

University of Southern California
Dornsife College of the Arts and Sciences

GE-B 120: Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry

Fall 2017

A Sea of History
Writing the Caribbean



Instructor: Ronald Mendoza-de Jesús
Email: ronaldme@usc.edu
Location of Office Hours: TTH 156R

Class Schedule: MW 8:30-9:50
Location: TBA

Office Hours: MW 10:00-12:30am & 3:00-5:00pm

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Near the beginning of Derek Walcott's poem, "The Sea is History," the main voice is interrogated by its unnamed interlocutor regarding the striking absence of historical objects ("monuments," "battles," "martyrs") in the Caribbean—a question to which the main voice of Walcott's poem replies by stating: "The sea / has locked them up. The sea is History."

Taking as our point of departure Walcott's suggestion that the sea has a particular way of being historical that is different from the way in which "monuments," "battles," and "martyrs" are said to be historical, this course will explore the ways in which contemporary Caribbean writers have attempted, against the backdrop of the Caribbean Sea, to write the history of their region. In so doing, we will reflect not only on the ethical challenges posed by the political, social, and economical situation of the Antilles—a geo-political location marked by the enduring persistence of the most diverse and severe forms of exploitation—but we will also pay special attention to the ways in which the writing of these Caribbean histories may challenge our received notions concerning the limits and possibilities of both historical witnessing and literary invention.

II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course satisfies the General Education (GE-B) requirements on Humanistic Inquiry. Designed as a seminar, the course will help students acquire or consolidate their command of the interdisciplinary methods that inform knowledge-production practices in the critical humanities. At a thematic level, the course will also give students the opportunity to become familiar with some of the foundational questions and texts in Caribbean literary and cultural studies and in Modern European philosophy of history. Finally, students in this class will reflect on the historical dimension of human experience from a perspective that is at once transnational, multicultural, and an interdisciplinary by engaging with philosophical, literary, and historical texts that explore the relation between historical truth and literary fiction in the context of the history of the Caribbean.

At the end of the semester, students will have:

- learn to read and interpret effectively philosophical, literary, and historical texts by becoming acquainted with the interpretive methods of the literary humanities (in particular, close reading)
- gained experience writing in different rhetorical registers, from informal blog entries to scholarly papers
- acquired a better understanding of Caribbean culture and history, becoming more aware of and sensitive to the historical specificities of foreign cultures and to the particular set of political, ethical, and epistemological questions that emerge out of regions marked by post-coloniality.
- acquired a better appreciation of the lasting legacy of European thought in post-colonial contexts
- become more familiar with the conventions that inform the dissemination of research in the contemporary humanities
- composed pieces that use writing as a tool in different cognitive contexts, ranging from synthesizing and summarizing information, to articulating critical questions, to communicating their views or findings
- developed flexible composing and revising strategies and acquire an appreciation for the repetition that is often required to produce polished and effective written texts
- take advantage of the cultural offerings of the city of Los Angeles and become more acquainted with how Caribbean culture has shaped the cultural and social fabric of the Americas.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Written Assignments:

1. *blog* (10 pages)
2. *midterm paper* (5-6 pages)
3. *midterm paper rewrite*
4. *final paper* (5-6 pages)
5. *take home final exam*

1. The major composition assignment required in this course consists of a *blog*. Students are asked to write *weekly* entries on their blogs during the first ten weeks of class, for a total of **10** entries throughout the semester. Blog entries should range between 250-300 words long. Blog entries should be posted by **Sunday** evening of the week in course. Late submissions will be penalized.

Blog entries should fall into one of the following four categories:

- a. a close reading or a sustained analysis of some of the sources discussed in class during the week in question
- b. an analysis of one or more articles, videos, blog postings pertaining to the Caribbean. Material used for these blog posts should be of recent publication; preference should be given to contemporary sources that engage explicitly with the questions that we will be pursuing in class.
- c. an analysis of material that is directly or indirectly related to the sources assigned in class.
- d. a topic of the students' choice, agreed upon in consultation with the instructor.

