

GeSem 120g
Strangers at Home: Rogues, Outsiders, and Aliens in the Contemporary Caribbean
Spring 2020
Tuesday and Thursdays 9:30 am – 10:50 am
Professor Natalie L. Belisle

Contact Information

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Course Overview

Strangers inhabit our everyday lives. Their familiar presence often marks the distinction between the private domain (home, family, friends) and the public (work, school, the market). And yet, we consider the stranger to be that which is wholly foreign to us—whether they speak another language, come from another culture, or have belief systems unlike our own. In this GE Seminar, we will challenge some of the prevailing assumptions about what it means to be a “stranger” by reading texts whose main characters see themselves or are seen as strangers—aliens, foreigners, and outsiders—in the places they call home by birth. We will analyze what it means to be a “stranger at home” through readings of contemporary Caribbean fiction—spanning literature, visual arts, film, and music. Described by Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant as “a meeting place of cultures”, the Caribbean is a place where people from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the indigenous Americas collided, giving birth to a uniquely diverse, multicultural, and multilingual milieu. And, in a region marked historically by dispossession and alienation, it is through narration that people of the Caribbean have attempted to make sense of these diverse relations and define what it means to be at home. For this key reason, the literature and culture from the Caribbean can serve as a model—here in the United States and globally—for understanding the opportunities and challenges of coexisting and belonging as human beings and citizens.

Through a close reading of a corpus of literary, visual, and digital texts from the Caribbean, this course will focus on three overarching themes:

- the feeling of being alienated from the place one calls home;
- how this alienation is expressed through the act of storytelling and humanistic expression; and,
- how storytelling enables alienated and marginalized subjects to imaginatively construct alternative homes or other worlds

Required Textbooks

Notebook of a Return to My Native Land, Aimé Césaire, ISBN-10: 9780819564528

The Tree of Life, Maryse Condé, ISBN-10: 0345360745

Massacre River, René Philoctète, ISBN-10: 081121725

Caracol Beach, Eliseo Alberto ISBN-10: 0375705066

Simone, Eduardo Lalo, ISBN-10: 022620748X

Midnight Robber, Nalo Hopkinson, ISBN-10: 0811217256

All the books for the course can be purchased at the University Bookstore. If you choose to purchase the textbooks at another retailer (Amazon, etc.), you must use the same edition as those available in the bookstore to make sure that we are all on the same page, in class discussion and in written work.

Additional readings for the course are available on Blackboard and marked as “BB” on the course calendar.

Learning Goals

This course satisfies the General Education (GE-B) requirements on Humanistic Inquiry. Designed as a writing-intensive undergraduate seminar, this course will help students acquire, develop, and consolidate their command of interdisciplinary methods of critical inquiry that inform the production of ideas and knowledges in the class.

At the end of this course students will have:

- ❖ learned to decode and interpret literary and cultural texts through the practice of close reading
- ❖ gained experience writing in different rhetorical registers, ranging from informal, short reader responses to longer analytical essays;
- ❖ composed polished prose pieces that use close reading as a tool in different cognitive contexts, ranging from synthesizing and summarizing information, to articulating critical questions, to communicating their views or findings;
- ❖ develop their capacity to listen to, respond, and dialogue mindfully with their peers about critical issues
- ❖ become more familiar with the conventions that inform the dissemination of research in the contemporary humanities;
- ❖ reflected on the relationship between belonging, storytelling, and imagination;
- ❖ cultivated a deeper understanding of how Caribbean writing can inform and contribute to our understanding of belonging, space, and place today;
- ❖ developed an awareness and sensitivity to the voices and political realities of foreign peoples, while building a comparative framework to consider how their histories and intersect with epistemologies of belonging in the United States

Grading and Assignments

Your performance in this course will be graded on the following components:

1. **Attendance and Participation (10%)**

Although this course is formatted as a lecture in order to share contextual information, there will also be a discussion component. You must come to class prepared with written notes to discuss and contribute to the readings with your own thoughts and questions. You must bring the texts to class every week. Your experience in this class will be a communal one; you will get out of it what you put into it.

