

December 2015

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### Recommended Citation

Gifford, Sheryl C. (2015) "New Gateways to Familiar Ground: Supriya M. Nair's *Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature*," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 , Article 10.

Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol12/iss2/10>

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New Gateways to Familiar Ground: Supriya M. Nair's *Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature*

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Supriya M. Nair, ed., *Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2012), 459 pp.

Developing an undergraduate or graduate course in Caribbean literature entails defining “Caribbean literature” itself. The canon’s dynamism complicates its representation. Supriya M. Nair’s *Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature* reframes philosophical debate about Caribbean literature’s meanings as a pedagogical opportunity. This collection of essays provides instructional strategies that “situate anglophone Caribbean literature in multiple contexts of production and circulation” (19). The volume speaks most directly to those teaching in American higher education, reflecting the editor’s and most contributors’ affiliations with U.S.-based institutions. However, its diverse selection of essays offers a wealth of suggestions to engage students with longstanding themes and emergent trends in anglophone Caribbean literature, making it a valuable resource for any teacher of the subject.

The title of Nair’s introduction, “Caribbean Groundings and Limbo Gateways,” captures her intent to promote a pedagogical balance between regional and diasporic representations of the Caribbean. The introduction addresses longstanding thematic concerns in four sections centered on the anglophone Caribbean’s context, canon, legacy of colonial education, and modes of cultural production respectively. The first section, “Contextualizing the Caribbean,” evidences Nair’s sensitivity to Caribbean literature’s place(s) in the American academy and the variety of students it may attract. She suggests that both can contribute to the course’s direction; for example, its place in an English department “means acknowledging that [Caribbean literature] does not always flow smoothly into a ‘great tradition,’” and students’ varying disciplinary backgrounds can inform discussions about “commonalities and internal tensions” between the course’s content and their majors (3). In Nair’s view, Caribbean literature’s curricular flexibility bears potential for “productive connections and possible links” (4), making it an ideal way to satisfy initiatives for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research prevalent in the American academy.

One of Nair's emphases is the importance of "Caribbean groundings." She advocates "redress[ing] the neglect of the physical Caribbean" by attending to "less glamorous national or local contexts" (5). Doing so includes remaining aware of ways in which the (American) academy situates Caribbean literature and values particular writers (10-11); addressing ideological and material challenges of regional authorship, publication and reception (13-16); and incorporating oral and performative texts which highlight nation language(s) and local cultural production (17-19). Nair stresses that these efforts should not take place to the exclusion of debates about contemporary cultural paradigms and theoretical trends. Rather, the local should contextualize the diasporic and ultimately balance representations of Caribbean literary production. The introduction's central metaphor also alludes to Wilson Harris's "limbo gateways," the multiple routes to and from the geographical and metaphorical Caribbean (6). The essays frequently utilize these permutations of diasporic Caribbean history and literary and cultural production to facilitate students' entry into less familiar local ground.

Part One, "Movements and Migrations," features readings by Albert Braz, Nicole N. Aljoe, Brinda Mehta, Timothy Chin, Louis J. Parascandola, John C. Hawley, and April Shemak. The articles offer strategies for reading the dynamics of various limbo gateways: those within the nation (Braz's explication of Guyana's complicated domestic policies in Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*); those leading into the Caribbean (Mehta's analysis of gender alienation which emerges from representations of Indo-Caribbean cultural and historical alienation; and Chin's contextualization of the themes within Chinese Jamaican texts); and those leading to North American and British contexts (Hawley's focus on the racialization and status of black Caribbean writers in Britain; Shemak's survey of anglophone Caribbean writers' relationship to North America).

The text's contributors frequently initiate courses with North American students' existing knowledge of the anglophone Caribbean, in part to gauge misconceptions they must address. For example, students tend to consider Caribbean literature a part of the African American canon. Consequently, they overlook differences in racial perspectives which inform Caribbean writers' works, and in the case of the Harlem Renaissance, the significance of these writers' contributions. As Parascandola points out in "Anglophone Caribbean Immigrants in the Harlem Renaissance," such writers knew little of "the bipolar distinction of black and white," for West Indians tended to attribute social advancement to hard work and its rewards rather than to race (104). Understanding this distinct racial perspective enables students to more equitably read the work of writers such as Marcus Garvey, who is "generally cast as saint or sinner" (101).

Parascandola's essay exemplifies the contributors' comprehensive instructional approach, including their attention to less conspicuous topical aspects. For example, Garvey's and McKay's works are typically employed to evidence Caribbean writers' participation in the Harlem Renaissance. Works by women writers such as Garvey's wives, "the two Amys," tend to receive less attention in the American academy, particularly since it tends to historicize Caribbean (women's) writing according to U.S.-based anthological and curricular debuts. Parascandola suggests options for addressing Garvey's wives' contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, as well as works by novelist Nella Larsen and playwright Eulalie Spence.