Of the 10 blog entries that students will write during the semester, 7 must be close readings of material covered in class (category a). The other 3 can fall into the other three categories.

These blog entries will give students the opportunity to practice writing on a regular basis, to benefit from receiving constant feedback from the instructor, and to solidify their command of the material we have been discussing in class.

2. For the *midterm paper*, students will receive a prompt one week before the deadline with three possible paper topics from which they should choose one. Students can also propose a paper topic of their choosing, in consultation with the instructor.
3. Once students have received their graded midterm papers, they will have the opportunity to *rewrite* them and submit them again for grading. This exercise is meant to expose students to the on-going, continuous nature of composition, instilling in them the importance of revision and rewriting within all writerly and communicative processes.
4. For the final paper, students will receive a prompt one week before the deadline with three possible paper topics from which they should choose one. Students can also propose a paper topic of their choosing, in consultation with the instructor
5. The last assignment will be a take-home exam, to be distributed two weeks before its due date.

Written assignments will be due on the date indicated on this syllabus, by midnight. Students can either bring a hard copy of their paper to class or email them to me on the day that the assignment is due. *No extensions will be granted.*

Students are required to use Times New Roman or a similar font, size twelve, and to double-space all their written assignments. When writing their papers, students must follow the guidelines established by the Modern Language Association (MLA), which will be discussed in class. Hard copies of all written assignments must be stapled.

- B. Participation:** Students are expected to come to each class prepared to engage in discussion. This requires not only that students read the assigned material, but that they read it actively, posing questions to the text, identifying problems, recognizing patterns, ambiguities, bizarre word usage, strange metaphors, etc.

Students are also expected to meet with the instructor to talk about the written assignments, to discuss the selection of paper topics as well as any other issue pertaining to the course. Students are **required** to meet with the instructor at least *two times* over the course of the semester:

1. to discuss their *midterm paper*
2. to discuss their ideas for the *final paper*

Failure to meet this requirement will be reflected in the participation portion of your grade.

Note on Attendance Policy: Active participation requires the student's presence in class. Every student will be allowed three absences—excused or unexcused. Beyond that point, each absence will bring the student's final grade down by a third of a letter grade (from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc.). Also, every three times a student comes late to class an absence will be added to his or her record.

Note regarding electronic devices: No laptops or any other electronic devices will be allowed in the classroom. Students are also asked to turn off their cell phones upon entering the classroom.

IV. COURSE EVALUATION

<i>Blog entries:</i>	20%
<i>Midterm Paper:</i>	20%
<i>Midterm Revision:</i>	10%
<i>Final paper:</i>	20%
<i>Final Exam:</i>	20%
<i>Participation:</i>	10% (5% in class participation, 5% office hours meetings)

Grading Scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	less 60%

Note on Academic Integrity: *Any instance of plagiarism will be subject to the disciplinary process outlined by USC's Student Judicial and Community Standards.* Plagiarism is not restricted to copying word by word the writings and thoughts of others. It also includes citing improperly, as well as paraphrasing ideas taken from any source other than your own thoughts without recognizing the author of those ideas. Students should be familiar with the process outlined by USC's Student Judicial and Community Standards, which can be accessed in the link below:
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/pages/students/academic_integrity.html

Students should also consult the *Trojan Integrity: A Guide to Avoid Plagiarism*, which can be accessed in the following website:
http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/903/docs/Trojan_Integrity_-_Guide_to_Avoiding_Plagiarism.pdf

Note on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Disability Services and Programs, to obtain a letter of verification for approved accommodations. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in 3601 Watt Way, GFS 120 and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Their website is: <http://dsp.usc.edu/contact/>

V. READINGS:

Carpentier, Alejo. *The Kingdom of this World*.
Césaire, Aimé. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*.
Césaire, Suzanne. “The Great Camouflage”
Ferré, Rosario. *Sweet Diamond Dust and Other Stories*.
Glissant, Édouard. Selections from *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*
---. Selections from *Poetics of Relation*
Hegel, G.W.F. Selections from *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*
Nietzsche, Friedrich. Selections from *Untimely Meditations*
Vieux-Chauvet, Marie. *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*
Walcott, Derek. Selections from *Collected Poems (1948- 1984)*
---. Selections from *What the Twilight Says and Other Essays*