- ❖ **No-penalty absences:** You will be granted a total of two (2), no penalty absences that you can take for any reason such as sick days, personal matters, etc. Religious observances will also be honored with no penalty, but you must let me know in writing a week in advance. Your total participation grade will be docked a later grade for every two days of classes you miss beyond the no-penalty absences.
- ❖ Students who receive an "A" in their participation grade have near perfect attendance, come prepared to work, actively participate in every class session, and bring their best effort and positive energy to small group work. They offer interesting contributions to the classroom discussion every session, and they prove themselves to be active listeners by the way they follow the discussion, take lots of notes, and build on the ideas and comments of other students. "A" students observe all of the course policies, at all times. "B" level participation is characterized by solid attendance (less than three absences during the semester) and regular participation in classroom discussions. These students frequently volunteer ideas and comments and always show that they are actively listening and taking notes. They may not always have answers, but they do ask questions when they don't understand. They also actively participate in small group work and always observe the course policies given in the syllabus. Students who receive a "C" in their participation grade only speak in the class if directly asked a question. They are not disruptive, but they may miss several sessions or seem half absent when they do come to class (falling asleep, checked out, trying to do other work in class, steps out of classroom regularly, checks cell phone under the desk). These students may fail to observe course policies at times. Sometimes these students will come to class without their book or note taking materials. "D" and "F" grades in participation are for those students who regularly fail to show up for class physically or mentally. Their poor attitude about the course, class discussions, or group work brings negative energy to the classroom. When called upon these students decline sharing their ideas or thinking on their feet. They never ask questions. These students thus essentially refuse to contribute anything in the course.

2. **Weekly Critical Essay Questions (15 %)**

Format

Beginning the second week of class, you will submit weekly, required short essay questions spanning 200-300 words to the course blog. **The essay questions must respond to the day's assigned reading for each week.** Learning to ask meaningful, critical questions about a text will aid you in developing arguments and claims for the purpose of longer prose writing in the course. Your weekly essay questions should consist of three parts:

- ❖ identify a passage, theme, or character that catches your attention
- ❖ critically analyze and interpret the passage, theme, character : explain why it interests you, what it says and what it shows
- ❖ formulate a thoughtful question—that is not immediately obvious to the reader—regarding the passage, theme, or character.

What should you be asking?

Questions posed should be substantive enough to stimulate class discussion and invite deeper, more thoughtful reflection and analysis of the text beyond a surface level reading. Examples of questions include (but are not limited to):

- ❖ asking why the author has chosen to present an idea or theme in a particular format, through a particular character or viewpoint, or at a particular point in the text
- ❖ interrogating the ethical/moral/social/political consequences of a character's actions or the author's decision to present a topic in a certain way
- ❖ querying how the presentation of a theme, idea, or character impacts our interpretation of the text
- ❖ expanding on a classmate's question with another question

These are a few suggestions among the wide range of questions you could ask.

Weekly submission schedule

To ensure that an equal amount of questions are submitted for the Tuesday and Thursday classes of each week, the class has been divided into two groups that pertain to each day. (Note: this is not a group project.)

- ❖ **Group A (for Tuesday's discussion):** individuals assigned to this group must submit their questions by 7 pm on Monday.
- ❖ **Group B (for Thursday's discussion):** individuals assigned to this group must submit their questions by 7 pm on Wednesday.
- ❖ Professor Belisle will select three questions from each group to be discussed in the Tuesday and Thursday classes each week.
- ❖ **You will not receive any credit for late posts or posts about readings done in prior weeks of class.**
- ❖ You are required to carefully read each of your classmates' submissions for the purpose of class discussion.

NO ESSAY QUESTIONS ARE DUE THE WEEK OF THE MIDTERM OR THE FINAL TWO WEEKS OF CLASS .

3. Midterm (20%)

The midterm consists of short essay questions based on the assigned readings *and* class lectures.

4. Writing Exercises (15%)

You will build your way to two essay-length projects through low-stakes exercises designed to help you cultivate and the various components of a literary analysis. These smaller steps consist of the following exercises, for which instructions will be provided prior to the assignments' due dates:

- ❖ **Exercise #1: Thesis statement** (January 28)
- ❖ **Exercise #2: Claims vs. Arguments** (February 11)
- ❖ **Exercise # 3: Topic sentences** (February 25)

5. Essays (30%)

You will write two, 5-page essays that respond to a topic and question related to the course topic. Detailed instructions, including the topics for each essay, will be provided by Professor Belisle two weeks before the due date.

- ❖ **Essay 1: Literary Analysis** (March 12)
- ❖ **Final Essay: Book Review** (May 12)

6. Final Oral Presentation Project (10%)

The last two weeks of the semester will be dedicated to creative oral presentations about a text covered in the semester. Working in groups of three, students will develop a creative project that explores in greater depth a theme and question that emerged from the course readings. The presentations must span 15 minutes and can incorporate a range of formats and platforms, including but not limited to:

- ❖ video
- ❖ PowerPoint
- ❖ games
- ❖ a reenactment of a text or passage of a text

This is an opportunity for you to have fun and be creative!

