Reader & Text: Reading Transnationally
Maria Helena Lima
Fall 2015

Course Description:
Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is history.

[‘The Sea is history’ by Derek Walcott]

This course will examine transnational representations of the sea and human relationships and lives bound by it (among many other things). Generic conventions informing the lyric, drama, and narrative will structure the course. We will start with a small sample of “sea poems” to unpack common tropes and rhetorical strategies. One of the central but unacknowledged ways in which European colonialism has constructed the trope of the isolated island and/or the brave man battling the seas is by mystifying the importance of the sea in its vastness. In order to recuperate the centrality of the ocean in European colonization and the literature that in a way enabled it, we will also think comparatively about how the dangers these texts associate with the sea—such as shipwreck, cannibalism, death and loss—figure alongside its potential as a means of mobility, wealth, and freedom (but only for a select few). We will explore how these early stories of oceanic journeys, migration, and/or transnational encounters generate hegemonic accounts of European colonization, history, and culture—a ‘transoceanic imaginary,’ in Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey’s words. Contemporary sea narratives attempt to ‘write back to that center.’

Both this section of “Reader and Text” and CMLT 200 will introduce students to a range of key theory-and-methods debates in critical theory and comparative literature, with particular attention to questions of history, globalization, cultural production and ‘the aesthetic.’ “Reader & Text” explores different strategies for cultural and literary interpretation, a spectrum of questions that can be asked of texts, trying to understand the ideologies that inform them (the texts and the questions). We will also explore how readers’ situations (differences of culture, national history, gender, race, class, and sexuality) precondition the questions we put to texts and thus what we see in them. Teacher and students should be able to foreground our literary and ideological assumptions (as much as possible!), to speak of meanings as constructed by both reader and text, and of criticism as historically situated and culturally-produced.

Required Texts:
Jean Rhys. Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) # 9780-3933-0880-8
Shakespeare. The Tempest. Cambridge University Press. ISBN # 9781107619579
Aime Cesaire. A Tempest. ISBN #1559362103
Fred D’Aguiar. Feeding the Ghosts: a Novel. ISBN #0060955937
Caryl Phillips. The Atlantic Sound. ISBN #0375701036
Jamaica Kincaid. A Small Place. ISBN #0374527075
Stephanie Black’s Documentary Life & Debt
Course Packet
After this course students will [hopefully 😊] demonstrate the ability

- to present individual ideas to the class and persuasively discuss the complexity of the texts and the contexts under discussion and, consequently, their different interpretations;
- to understand the basic conventions that constitute literary genres;
- to interpret and analyze works of literature using the basic terminology of literary criticism;
- to understand how literary theory shapes the practice of criticism;
- to write short essays of literary criticism that demonstrate knowledge of basic generic conventions, incorporating contemporary critical discourse while demonstrating mastery of the conventions of Standard English;
- to develop research skills, including the ability to search databases, evaluate published materials, and incorporate information gleaned from articles of literary criticism, source texts, and works of historical/social background into their own critical writing skills to produce a final paper as final evidence they have “joined the conversation.”

**Assignments and Portfolio Grading:**

You must complete ALL written work to pass the course. You are also responsible for ALL readings—whether or not we have time to fully discuss them. (I will probably save the ones we haven’t read closely for the final exam). Your final grade will depend upon attendance, active and engaged participation, including the oral presentation of your research argument (25%) and progress in writing critically: an essay about the lyric and one about drama (25%), an essay of literary criticism that incorporates recent scholarship (35%), and a final exam (15%) will be assessed.

I tell all my students on the first day, the highest grade they can anticipate (if they do not talk in class) is a B- even if they can write like God herself. So if you think you are shy, this class is not for you. I thought I was shy too... We need to look at specific passages TOGETHER, to argue about interpretation, so the readings will have to come to class with you--your memory of the texts will not be enough. I will reserve the right to quiz the class every day.

**WRITING:** Papers are to be typed, preferably Times New Roman 12’ font, with 1.5 spacing and 1” margins. Your name, the title of the course, my name, and the date the paper is turned in should be typed on the top-left of the page, single-spaced; the title should be centered on the page, below all that. No name and page number on title page (yes, I disagree with MLA format here). There will be a header with your last name and page number starting on page 2. The paper should be stapled together. Do NOT include a cover page or a fancy folder.