VI. SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS:

I. INTRODUCTION: HISTORIES FROM THE ARCHIPELAGO

First Week

Monday, August 21:

Discussion of Syllabus

D. Walcott, “The Sea is History,” pgs. 364-66

Wednesday, August 23

D. Walcott, “The Sea is History,” pgs. 364-66

D. Walcott, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory”

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html

Blog Entry

Second Week

Monday, August 28:

S. Césaire, “The Great Camouflage” from *The Great Camouflage*, pgs. 39-46

D. Walcott, “The Muse of History,” from *What the Twilight Says*, pgs. 36-64

Wednesday, August 30:

E. Glissant, “History—Histories—Stories” from *Caribbean Discourse*, pgs. 61-96

Blog Entry

II: HISTORICITY, HISTORIOGRAPHY, PROGRESS: GERMAN AND CARIBBEAN APPROACHES

Third Week

Monday and Wednesday, September 4 and 6

G.W.F. Hegel, Selections from *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, pgs. 25-46

Blog Entry

Fourth Week

Monday and Wednesday, September 11 and 13

G.W.F. Hegel, Selections from *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, pgs. 47-67

Blog Entry

Fifth Week

Monday and Wednesday, September 18 and 20

F. Nietzsche, Selections from “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life,” pgs. 59-77

Blog Entry

Midterm paper prompt distributed this week

Sixth Week

Monday, September 25

A. Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, First Part, pgs. 3-47.

Wednesday, September 27

A. Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, Second Part, pgs. 51-99.

Blog Entry

Midterm Paper due this week

Seventh Week

Monday, October 2

A. Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, Third Part, pgs. 101-51.

Wednesday, October 4

A. Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, First Part, pgs. 153-182.

Blog Entry

Eight Week

Monday, October 9

A. Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, pgs. 1-25

Wednesday, October 11

A. Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, pgs. 25-51

Midterm Rewrite due this week

Blog Entry

III. OPACITY AND HISTORY

Ninth Week

Monday, October 16

E. Glissant’s “The Open Boat,” from *Poetics of Relation*, 5-10

Wednesday, October 18

E. Glissant, "The Right to Opacity," from *Poetics of Relation*, pgs., 189-94

Blog Entry

Tenth Week

Monday, October 23

M. Vieux-Chauvet's "Love" in *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*, pgs. 3-47

Wednesday, October 25

M. Vieux-Chauvet's "Love" in *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*, pgs. 47-91

Blog Entry

Eleventh Week

Monday, October 30

M. Vieux-Chauvet's "Love" in *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*, pgs. 91-156

Wednesday, November 1

M. Vieux-Chauvet's "Anger" in *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*, pgs. 159-195
Final paper prompt distributed in class

Twelfth Week

Monday, November 6

M. Vieux-Chauvet's "Love" in *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*, pgs. 196-242

Wednesday, November 8

M. Vieux-Chauvet's "Love" in *Love, Anger, Madness: a Haitian Tryptich*, pgs. 243-284
Final Paper due this week

Thirteen Week

Monday, November 13

R. Ferré, "Sweet Diamond Dust" in *Sweet Diamond Dust* 1-25

Wednesday, November 15

R. Ferré, "Sweet Diamond Dust" in *Sweet Diamond Dust* 25-50

Fourteenth Week

Monday, November 20

R. Ferré "Sweet Diamond Dust" in *Sweet Diamond Dust* 50-85

Wednesday, November 22

Thanksgiving, Classes Cancelled

Fifteenth Week

Monday, November 27

R. Ferré, "Isolda's Mirror" in *Sweet Diamond Dust* 110-50

Final Exam distributed in class

Wednesday, November 29

Discussion of final exam, concluding remarks, end of semester celebration

Final exam due: December 10, 2017