Aljoe's "The Slave Narrative in the Anglophone Caribbean" facilitates a comparative analysis of the slave narrative, which is often considered an African American mode of literary production. She initiates a study of Caribbean slave narratives by discussing students' expectations of slave narratives, which is likely to be informed by experiences with popular narratives such as those attributed to Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Doing so frames an exploration of "the similar cultural and aesthetic relationships among members of the African diaspora" as well as "the disparate discourses...various rhetorical strategies, techniques, and forms in which the slave voice or notions of the slave voice operated or was desired" (54). Aljoe's goals illustrate Caribbean slave narratives' (and many of the region's genres') suitability to comparative study as well as special topics courses. As she points out, these narratives also provoke questions related to the larger subject of literary authority (50), and as such are relevant to courses in literary theory and/or Caribbean literary production.

Essays by Carolyn Cooper, Paula Morgan, Giselle Liza Anatol, Joshua Albert Brewer, and Karina Smith in Part Two, "Ritual, Performance, and Popular Culture," trace anglophone Caribbean cultural production back to its roots in local ground. Morgan addresses J'ouvert as "traveling symbol" (169); Brewer the postcolonial gothic and "the primary source of that darkness," the colonial gothic (199); and Smith "the politics of collective organization" in the Sistren Theatre Collective's plays (221). Cooper's "'Disguise Up de English Language': Turning Linguistic Tricks in Creole-Anglophone Caribbean Literature" centers on the "strategies of self-disclosure and concealment" that emerge in oral and scribal representations of Caribbean creole (156). These strategies ultimately validate nation language, and the challenge of teaching the subject "confirms the complexity of negotiations that must be transacted" to accurately convey meaning (166). Cooper first (re)considers what "anglophone" means in the linguistic analysis of Caribbean letters before utilizing Louise Bennett's creative writing, or "embodied theory," to exemplify the strategies inherent in representation via

creole-anglophone nation language (155-57, 166). Cooper also incorporates works by Franciscus Williams, Claude McKay, Herbert DeLisser, and linguist Frederic Cassidy to provide a historical survey of creole-anglophone linguistic production. Anatol initiates an in-depth analysis of Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* by situating it in relation to Kevin Rodney Sullivan's *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*. Mimi Sheller's *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* contextualizes Anatol's pedagogical approach to *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*; Anatol also suggests resources which enable students to apprehend culturally specific themes in *The Harder They Come*. The film's role in popularizing reggae music and its allusions to U.S. culture also engage students with its portrayal of Caribbean sociocultural and political realities.

Part Three, "Interpretive Approaches," features essays by Faith Smith, Rhonda Frederick, Jennifer P. Nesbitt, Grant Farred, Shane Graham, Alisa K. Braithwaite, and Vivian Nun Halloran. Smith proposes that nineteenth-century literature might be better framed by "their particular understanding of power, rather than their inability to meet their literary descendants' notions of 'representing West Indian reality'" (245). Frederick suggests ways to "frame and reframe what students might already know about race in the United States and prepare them for the different ways it manifests in the Caribbean," which paves their consideration of "the idea of flexible meanings of race" and ultimately "the complexities of Caribbean racial identity categories" (256). Nesbitt employs the history of rum's "production, distribution, and consumption in the Caribbean" to illustrate how "attending to material culture in anglophone Caribbean literature encourages students to notice the relation between economics and cultural values" (280). Farred utilizes Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* to demonstrate how one might navigate the challenge of teaching trauma. Mootoo's novel exemplifies "that text that cannot be taught without critical foreclosure—the willingness to read when it is known, in advance, that there is a limit to what can be extracted from the text" (296). Halloran offers strategies which capitalize upon Caribbean literature's potential for comparative study. She advocates "portraying Caribbean writers simultaneously as national, regional, and transnational figures" in a way which conveys "the complexity of their subject positions and the geographic impracticability of considering the entire Caribbean basin as one large 'repeating island'" (331).

In "On Daffodils and Castaways: Intertextual Approaches to Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature," Graham suggests utilizing texts which respond to William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" to initiate conversations about colonial education's "social functions and pedagogical strategies" (307). This particular comparison might also inspire other intertextual

analyses of anglophone Caribbean works which respond to master texts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: e.g., Amié Césaire's *A Tempest* and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*. Graham suggests using various forms of intertexts such as Gauguin's West Indies paintings, to which Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound* refer. Graham's goal is to encourage students' interrogation of "the common assumption that colonial education succeeded in wiping out local cultural identity," and illustrate how "West Indian writers tak[e] the instruments of colonial indoctrination...and mak[e] them their own" (315).