**THE CENTER FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE:** Tutors at the Writing Learning Center (210 Milne Library) can help you with brainstorming ideas, organization, some grammar, and revision. Bring the assignment and editing questions, and allow yourself enough time to take advantage of the tutor’s advice. For more information go to http://www.geneseo.edu/english/writing_center.

**SUNY Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. You should contact the Assistant Dean for Disability Services (Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, Erwin 106 A) and also talk to me to discuss needed accommodations as early as possible in the semester.**

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS:** This schedule may change at any time according to class needs and demands. When a teacher puts a syllabus together, she does not know what to expect, for each group is different. This is a new course, so you will have to be really patient with me. I will always look at the syllabus as a work in progress—old course or new.

**August**

31  **M** Overview of the course/shared assumptions about literature/ why compare transnationally? What is world literature? How to sustain the idea of Europe as the organizing principle of comparison when Europe is no longer the unquestioned center? Student-centered discussions, the “moves that matter in academic writing,” research paper (with oral presentation) and portfolio grading explained.
### September

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| 2 W  | Sea poems: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Secret of the Sea” (1850) and Lord Tennyson’s “The Sailor Boy” (1861)  
Why is reading poetry so difficult? What counts as ‘universals’ in literature? |
| 4 F  | Sea Poems: Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” (1867) and Thomas Hardy’s “The Convergence of the Twain” (1915) |
| 7 M  | No class: Labor Day |
| 9 W  | Sea Poems: D.H. Lawrence's “The Mystic Blue” (1916) and Carl Sandburg’s “Young Sea” (1916) and/or “The Sea Hold” (1918) |
| 11 F | Sea Poems: Derek Walcott’s “The Sea Is History” and Dorothea Smartt’s “middle passage” (2001) |
| 14 M | Writing about a Poem—sample paper discussed |
| 16 W | Reading transnationally: How can Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) be a prequel to Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847)? |
| 18 F | *Wide Sargasso Sea* |
| 21 M | *Wide Sargasso Sea*  
FIRST PAPER (ON A POEM) IS DUE TODAY |
| 23 W | *Wide Sargasso Sea* |
| 25 F | *Wide Sargasso Sea* |
| 28 M | Linda Colley, *Introduction to Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-180*  
*Shakespeare. The Tempest* |
| 30 W | View *The Tempest* (2011 Stratford production) in class |

### October

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| 2 F  | drama: generic conventions  
*The Tempest* |
| 5 M  | *The Tempest* |
| 7 W  | *The Tempest*  
Writing about drama: sample paper analyzed |
| 9 F  | *The Tempest*  
Kenji Go, “Montaignes’s ‘Cannibals’ and The Tempest Revisited” |
| 12 M | **Fall Break: No classes** |
| 14 W | Aime Cesaire’s *A Tempest*  
Roberto Fernandez Retamar, “Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America” |
| 16 F | *A Tempest* |
| 19 M | *A Tempest* |
21 W  A Tempest  
SECOND PAPER (ON A PLAY) IS DUE TODAY

23 F  Slavery and Art: Specters of the Atlantic  
Fred D’Aguiar. Feeding the Ghosts: a Novel

26 M  Feeding the Ghosts: a Novel

28 W  Feeding the Ghosts: a Novel

30 F  Feeding the Ghosts: a Novel  
Writing about a novel: sample paper analyzed

November
2 M  Caryl Phillips. The Atlantic Sound

4 W  The Atlantic Sound

6 F  The Atlantic Sound

9 M  The Atlantic Sound

11 W  Opal Palmer Adisa, “Widow’s Walk”

13 F  Edwidge Danticat, “Children of the Sea”

16 M  “Children of the Sea”

18 W  Jamaica Kincaid. A Small Place

20 F  A Small Place

23 M  A Small Place

THANKSGIVING BREAK

30 M  Life & Debt (documentary): in class

December
2 W  Life & Debt

4 F  oral presentations of the argument for your final paper

7 M  oral presentations

9 W  oral presentations

11 F  oral presentations

14 M  Editing Day for your final paper

15 T  Study Day Office Hours: 12:30-1:30

FINAL EXAM DAY: Wednesday, 12/16, 3:30-6:50 pm  whole portfolio is due
Final Thoughts:
(1) You cannot take this course as a correspondence class. What happens in every class cannot be made up by borrowing notes or doing extra work. If coming to every class is going to be a problem, this course is not for you. In order for this class to run smoothly, each of us must make a commitment to come to every class, to be here on time, and to meaningfully engage the readings.
(2) You should keep all the work I return with comments in a folder—I DO NOT have a gradebook and need to see all your work again to reach a decision about your final grade.
(3) If you fall behind, TALK TO ME. Don't disappear. I'm not assigning late penalties for papers, but don't take advantage of that.
(4) You will be able to revise your first two essays as many times as it takes for an “A.” I will let you revise the final paper if you hand it in before Thanksgiving Break.
(5) Plagiarism is intolerable. Refer to the College Policies in your Handbook.

