

FREN 23320, CRES 23320, CLAS 23320 – Winter 2020
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SHORT STORIES OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC: A FRANCOPHONE PERSPECTIVE



COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Since the late-eighteenth century, French writers have relied on the brevity and evocative powers of the short story to inform, shock, and impassion their readers with the realities of slavery, colonialism, and racial violence in the Atlantic World. From Germaine de Staël to Claire de Duras to Prosper Mérimée, the experiences of Africans and people of African descent on both sides of the Atlantic—enslaved or free—have served to shape the contours of a literary genre rooted in a set of romantic sentiments, exotic expectations, and sensationalistic ends. Soon enough, however, the subjects of these lived experiences took the pen to write *their own (short) stories*, thus cannibalizing the genre in order to fit the necessities of their own cultural settings and political agendas. In this course, we will trace the evolution of the short story as it traveled along the shores, around the themes, and across the traditions of the Francophone Black Atlantic. We will explore the ways in which writers from France, the Caribbean, and West Africa have dialogued with one another to further hybridize a literary genre often defined by its very indefinability. Along with canonical texts by Staël, Duras, and Mérimée, we will read nineteenth- and twentieth-century short stories by Victor Séjour (Louisiana), Frédéric Marcelin (Haiti), Paul Morand (France), Ousmane Sembène (Senegal), and Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe)—among others. All texts will be available in both French and English.

COURSE GOALS:

The aims of this course are threefold: 1) to introduce students to the main notions and concepts of Black Atlantic Studies through the lens of Francophone literary texts ; 2) to help students identify formal and substantial features of Francophone short stories and help them situate the genre within the larger contexts of French, Caribbean, and West African literary and political histories; and 3) to provide students with the necessary critical tools to read, discuss, and analyze works of fiction, either in French or in English.

READINGS:

All texts (originals and translations) will be available on Canvas.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- ✓ **Reading, attendance, and active participation (20%).** You will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of your interventions in class. Repeated and unjustified absences will have a direct impact on your grade. Keep in mind that there are many ways to actively participate in class, including by asking a question, sharing an opinion, responding to a classmate, drawing attention to the text, asking for clarifications, etc. The point is: We all learn best when we listen to and engage with each other!
- ✓ **Comments and questions (in English) on our course blog (20%).** Starting on week 2, on the day before each session (6 p.m. at the latest), you will post your comments and questions (150-250 words) regarding the reading(s) assigned for that session. Make sure to carefully cite the texts you refer to so that your classmates can follow your ideas. Keep in mind that these blog posts are an opportunity for you to play an active role in the shaping of your learning experience, as they will serve as the basis for our biweekly in-class conversations.
- ✓ **Oral presentation (5-10 min) and short written assignment (30%).** On week 2, you will be asked to sign up for a short in-class presentation in which you will give a brief introduction of the text(s) assigned for the chosen session and help initiate our conversation with a discussion question. In addition, you will write a short biography of the author as well as a brief publication history and summary of the story (≈1000 words) which you will send me via email in a Word document the day before your presentation (6 p.m. at the latest). You will find specific guidelines to complete this assignment on our course blogs. After revisions, your work will provide the content for our Digital Humanities project.
- ✓ **Your final paper** will be due on ??/??/?? at midnight (30%). *Option 1:* Compare and analyze two texts listed on the syllabus using the guidelines provided on our course blog. *Option 2:* Write a short story *in the style of* one of the texts listed on the syllabus. If you are taking the class for French credits, you will write your paper in French. Whether you choose *Option 1* or *Option 2*, you will be encouraged to publish your work on our course website as part of our online exhibit.
Please note that you will have to make an appointment to discuss your choices and ideas **no later than Friday of week 8.**

DIGITAL HUMANITIES PROJECT:

As noted above, some of your assignments will contribute to the creation of an online exhibit on “Francophone Short stories of the Black Atlantic.” Hosted on an Omeka site, this exhibit will comprise visual and textual content on a selection of stories and authors, as well as an interactive StoryMap tracing the currents and coordinates of a literary history of Black Atlantic short fiction. In addition, you will be encouraged to publish your final projects as part of the exhibit.