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

General Policies

Office hours

If you have detailed questions about the material covered in class, the coursework, or your writing, please meet with me in person during my office hours, at which time I will be more than happy to address your concrete questions. So that you can get the most out of your time in office hours, please come prepared, having studied and read the material, and with specific questions.

- ❖ Office hours should not be used to make-up material that you did not study due to class absences.
- ❖ Please do not wait until the end of the semester to meet with me about your concerns. If you cannot attend my office hours due to a scheduling conflict with another course, please email me so that we may determine an alternative time to meet.

Communication

Please allow me 24 hours to respond to your emails during the week (from Monday through Friday). During the weekends, I will respond to emails within 48 hours. In order to protect your privacy, I only respond to messages sent from your official USC account (*Your.NetID@usc.edu*), as I cannot verify your identity with other email providers. Please use professional language and forms of address in your communications to me.

Students with Disabilities and Special Needs

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. As stated on the DSP web site, “according to the **Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended (ADAAA 2008)**, an individual with a disability is someone who experiences or lives with an impairment that **substantially** limits one or more major life activities, or who is regarded as, or has a history of being regarded as, an individual with a disability.” If you believe that you have a need or diagnosis that falls under this definition, please visit the DSP office sooner rather than later to receive accommodations. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. All accommodations will be kept confidential. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. For more information, please visit the DSP web site at <https://dsp.usc.edu/about-dsp/our-purpose-and-practice/>

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

course calendar

PLEASE NOTE: the schedule may be subject to very minor changes and adjustments, depending on the pace of readings and discussion for the week.

dates		themes, readings, assignments
Week 1	1/14	Introductions: The stranger/the home
	1/16	In search of roots Césaire, <i>Notebook of a Return to My Native Land</i> , pp. 1-28
Week 2	1/21	<i>Notebook of a Return to My Native Land</i> , pp. 29-58
	1/23	Condé, <i>Tree of Life</i> , pp. 3 - 61 / Writing Workshop
Week 3	1/28	<i>Tree of Life</i> , pp. 62 - 134 ➤ Exercise #1 Due: Thesis
	1/30	<i>Tree of Life</i> , pp. 135 - 181
Week 4	2/4	<i>Tree of Life</i> , pp.185 - 233
	2/6	<i>Tree of Life</i> , pp. 234 - 294 / Writing Workshop
Week 5	2/11	<i>Tree of Life</i> , pp. 295 - 368 ➤ Exercise #2 Due: Claims vs. Arguments
	2/13	Annalee Davis, “Uprooted” (BB); “Rooted with Passion” (BB) Simone Weil, “Uprootedness” (BB)
Week 6	2/18	Lalo, <i>Simone</i> , pp. 1 - 53
	2/20	<i>Simone</i> , pp. 54 - 109 / Writing Workshop
Week 7	2/25	<i>Simone</i> , pp. 110 - 159 ➤ Exercise #3 Due: Topic Sentences
	2/27	MIDTERM
Week 8	3/3	Taking someone else’s place Alberto, <i>Caracol Beach</i> , ch 1- 13
	3/5	<i>Caracol Beach</i> , ch 14 –26
Week 9	3/10	<i>Caracol Beach</i> , ch 27- 38
	3/12	<i>Caracol Beach</i> ch 39 - end ➤ Essay 1 Due

dates	themes, readings, assignments	
SPRING BREAK/NO CLASS		
Week 10	3/24	Inhuman citizenship <i>Massacre River</i> , ch 1- 9
	3/26	<i>Massacre River</i> , ch 10 - 15
Week 11	3/31	<i>Massacre River</i> , ch 16 - 20
	4/2	<i>Massacre River</i> , ch 21 - end
Week 12	4/7	The extraterrestrial Caribbean Hopkinson, <i>Midnight Robber</i> (pp. 1 – 77)
	4/9	<i>Midnight Robber</i> (pp. 78-141)
Week 13	4/14	<i>Midnight Robber</i> (pp. 143 – 212)
	4/16	<i>Midnight Robber</i> (212 – 281)
Week 14	4/21	<i>Midnight Robber</i> (pp. 281 – end)
	4/23	Yoss, <i>A Planet for Rent</i> , “For Rent, One Planet” and “Social Worker” (BB)
Week 15	4/28	<i>Presentations</i>
	4/30	<i>Presentations</i>
FINAL ESSAY DUE: Tuesday, May 12, 2019 Submitted to Professor Belisle on Turnitin via Blackboard at 5 p.m.		