If in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, attend one of the Fall 2015 Plagiarism Workshops:
Wednesday, September 9, 3:30-4:20 Room: Milne 104
Thursday, September 10, 6:00-6:50 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, September 15, 4:30-5:20 Room: Milne 104
Monday, September 21, 2:30-3:20 Room: Milne 104
Wednesday, September 23, 7:00-7:50 Room: Milne 104
Monday, September 28, 5:00-5:50 Room: Milne 104
Friday, October 2, 2:30-3:20 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, October 6, 4:30-5:20 Room: Milne 104
Thursday, October 8, 6:00-6:50 Room: Milne 104
Monday, October 19, 2:30-3:20 Room: Milne 104
Wednesday, October 21, 7:00-7:50 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, October 27, 5:30-6:20 Room: Milne 104
Monday, November 2, 4:00-4:50 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, November 3, 5:00-5:50 Room: Newton 214
Wednesday, November 11, 6:00-6:50 Newton 214

Guiding Questions [for when you revise your short papers]:
1. Read the introduction to the argument. Is it effective? Why or why not?
2. What device does the writer use to convince you that her argument is worth pursuing? Can you think of a better way?
3. Are there any significant “facts” left out?
4. Write down what you think the thesis of the paper is. Is the thesis what you intended? Learn to be a critical reader of your own writing.
5. How would you characterize this writer's ethos. Cite examples from the paper to explain your characterization. How do you sound like?
6. How is the paper organized? Briefly outline the paper. Are there ways to improve the flow of the argument?
7. Read back over the paper. Have you varied your sentence structure or do all sentences sound the same?
8. Look over the paragraphing. Does it seem coherent and logical? Are transitions effective? Do topic sentences need sharpening? Make sure you do not sound like you are merely paraphrasing the poem.
9. How does the paper end? Does the writer leave you with a provocative thought? Does she merely summarize what has come before? If it is merely a summary, your teacher will write “weak ending” next to it.
10. Do you find your title catchy? Appropriate as a “doorway into your argument?”
11. Check the paper for any mechanical or grammatical problems. FIX THEM.
12. Have you used the Present Tense throughout?

The Research Paper:
The first step for the success of this assignment requires that you find something you want to argue. A good starting point, experts believe, is for you to find out more about the author and the context surrounding the text you plan to enter the critical conversation surrounding it. Once you know more
about both (writer and context), you will be better equipped to focus your questions to develop your
own original thesis. The more focused the argument, the stronger the paper. I need to hear your voice
(ethos) throughout. You need to sound intelligent and balanced for your claims to be considered.
Never praise the author of the text you are writing about. And PLEASE do not sound condescending.
Your audience is someone who knows the text very well, so avoid (plot) summaries. Only include the
facts from the text (logos) that are central to your argument.

Pay special attention to focusing your introduction. I usually write my introductions last. You
only really know what the paper is going to accomplish once you are done drafting it. The introduction
makes a promise it must fulfill. Think of a catchy title and of a first sentence that really grab your
reader. Finally, make sure your introduction announces the organizational layout of the whole paper.
It must.

Remember that you may change the sequence of paragraphs (the organization of the paper) for
the best effect as many times as you revise, so you need to make sure transitions are always present and
the topic sentence is focused enough. Remember that topic sentences advance the argument and are
(preferably) thematically connected to the whole. Remember also to write in the Present Tense
throughout (reading the paper out loud more than once is the only way to spot tense inconsistency).
Avoid unnecessary repetition of words.

Another important aspect of a successful research paper is for you to vary your sources: a book, an
essay from a critical anthology, a journal article, a web source, an interview perhaps. All your
references must be recent (within the last five years) otherwise your teacher may suspect plagiarism.

