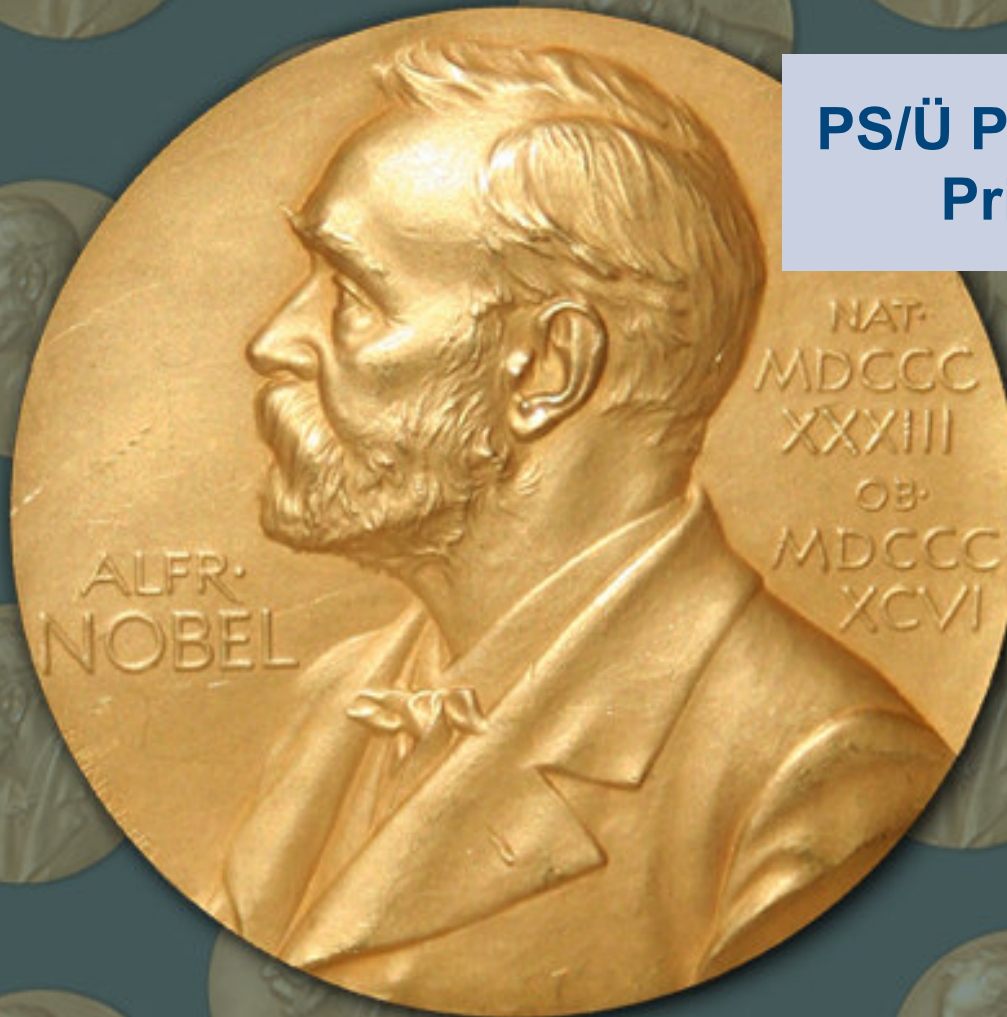


**PS/Ü Postcolonial Nobel
Prize Laureates**



PS/Ü Postcolonial Nobel Prize Laureates

Session 9: Travel Literatures and Counter-Narratives Literatures of Exiles

Prof. Dr. Nora A. Pleßke

Vertretungsprofessorin

Lehrstuhl für Englische Literaturwissenschaft

Time: Wed 12:00 – 14:00

Room: MG1/02.06

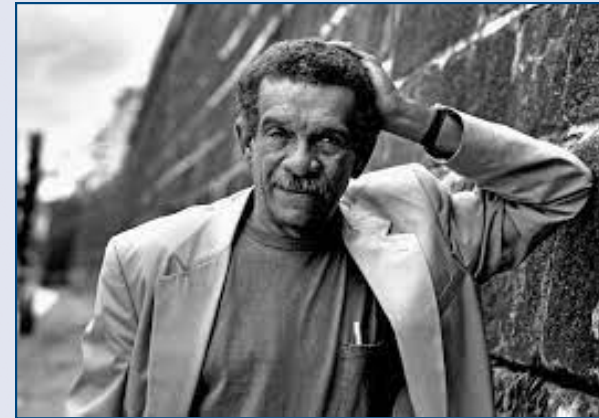
Email: nora.plesske@uni-bamberg.de

Website: <https://www.uni-bamberg.de/englit/personen/prof-dr-nora-plesske/>

Office Hours: Wed 16:00 – 17:00, U9, 202 (register via VC)

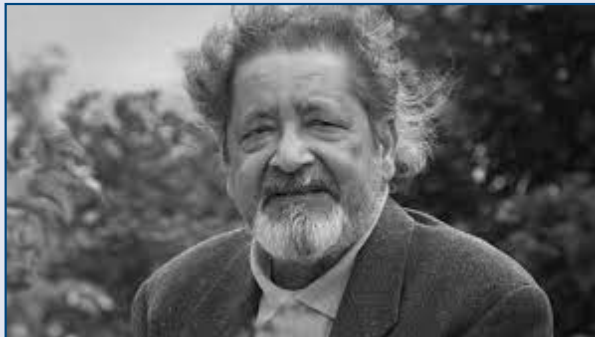
The Nobel Lectures: Biographical / Literary

Wole Soyinka, “This Past Must Address Its Present” (1986)



Derek Walcott, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory” (1992)

V.S. Naipaul, “Two Worlds” (2001)



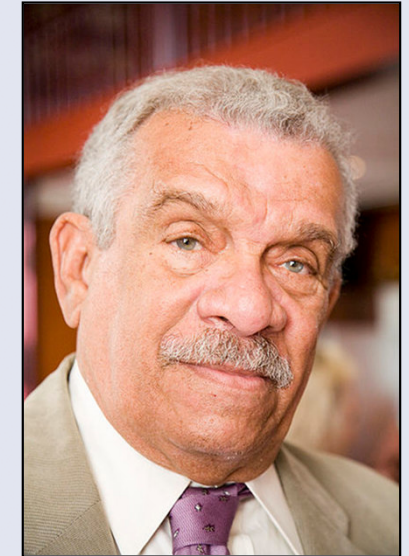
Abdulrazak Gurnah, “Writing” (2021)



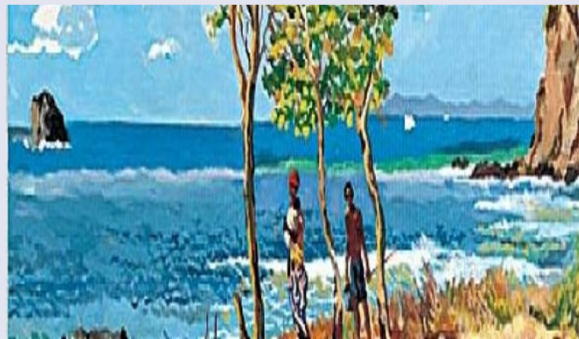
Travel Literatures and Counter-Narratives

Derek Walcott (1930-2017)

- Caribbean poet, playwright and visual artist
- Was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992 "for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment"
- Literature that is engaged with the canonical heritage from Europe
- Critical of back-to-Africa movements, accusing their proponents of taking "a free ride on the middle passage" (Walcott 1992: 269)
- Specific Caribbean condition with ideas of transfer and translation
- Examples: "Sea Grapes" (1976), "The Muse of History" (1974), "The Sea is History" (1979), *Omeros* (1990)



Creatively Dealing with Colonialism...



Pomme arac,
 otaheite apple,
 pomme cythère,
 pomme granate,
 moubain,
 z'ananas
 the pineapple's
 Aztec helmet,
 pomme,

I have forgotten
 what pomme for
 the Irish potato,
 cerise,
 the cherry,
 z'aman
 sea-almonds
 by the crisp
 sea-bursts,
 au bord de la 'ouvière.
 Come back to me my language.

(Walcott, *Sea Grapes*, II. 1-20)

Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History” (1979)

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.

