that inform them;
- To acquaint you with oral and hybrid forms emerging from the region's diverse diasporas;
- To hone your research;
- To help you to refine your teaching philosophy; and, of course,
- To introduce you to some amazing books.

**Required Texts: Books**

Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (Plume)  
David Dabydeen, *The Counting House* (Peepal Tree)  
Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (Ferrar, Straus and Giroux)  
---, *A Small Place* (Ferrar, Straus and Giroux)  
George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (U Michigan)  
V. S. Naipaul, *Half a Life* (Vintage)  
---, *Miguel Street* (Vintage)  
Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (Longman)  
Derek Walcott, *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (Ferrar, Straus and Giroux)  
---, *Omeros* (Ferrar, Straus and Giroux)

**Viewings**

Stephanie Black et al, *Life and Debt*  
Gillo Pontecorvo et al, *Burn!*

You will find the two required viewings on reserve in Media Services; other required readings are available via Blackboard (details below).

**Requirements**

- **Weekly Reading Responses (10%):** Ten times during the term, you will post a question to the class's Blackboard discussion forum. These should address parts of the reading that confused or disturbed you, inexplicably delighted you, reminded you of something else, and so forth. In other words, you should pose a question you really have. Then, in about 100 words, explain what gave rise to the question and propose an answer to your own question. In many cases, you may well have a question about or a response to a classmate's posting, and you are welcome to post such questions or responses to fulfill this requirement. Ideally, posts to this forum will constitute a scintillating, ongoing conversation that extends and enriches the brief time we have in class. These posts are not graded *per se*, and you should approach them as a space for thinking and sharing ideas.

In any event, your posts are due on Blackboard by noon on the Sunday before the seminar, in order to give us all an opportunity to read them before our meeting, when I will incorporate them into my plans for discussion.

- **Review and Presentation of a Critical Article (20%):** Articles in refereed journals are perhaps the major currency in our profession. Each student will be required to find such a scholarly article that pertains to one of the readings, and to write a 1500-word review thereof. To set the tone for the discussion, students will present their reviews to the class on the day of the relevant reading. Ideally, this review will contribute to your final project, so think carefully about what you sign up for. All the same, however, you'll find that all of the readings dovetail with each other in unexpected but nonetheless compelling ways, so do not worry if you are assigned to a text that is not directly or ostensibly related to your final project.
- **Final Project (70%):** This project is equivalent to a seminar paper and will be due in stages. Your project may take any form you desire (including the traditional 5000-word research paper), but I would like to incorporate all of your projects into a permanent online archive of materials for teaching Caribbean literature and culture to advanced undergraduates and beyond. Consider that we are all teachers, even—indeed, *especially*—when we are doing research. After all, literary scholars publish to teach other scholars and interested readers about new insights into familiar texts. As we all know well, teaching calls upon us to be our smartest selves; it demands that we be scholars who clearly articulate our ideas in order to help an audience achieve a fuller understanding. Those who wish to complete this project as part of a small group are encouraged to do so, but it will be absolutely necessary to document meticulously who contributed what to the final project. Deadlines for each stage of this project are due on the dates indicated in the Course Schedule below.
  - *Proposal (15%):* Though your project will not yet exist, this part of the assignment requires you to describe your plans to the best of your ability. What form will it take? On what text(s), topic(s), or area(s) do you wish to concentrate? What theoretical bases do you plan to implement? While your proposal need not state an argument, it should convey clearly what issues in Caribbean studies interest you, what you consider to be relevant texts, what questions you wish to consider in regard to those texts, and so on. Be mindful of the need to focus—a need that will increase as we approach the end of the term. Attempting an archive of reggae from its contributory influences to current iterations, for example, would be too ambitious for a semester-long project, and despite its appeal will most likely result in frustration and slipshod work.
  - *Annotated Bibliography (15%):* In most cases, this document will form part of your final project, especially if you approach it as a teaching resource. Your bibliography should be as exhaustive as you can possibly make it. Since, with few exceptions, the authors we are encountering are living and in many cases prolific in not only multiple genres, but also even multiple media, you should feel free to include, for instance, interviews, audio files, the author's own web sites, and the like. As you research, you will likely find some sources mentioned repeatedly. The five or six most frequently mentioned should be thoroughly yet concisely annotated, with the annotations describing the sources and summarizing their arguments where applicable. Annotations should also state the source's relevance to the overall aims of the project: why should a user of your project refer to this source? What does it add to that user's understanding of the text, subject, or form? Additionally, what does your research suggest might be the critical consensus on your topic thus far?
  - *The Project Itself (30%):* These will be formally and finally submitted by 7 p.m. Monday, May 7, 2007. Your project should convey a clear sense of its objectives, be not terribly complicated to use, and demonstrate a scholarly grasp of the material. A rubric will be distributed well in advance of the last weeks' presentations (see below).
  - *Presentation and Informed Feedback on Others' Projects (10%):* The last two weeks of class will be devoted to sharing a preliminary version of your exciting work. The other members of the seminar will offer constructive criticism, in effect workshoping your project to make it as effective as possible.