CONTENT WARNING:

The content and discussion in this course will necessarily engage with issues of racism and sexual violence. Much of it will be emotionally and intellectually challenging to engage with. I will flag especially graphic or intense content and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content every week.

ACCESSIBILITY:

Please let me know as soon as possible if you require special accommodations. Make sure to also contact the Office of Student Disability Services (5501 S. Ellis Ave., 773-702-6000, disabilities@uchicago.edu, <http://disabilities.uchicago.edu/accommodations>).

*** *The information in this syllabus is subject to change, in which case students will be notified via email. Please make sure to always consult the updated version of the syllabus available on Canvas.* ***

READING SCHEDULE (IN FRENCH)

Week 1 – In short: The Black Atlantic

Objectives: To discuss the three following questions: What is a short story? What is the Black Atlantic? And is there such a thing as a Francophone short story of the Black Atlantic?

Session 1: Introductory Remarks.

Session 2: Gilroy, Paul. 1993. “Chapter 1. The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,” in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

Week 2 – Engendering Slavery

Objectives: To examine the roles of race and gender in relation to French abolitionist literature of the Romantic era. Keywords: sentimentalism and alienation.

Session 3: Staël, Germaine (de). 1795. “Mirza, ou lettre d’un voyageur,” in *Recueil de morceaux détachés*.

Session 4: Duras, Claire (de). 1823. *Ourika*.

Week 3 – Interracial Intimacies

Objectives: To reflect on an increasing concern with interracial love in nineteenth-century France and its colonies. Keywords: romanticism and color prejudice.

Session 5: Doin, Sophie. 1826. “Blanche et noir;” “Noire et blanc;” “Le négrier” in *Cornélie, nouvelle grecque; suivie de six nouvelles religieuses, morales et philosophiques*.

Session 6: Lormeau, Juliette. 1844-1845. “Le Double Masque,” *Journal des femmes*.

Week 4 – Revolts and Revolution

Objectives: To explore the fears introduced by the Haitian Revolution as well as the relationship between the short story and history. Keywords: exoticism and racial violence.

Session 7: Hugo, Victor. 1820. “Bug-Jargal,” *Le Conservateur littéraire*.

_____. 1845. “Le pillage. Révolte de Saint-Domingue,” in *Choses vues*.

Session 8: Mérimée, Prosper. 1929. “Tamango,” *Revue de Paris*.

Week 5 – The Tragic Mulatto/a

Objective: To think about race, gender, and sexuality in the context of Caribbean slavery, as well as the role of the press in the development of the short story. Keywords: tragedy and hybridity.

Session 9: Chapus, Eugène. 1833. “Pélage, épisode de la révolution aux Antilles,” in *Contes de toutes les couleurs*.

Session 10: Séjour, Victor. 1837. “Le mulâtre,” *Revue des colonies*.

Levrault, Louis. 1837. “La mulâtresse,” *La France littéraire*.

Week 6 – Caribbean Sketches and Chronicles

Objective: To discuss the relationship between literature and the real in the 19th century Caribbean, along with the affinity between the short story and travel chronicles. Keywords: Realism and the marvelous.

Session 11: Nau, Ignace. 1836. “Isalina, ou une scène créole,” *La Revue des colonies*.

Marcelin, Frédéric. 1915. “Jan-Jan (Idylle archaïque),” in *Propos d’un haïtien*.

Session 12: Hearn, Lafcadio. 1890. “Preface;” “La Guiabliesse;” “Ti Canotier,” in *Two Years in the French West Indies*.

Week 7 – Atlantic Crossings in the Age of ‘Negrophilia’

Objective: To address the (problematic) admiration of white intellectuals for ‘negro art’ in relation to a rising global racial consciousness. Keywords: primitivism and Black Internationalism.

Session 13: Morand, Paul. 1928. “Le Tsar noir;” “‘Congo’ (Bâton-Rouge),” in *Magie noire*.

Session 14: _____. “Syracuse ou l’homme-panthère;” “Adieu New York!,” in *Magie noire*.