Press Release, 8 October 1992

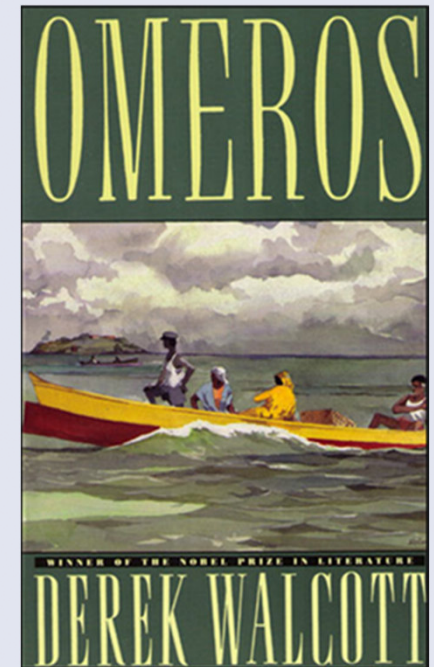
“Walcott’s latest poetic work is “Omeros” (1990), a majestic Caribbean epos in 64 chapters – “I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea”. This is a work of incomparable ambitiousness, in which Walcott weaves his many strands into a whole. Its weft is a rich one, deriving from the poet’s wide-ranging contacts with literature, history and reality. We find Homer, Poe, Mayakovsky and Melville, allusions are made to Brodsky (“the parentheses of palms / shielding a candle’s tongue”), and he quotes the Beatles’ “Yesterday”. Walcott’s metaphors and images are numerous, and often striking – “And beyond them, like dominoes / with lights for holes, the black skyscrapers of Boston”. He captures white seagulls against a blue sky in the image “Gulls chalk the blue enamel”. His poetry acquires at one and the same time singular lustre and great force.”

Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (1990)

- Ironic epic poem: self-conscious engagement with the genre (heroic proportions, long narrative, myth, origins of a nation)
- Loosely echoes and references Homer's *The Iliad*
- Classicism (terza rima) and nativism
- Creative use to postcolonial ends, engagement with the classical models and prefigurations of local St Lucian realities; subjects the ordinary lives of fishermen, taxi drivers and waitresses in St Lucia to epic treatment
- A programmatic New World text concerned with naming the topography of Caribbean islands
- Central and self-conscious figure of a poet as part of his own narrative
- Text launches readers on an open-ended passage towards a fuller understanding of Caribbean existence constituted always by transfers

Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (1990)

All that Greek manure under the green bananas,
under the indigo hills, the rain-rutted road,
the galvanized village, the myth of rustic manners,
glazed by the transport page of what I had read.
What I had read and rewritten till literature
was guilty as History. When would the sails drop
from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War
in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?
When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse
shaking off a wreath of flies? When would it stop,
the echo in the throat, insisting, 'Omeros';
when would I enter that light beyond metaphor? (Walcott 271)



- displacement of Homeric works into Caribbean worlds is being questioned: complicity with the Western canon and constant misnaming of St Lucian realities (Döring 193)

Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (1990)

The ocean had
no memory of [...]
whose sword severed whose head in the *Illiad*.
It was an epic where every line was erased
yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf (Walcott 295)

- Only language that is adequate to an island that is shaped by displacement is a language that is displacing and displaced

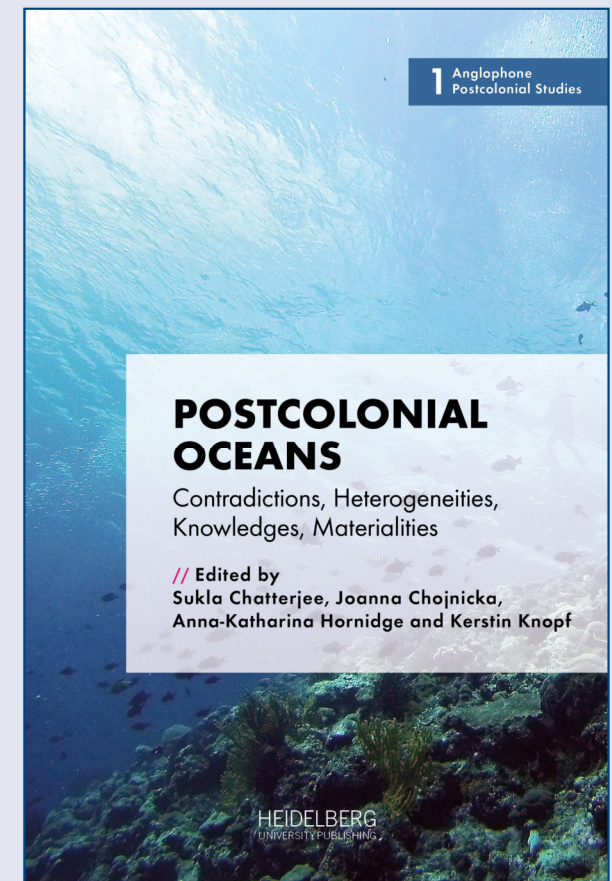
“to see Helen /as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow” (Walcott 271)