Braithwaite utilizes Graham's intertextual analysis of Wordsworth's "daffodil poem" to exemplify strategies for "Reading about Reading in the Anglophone Caribbean Novel." These strategies rely upon reader response theory to frame intertextual analyses of reading and writing practices. Braithwaite encourages student readers to consider themselves members of an interpretive community, their active creation of meaning being "foundational to the written work that they will produce" (319). This act of (re)creating meaning mirrors the writing of and within texts which "destabilized the dominance of the Western tradition and also intertextually engaged with the very tradition that attempted to silence them" (322). One example is from Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven*; when the protagonist Clare "looks away," or stops reading Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to consider how she and Jane might be alike, she models "Barthes's disrupting the regularized pattern of reading a book from beginning to end...tak[ing] control of his reading experience" (324). Likewise, students should "read to include these moments of looking away when they process for themselves what the text means to them" (325). Such an approach underscores that "intertextuality is not necessarily a hierarchical relation between texts," as "making such a distinction is critically important for the [Caribbean's] literary history, [which] has been defined by subjugation" (327).

Part Four is given to "Course Contexts," essays by Elaine Savory, Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Elizabeth Way, Mimi Pipino, and Denise deCaires Narain which detail instructional methods for specific courses. Savory centers on key themes of creolization, Carnival, and crossings to structure her Introduction to Caribbean Literature course, one intended to "give students an idea of how to read Caribbean texts with a sense of context" (343). Way utilizes Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* in her Men, Women and Gendered Rhetoric course to exemplify "diverse rhetorical modes and devices that confront and question the relation of Victorian gender norms to national identity and narrative authority" (381). Pipino situates Homer's *Odyssey* alongside Derek Walcott's *Omeros* to explore "the currents of time and space that run through ethnic literature" in *Travels through Time and Space*, an introductory-level

humanities course (405). deCaires Narain devotes one week during the latter half of an Aspects of Literary History course, one which historicizes the genre of pastoral poetry and views it through contemporary critical lenses such as ecocriticism and feminism, to the works of postcolonial Caribbean women poets Lorna Goodison, Grace Nichols, and Olive Senior. deCaires Narain's emphasis is how the three poets "make nature speak...do[ing] so with an acute awareness of histories of violation and of the stories that consolidate that violation" in contemporary pastoral poetry, which "works across and between idealized constructions of nature to foreground the entangled nature of these women poets' engagement with it" (429-30).

In "Autobiographical Occasions: A Graduate Seminar in Caribbean Autobiography," Sandra Pouchet Paquet provides plans for each week of her Caribbean Literature: Autobiographical Occasions fifteen-week graduate seminar. Paquet's *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation* serves as the course's organizing principle; however, Paquet extends its reaches, "amplif[ing] its frame of reference and complicat[ing] its thematics with different readings, new theoretical frameworks, and critical approaches" (366). The course features diverse narratives of self-representation which are most effectively framed by an "unwavering attention to historical and cultural contexts" and "an emphasis on the ideological and aesthetic values generated by an individual text" (366). To this end, Paquet suggests numerous resources which will enable students to situate the readings in specific contexts and highlight unique literary features and thematic concerns. Primary texts range historically and thematically from those which exemplify the spiritual autobiography, such as Anne Hart Gilbert and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites's "History of Methodism" (1804) to those centered on loss and mourning such as Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and Edwidge Danticat's *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007). Paquet offers a comprehensive body of critical works which enable the instructor to convey "the range and scope of autobiographical criticism and theory" and "a broader and deeper understanding of Caribbean literature and culture in the Caribbean and North America"; and to "encourage students at every stage to anticipate their professional roles as scholars and researchers contributing to a growing body of thought" (376). Such goals seem attainable thanks to Paquet's organization of the course and suggestions for primary and secondary texts. The course's inherent flexibility allows for instructional creativity and modification. Paquet's essay also highlights how well the text's selections speak to one another; for example, Aljoe's work on slave narratives supplements Paquet's selections representing "those who do not write" (368).

*Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature* closes with what Nair describes as a “very selective sampling of further readings and background information” (435). “Very selective sampling” acknowledges the canon’s scope and depth, no matter how one defines its limits. It also understates the wealth of resources that Nair provides, supplementing a text which ultimately facilitates students’ engagement with anglophone Caribbean literature’s groundings and gateways and represents the diversity and richness of the literature we are privileged to teach.