### Attendance

You are expected in class each week, prepared and on time. Straggling in late is disruptive to the class and unfair to students who have arrived on time, so be punctual. Do not leave class early. If you need to use the restroom, please do so as unobtrusively as possible, and preferably before class.

### **E-mail**

At VCU, e-mail is an official method of university communication. Students are responsible for information transmitted this way and should check their accounts daily. Because e-mail constitutes official communication, you should not send anything that you would not want the University's administration to see. E-mail messages to instructors and to peers should begin with a salutation and identify the sender (we have no idea who sexxybeast@gmail.com is, after all). You should create a clear, appropriate subject heading, not least because the faculty-staff e-mailer is ruthless with spam. In any case, bear in mind that, in such official communication, you should conduct yourself as professionally as possible.

### **Blackboard**

This is VCU's online learning management system. Log in at <http://blackboard.vcu.edu>. If you are enrolled in this class, you will be able to get access to your grades and course materials, including this syllabus. Additionally, Blackboard includes a feature that enables you to contact the whole class. Early in the term I will introduce you to our course's site, and I welcome any questions you might have about its use.

### **Student Conduct in the Classroom**

We will abide by the code of conduct set out in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*, which states:

The instructional program at VCU is based upon the premise that students enrolled in class are entitled to receive instruction free from interference by other students. Accordingly, in classrooms, laboratories, studios and other learning areas, students are expected to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner so that the faculty member can proceed with customary instruction. Faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) may set reasonable standards for classroom behavior in order to meet these objectives. If a student believes that the behavior of another student is disruptive, the instructor should be informed. If a faculty member believes that a student's behavior is disrupting the class and interfering with normal instruction, the faculty member may direct the student to leave the class for the remainder of the class period. In such circumstances, the faculty member is the sole judge that the student's behavior is sufficiently disruptive to warrant a temporary dismissal from the classroom. Disruptive behavior on the part of the student may result in the filing of formal charges under the University's Rules and Procedures document. (29)

In other words, I will throw out anyone who harasses, threatens, disrupts, or disrespects anyone else in the classroom. We are all responsible for contributing to an environment in which all can learn, and it is my duty to prevent distractions.

### **Special Needs**

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires VCU to provide a "reasonable accommodation" to any individual who advises us of a physical or mental disability. If you have a physical or mental limitation that requires an accommodation or an academic adjustment, please arrange a meeting with me at your earliest convenience. Please contact the Office of Disability Support Services (828-1944). For details, go to

<http://www.students.vcu.edu/dss/indexmp.html>.

### **The Honor System**

VCU is an academic community that depends the honesty and integrity of its constituents—that is, you, me, President Trani, and practically everyone else on campus. You will find the full terms of the Honor System set out at

[http://www.vcu.edu/provost/univ\\_policies/honor.htm](http://www.vcu.edu/provost/univ_policies/honor.htm)

The policies that apply specifically to this class are cheating, plagiarism, and facilitating academic dishonesty, which will not be tolerated.