- no original language is available to the New World
- drawing on existing models not to be read as distorting Caribbean life but as establishing meaningful connections to its special situation and locale (Döring 193)

Blue Humanities

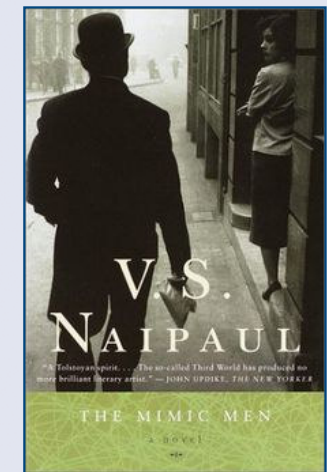
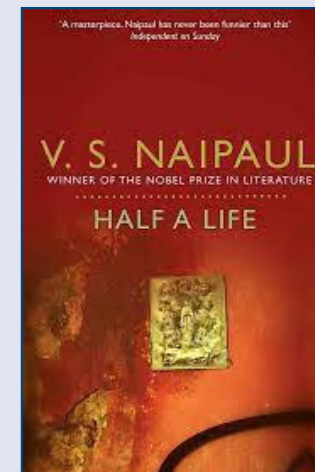
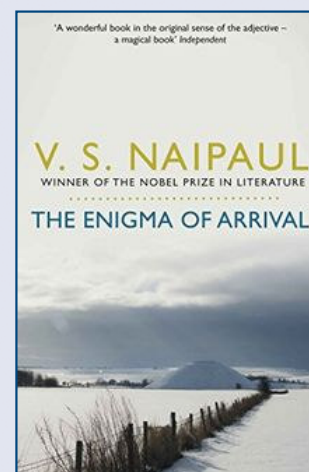
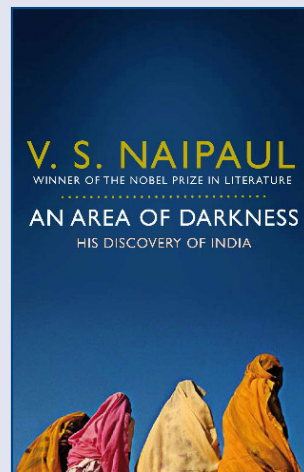
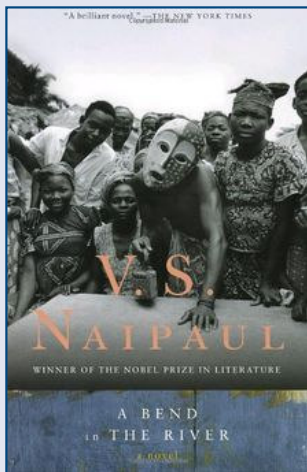
The Sea

- reasserts the interpretive significance of space
 - as the site of the Middle Passage and as marker of a distinct island experience
 - gives meaning to an inherently contradictory poetics of location, place and displacement
 - takes us beyond the static polarities of the global and the local
 - establishes non-anthropocentric perspectives
- becomes the medium to writer and rewrite histories from a decolonial perspective
- writes back to the generic tradition of sea fiction



V.S. Naipaul (1932-2018)

“for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories” (Press Release 2001)



“Naipaul has devoted much of his life to travel in different places in the world, which has come to be reflected in his novels as well as his travel writing and reportage.[...] At the core of many of V.S. Naipaul’s novels is colonialism and post-colonial society, where identity and alienation in a multicultural world are central themes.” (V.S. Naipaul Facts)