Week 8 – Telling Stories of Négritude

Objective: To reflect on the recognition of shared experiences by Africans and people of African descent, as well as the relationship between the short story and folktales. Keywords: orality and diaspora.

- Session 15: Horth, Roberte. 1931. "Histoire sans importance," *La Revue du monde noir*.
 Carbet, Marie-Magdelaine. 1931. "Image oubliée," *La Revue du monde noir*.
 _____. 1932. "Nuit de veille," *La Revue du monde noir*.
 Ménil, René. 1932. "Point de vue sur le folklore nègre," *La Revue du monde noir*.
 Éboué, Félix. 1932. "Les Éléphants et les hippopotames," *La Revue du monde noir*.
- Session 16: Diop, Birago. 1947. "Introduction," "Les mamelles;" "Maman-Caïman," in *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*.

*** In preparation for Session 17, a special projection of Ousmane Sembène's 1966 film *La noire de...* will be scheduled on Week 8 outside of class-time. Students who cannot or choose not to attend may watch the film (with English subtitles) on YouTube or on DVD at the Regenstein.

Week 9 – The Boom of African Independence

Objective: To explore the simultaneous explosion of Francophone African fiction and its relationship with national independence, as well as the particular affinity between the short story and cinema. Keywords: social realism and decolonization.

- Session 17: Sembène, Ousmane. 1962. "Le Voltaïque;" "La noire de...," in *Voltaïque*.
 Sembène, Ousmane, dir. 1966. *La noire de...*
- Session 18: Lopès, Henri. 1971. "La fuite de la main habile;" "Ah Apolline !;" "Monsieur le député," in *Tribaliques*.

Week 10 – Vexed Genealogies of the Caribbean

Objective: To think about the gendered dynamics of community in the Caribbean, as well as the failures of memory and re-membering. Keywords: postcolonial writing and creolization.

- Session 19: Condé, Maryse. 1985. "Pays mêlé," in *Pays mêlé*.
 Session 20: Final Remarks.

READING SCHEDULE (IN TRANSLATION)

Week 1 – In short: The Black Atlantic

- Objectives:* To discuss the three following questions: What is a short story? What is the Black Atlantic? And is there such a thing as a Francophone short story of the Black Atlantic?
- Session 1: Introductory Remarks.
- Session 2: Gilroy, Paul. 1993. "Chapter 1. The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity," in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.
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Week 2 – Engendering Slavery

- Objectives:* To examine the roles of race and gender in relation to French abolitionist literature of the Romantic era. Keywords: sentimentalism and alienation.
- Session 3: Staël, Germaine (de). 1795. "Mirza, or Letters of a Traveler," in Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Marssadier-Kenney, eds., *Translating Slavery, Volume I: Gender and Race in French Abolitionist Writing, 1780-1830* (Kent, O.: Kent State University Press, 2009).
- Session 4: Duras, Claire (de). 1823. "Ourika," in Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Marssadier-Kenney, eds., *Translating Slavery, Volume II: Ourika and Its Progeny* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010).
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Week 3 – Interracial Intimacies

- Objectives:* To reflect on an increasing concern with interracial love in nineteenth-century France and its colonies. Keywords: romanticism and color prejudice.
- Session 5: Doin, Sophie. 1826. "A White Woman and a Black Man;" "A Black Woman and a White man;" "The Slave Trader," in Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Marssadier-Kenney, eds., *Translating Slavery, Volume I: Gender and Race in French Abolitionist Writing, 1780-1830* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009).
- Session 6: Lormeau, Juliette. 1844-1845. "The Double Mask," *Bizarre. For Fireside and Wayside*, vol. 2, no. 3 (19 February 1853).
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Week 4 – Revolts and Revolution