*Cheating* is defined as "Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids or other devices, or obtaining unauthorized assistance from any source for work submitted as one's own individual efforts in any class, clinic, assignment, or examination."

*Plagiarism* is "Representing orally or in writing, in any academic assignment or exercise, the words, ideas, or works of another as one's own without customary and proper acknowledgment of the source."

*Facilitating academic dishonesty* consists of "Helping or attempting to help another person commit an act of academic dishonesty."

You will find examples of each at the URL given above.

**Course Schedule**

**Key**

(B) = Available via Blackboard

(R) = On Reserve in Media Services, Cabell Library

<p style="text-align: right;">January 22</p> <p><b>Introduction and Colonial Contact</b>                  Christopher Columbus, extracts of documents pertaining to the first and second voyages (in class)</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">29</p> <p><b>Colonial Contact, continued</b>                  Mary Louise Pratt, from <i>Imperial Eyes</i>                  Michel de Montaigne, <i>Des Cannibales</i> (B)                  Jean de Léry, from <i>Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil</i> (B)</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">February 5</p> <p><b>Settlement, Slavery, and Indenture</b>                  Mary Prince, <i>The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself</i> (B)                  David Dabydeen, excerpts from <i>Slave Song</i> and <i>Turner</i> (B), <i>The Counting House</i>                  J. M. W. Turner, <i>Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying; or Typhon Coming on ("The Slave Ship")</i> (B)</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">12</p> <p><b>Colonial Education</b>                  Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man" (B)                  Jamaica Kincaid, "On Seeing England for the First Time" and "Girl" (B)                  George Lamming, <i>In the Castle of My Skin</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Article Reviews Begin</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;">19</p> <p><b>Empire Windrush: Emigration and Exile</b>                  Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse" (B)                  Grace Nichols, "Epilogue," "Wherever I Hang" (B)                  Samuel Selvon, <i>The Lonely Londoners</i>                  Jamaica Kincaid, <i>Lucy</i></p>
<p style="text-align: right;">26</p> <p><b>Resistance and Decolonization</b>                  Gillo Pontecorvo (dir.), <i>Burn!</i> (R)                  Louise Bennett, "Independence" and "Independence Dignity" (B)                  Jean Rhys, "The Day They Burnt the Books" (B)                  Michelle Cliff, <i>No Telephone to Heaven</i></p>
<p style="text-align: right;">March 5</p> <p><b>Caribbean Literature</b>                  Derek Walcott, <i>Omeros</i>                  1992 Nobel Lecture: "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" (B)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Project Proposals Due</b></p>

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<b>Classes Cancelled for Spring Recess</b>	
	19
<b>Caribbean Literature</b> Derek Walcott, <i>Dream on Monkey Mountain</i> Trinidad Theatre Workshop, <i>Dream on Monkey Mountain</i> (1970) (B, optional) "A Far Cry from Africa," "Ruins of a Great House," "The Schooner <i>Flight</i> ," and "Laventille" (B)	
	26
<b>Caribbean Literature</b> V. S. Naipaul, <i>Half a Life</i> 2001 Nobel Lecture: "Two Worlds" (B)	<b>Annotated Bibliographies Due</b>
	April 2
<b>Caribbean Literature</b> V. S. Naipaul, <i>Miguel Street</i>	
	9
<b>Neocolonialism and Globalization</b> Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i> Stephanie Black, dir., <i>Life and Debt</i> (R)	
	16
<b>Caribbean englishes and Dub Poetry</b> E. Kamau Brathwaite, from <i>History of the Voice</i> (B) John Agard, "Listen Mr. Oxford Don" and "Mek Four" (B) Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Language" and "Noh Lickle Twang" (B) Mikey Smith, "Mi Cyaan Believe It" (B) Mutabaruka, "dis poem" (B) Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Inglan is a Bitch" (B) Jean "Binta" Breeze, "Can a Dub Poet Be a Woman?" (B)	
	23
<b>Presentation of Final Projects</b>	
	30
<b>Presentation of Final Projects</b>	