Genres	Themes
Writing Back	Intertextuality
Life Writing	Tourism
Place Writing	Feminism
History Writing	Migration / Nomadism
Rewriting	Postmodernism
Counter Travel Writing	Identity
Fictions of Migration	Transculturalism / Globalisation

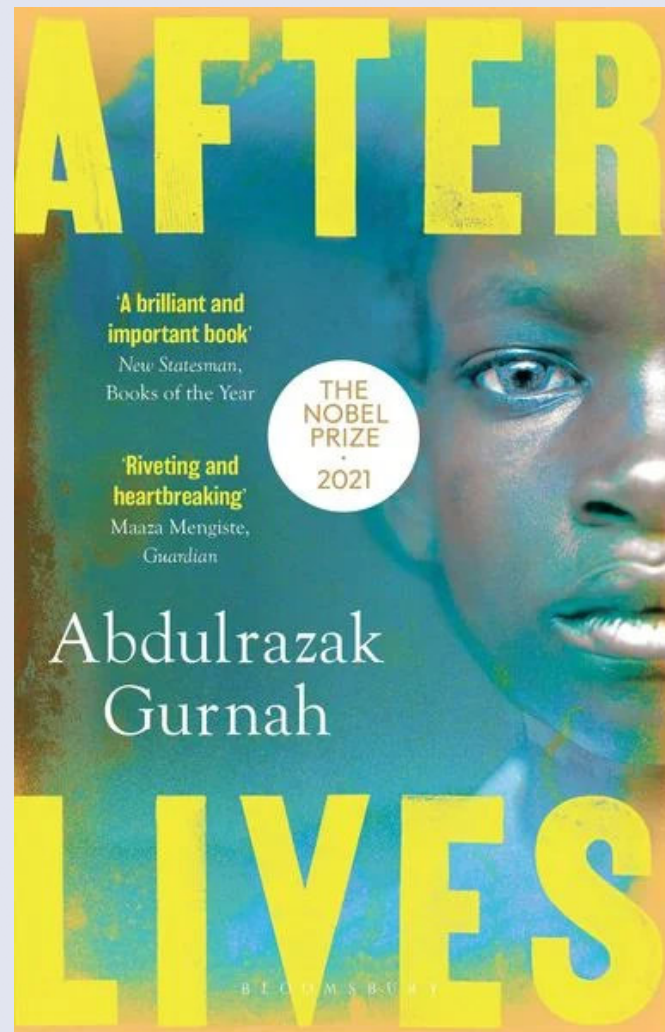
The Enigma of the Arrival (1987)

“Fifty years ago there would have been no room for me on the estate; even now my presence was a little unlikely. But more than accident had brought me here. Or rather, in the series of accidents that had brought me to the manor cottage, with a view of the restored church, there was a clear historical line. The migration, within the British Empire, from India to Trinidad had given me the English language as my own, and a particular kind of education. This had partly seeded my wish to be a writer in a particular mode, and had committed me to the literary career I had been following in England for twenty years. The history I carried with me, together with the self-awareness that had come with my education and ambition, had sent me into the world with a sense of glory dead; and in England had given me the rawest stranger’s nerves.” (Naipaul 17-18)



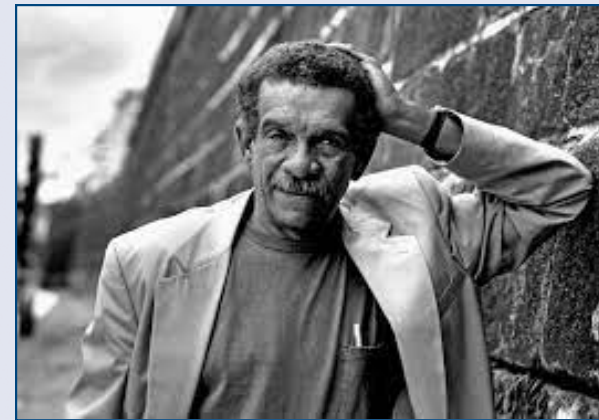
Literatures of Exile

Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Afterlives* (2020)



The Nobel Lectures: Literary / Political

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