Make sure you achieve a balance between instances where you paraphrase what other writers
have said (you still need to use the MLA format for parenthetical citations) and times when the other
critic’s voice is required. Are you ultimately in charge of the researched material? You will write in the
first person point of view, and vary the way to bring other voices into your “symphony” (vary
the ways to introduce quotes). "Say" is an extremely weak verb, for example. Figure what the quote is
doing and introduce it properly: according to “so and so,” “so and so” suggests, notes, emphasizes,
argues, points out, claims, rejects, etc. should be used accordingly.

Anticipate possible objection(s) to your argument and build a plausible refutation. If there is a
passage in the text that contradicts what you are saying, do not hope that Maria will not know it’s
there… Bring it in. Your argument will be stronger if you attempt to refute it.

Finally, a strong conclusion does not merely repeat everything you have already said in the paper.

EDITING QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH PAPER (You will exchange drafts with a
classmate)

Your
name: ________________________________________________________________
The other writer’s name: __________________________________________________

First read the introduction to the paper carefully.
1. Does the introduction to the paper provide the background you need to understand the
argument/analysis that follows? Does it attract your interest? How would you improve it? Write down
the essay’s argument in your own words, as you understand it from reading the introduction.
2. Read every topic sentence of every paragraph at least twice. Does it introduce the paragraph well?
Does it flow nicely from the last sentence of the paragraph that precedes it? Suggest ways of improving
transitions and topic sentences.
3. Does the writer use quotations well? Circle at least two examples in the paper itself. Are there page
numbers after every quote? Does the writer remember how to punctuate with quotation marks? How
well do the quotes contribute to and support the writer’s argument? MARK ANY HIT-AND-RUN
QUOTATION(S). Is there any section in the paper that would benefit from more quotes from the text?
How many indented quotes are there? Are they 1.5 spaced without quotation marks and period inside
the parentheses? Remember that you only indent if the quote is longer than four lines (we are using the
MLA format).
4. How much does the writer vary the way to introduce her quotes? Evaluate all verbs used to introduce quotes and paraphrased information. Suggest ways of improving them. Remember that “SAY” is a weak verb.

5. Can you recognize the writer’s voice, the writer ethos, throughout the paper? Mark the passages in the paper where you miss the writer’s presence. Good writing means never exaggerate, nor condescend—watch for these too.

6. Do you disagree with any of the assertions made about the text(s), either interpretations or evaluations? Are there ways in which you would have handled the argument differently? Suggest ways in which the writer might incorporate your objections (by refuting them) into the paper.

7. Has the writer varied her sentence structure often enough? Could she have combined sentences more effectively? Remember “the arms of your sentence.”

8. Read over the concluding paragraph. Does it merely summarize the paper? What emotion/idea/question does the writer try to leave you with?

9. Has the writer used the Present Tense consistently?

10. Tell me how reading this paper has given you a new perspective on the essay you are working on yourself?

11. Do you find the title appropriate to the argument? Is it catchy? Can you suggest another one?

12. What about the works cited page? Are the sources recent? Is the format MLA?

Dates to Remember and some Extra-Credit Opportunities:

**September 9** English Majors Welcome Event, 3:30 Welles 111  
**Monday 9/21** - poet John Gallaher, 7pm, location TBC  
**September 22** Alumni Lecture, Dr. Jacqueline Jones, “Embracing the Cultural Context: Reading August Wilson’s Gem of the Ocean as a Neo-Slave Narrative,” Time and Room TBA  
**September 23** All-College Hour Speaker, Maria Helena Lima: “Worlds in Translation: The Future Lies in Comparisons,” 2:30 CU Ballroom  
**Friday 9/25** - poet Carey McHugh, 2pm, Doty Tower Room  
**Wednesday 10/14** - fiction writer Karen Russell, 6pm, MCU Ballroom  
[http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/authors/karen-russell](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/authors/karen-russell)  
**October 14** All-College Hour Speaker, George Kuh-Inaugural All-College Lecture, 2:30 CU Ballroom  
**October 19-24** Cultural Harmony Week – all events count as extra-credit if you write a response.  
**October 23** Upper Level Writing Workshop and Track Application Deadline, 4pm Welles 226  
**November 11** Last day to withdraw  
**November 16** Harding Lecture, 7:30 Doty Recital Hall  
**November 18** All-College Hour Speaker, Kris Dreessen, 2:30 CU Ballroom  
**December 9** All-College Hour Speaker, Paul Rogat Loeb, 2:30 CU Ballroom