- Objectives:* To explore the fears introduced by the Haitian Revolution as well as the relationship between the short story and history. Keywords: exoticism and racial violence.
- Session 7: Hugo, Victor. 1820. "Bug-Jargal," in Chris Bongie, ed., *Bug-Jargal / Victor Hugo* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004).
 _____. 1845. "The Saint Domingue Revolt," in Chris Bongie, ed., *Bug-Jargal / Victor Hugo* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004).
- Session 8: Mérimée, Prosper. 1929. "Tamango," in George Saintsbury, ed., *The Works of Prosper Mérimée*, vol. 3 (New York: Frank S. Holby, 1906).
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Week 5 – The Tragic Mulatto/a

- Objective:* To think about race, gender, and sexuality in the context of Caribbean slavery, as well as the role of the press in the development of the short story. Keywords: tragedy and hybridity.
- Session 9: Chapus, Eugène. 1833. "Pelage, the Creole; an episode of the Revolution in the Antilles," *Court Magazine, Monthly Critic, Lady's Magazine and Museum* (March 1838).
- Session 10: Séjour, Victor. 1837. "The Mulatto," in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Valerie A. Smith, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, vol. 1, 3rd edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

Levrault, Louis. 1837. "A Haytian Legend," *The Yale Literary Magazine*, vol. 5, no. 1 (November 1839).

Week 6 – Caribbean Sketches and Chronicles

Objective: To discuss the relationship between literature and the real in the 19th century Caribbean, along with the affinity between the short story and travel chronicles. Keywords: Realism and the marvelous.

Session 11: Nau, Ignace. 1836. "Isalina, or a Creole Scene," forthcoming.
Marcelin, Frédéric. 1915. "Jan-Jan (A Haytian Idyl)," *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January 1928).

Session 12: Hearn, Lafcadio. 1890. "Preface;" "La Guiablesse;" "Ti Canotier," in *Two Years in the French West Indies*.

Week 7 – Atlantic Crossings in the Age of 'Negrophilia'

Objective: To address the (problematic) admiration of white intellectuals for 'negro art' in relation to a rising global racial consciousness. Keywords: primitivism and Black Internationalism.

Session 13: Morand, Paul. 1928. "The Black Tsar;" "Congo [Baton-Rouge]," in *Black Magic* (New York: Viking Press, 1929).

Session 14: _____. "Syracuse, or the Panther-Man;" "Good-Bye, New York! [Ivory Coast]," in *Black Magic* (New York: Viking Press, 1929).

Week 8 – Telling Stories of Négritude

Objective: To reflect on the recognition of shared experiences by Africans and people of African descent, as well as the relationship between the short story and folktales. Keywords: orature and diaspora.

Session 15: Horth, Roberte. 1931. "A Thing of No Importance," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World*, no. 2 (December 1931).

Carbet, Marie-Magdelaine. 1931. "Recollection," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World*, no. 2 (December 1931).

_____. 1932. "Night Vigil," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World*, no. 6 (April 1932).

Ménil, René. 1932. "Views of Negro Folklore," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World*, no. 4 (February 1932).

Éboué, Félix. 1932. "Elephants and Hippopotamuses," *La Revue du monde noir / The Review of the Black World*, no. 3 (February 1932).

Session 16: Diop, Birago. 1947. "Introduction;" "The Humps;" "Mother Crocodile," in *Tales of Amadou Koumba* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

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Objective: To explore the simultaneous explosion of Francophone African fiction and its relationship with national independence, as well as the particular affinity between the short story and cinema. Keywords: social realism and decolonization.

Session 17: Sembène, Ousmane. 1962. "Tribal Scars or the Voltaïque;" "The Promised Land," in *Tribal Scars* (London, Heinemann, 1974).

Sembène, Ousmane, dir. 1966. *Black Girl*.

Session 18: Lopès, Henri. 1971. "Exodus of the Skilled Workers;" "Oh, Apolline;" "The Esteemed Representative," in *Tribaliks: Contemporary Congolese Stories* (London, Heinemann, 1987).

Week 10 – Vexed Genealogies of the Caribbean

Objective: To think about the gendered dynamics of community in the Caribbean, as well as the failures of memory and re-membering.
Keywords: postcolonial writing and creolization.

Session 19: Condé, Maryse. 1985. “Land of Many Colors,” in *Land of Many Colors & Nanna-ya* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

Session 20: Final Remarks.
