

Carleton University
Fall 2024 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 3972A: Studies in Postcolonial Literature
Caribbean Postslavery Literature

Prerequisite: third-year standing or permission of the department.

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***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

Course description:

The Caribbean is often imagined as a carefree zone of sun, sand and sea. Behind the tourist's fantasy, however, lies the far more complex and traumatic history of colonialism, plantation agriculture, slavery and indentureship that produced the modern Caribbean. In this course, we will examine this difficult history through the lens of the rich literary tradition of the Caribbean and its diaspora. In particular, we will consider how contemporary Caribbean writers engage with the legacies of slavery that haunt the region, imaginatively reconstructing the untold stories of enslaved people and addressing gaps in the archive in order to envision alternative futures.

While our primary focus will be on 20th and 21st-century Caribbean writers, our syllabus will also highlight a series of 18th and 19th-century works that inspired these writers to revisit the slavery past. Each session of the course will pair a contemporary work of fiction, poetry or film with a historical text or artwork that it invokes. This structure will allow us to consider “classic” slave narratives alongside “neoslave narratives”: contemporary works of historical fiction that mimic the conventions of the slave narrative in order to explore how the legacies of the Middle Passage continue to shape the present. Alongside the slavery fiction, we will read works of poetry that return to key episodes in the history of the transatlantic slave trade, powerfully interrogating the slavery archive.

Class discussion will focus on such themes as: the archive, the presence of the past, memory and forgetting, distorted genealogies, gendered and creolized identities, and the (un)making of literary forms.

Tentative List of Texts and Films:

David Dabydeen, “Turner.” *Turner: New and Selected Poems*. Peepal Tree Press, 2010.
Andrea Levy, *The Long Song*. Hamish Hamilton, 2011.
M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* Wesleyan University Press, 2008. (excerpts)

Caryl Phillips, *Cambridge*. Vintage, 1993.
Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Penguin, 2000.
Canisia Lubrin, *Code Noir*. Knopf, 2024. (excerpts)
Belle, dir. Amma Asante, 2013.

In addition to the major literary texts, short literary, historical and theoretical readings and audiovisual materials will be made available electronically. These will include excerpts from: Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789), Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* (1831), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the *Code noir* (1685), and J.M.W. Turner's painting *Slave Ship* (1840).

Evaluation:

Attendance and participation (15%)
In-class writing exercises (30%)
Film response (15%)
Essay proposal (5%)
Essay (35%)