

## **Myriam J.A. Chancy: an Introduction**

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Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and subsequently raised there and in Canada, Myriam J.A. Chancy is a Guggenheim Fellow and HBA Chair of the Humanities at Scripps College, California. Former Professor at the University of Cincinnati and the State University of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, she has taught courses in African Diaspora Studies, Caribbean Literature, Postcolonial Literature and Theory, Feminist Theory and Women's Studies, and Creative Writing. The range of her academic interests testifies to her personal commitment as a writer and a scholar, or, rather, as she puts it in one of her essays, «A (Caribbean Woman) Writer/Scholar» who, having lived longer in the US (where she completed her education) than Canada, and resided in both of the former longer than in her place of birth, has devoted herself to the exploration and expression of the intricacies of the world of modernity through the lens of her peculiarly Haitian, multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan rootedness.

Indeed, by pursuing a double, often converging, trajectory, the writer/scholar has not only produced both criticism and creative writing but has also included personal narrative and fiction (and even photography) in her criticism as well as deepened critical issues that possibly exceed the scope of her theoretical argumentation in and through her fiction. Chancy's astoundingly precocious scholarly career began with the publication in 1997 of two path-breaking books of literary criticism (*Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, Rutgers UP, and *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*, Temple UP, Choice OAB Award, 1998) that opened the way to Haitian Women's studies and contributed to the development of Afro-Caribbean Women's literature. Her more recent, broad-ranging, book *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic* (WUP 2012, republished in paperback in 2013) innovatively ponders the reasons for the exclusion of Haiti from contemporary Latin American studies and focuses, instead, on the connections that link the women writers of these three nations. A fourth book in progress, whose project has won her a 2014 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, is concerned with transnational Black subjectivities.

As a novelist, Chancy has produced *Spirit of Haiti* (Mango 2003; short-listed, Best First Book Category, Canada/Caribbean region, Commonwealth Prize 2004), *The Scorpion's Claw* (2005), and *The Loneliness of Angels* (Peepal Tree 2010; 2011 Guyana Prize in Literature Caribbean Award, Best Fiction 2010). As she herself points out in an interview, these novels investigate slices of Haitian history (the colonial and revolutionary past, the US occupation, the Duvalier regimes, the post-Duvalier era, the aftermath of the 2004 *coup d'état*) and make connections to how the legacies of the past impact the present lives of her characters. And yet, Chancy's are not, strictly speaking, historical novels, since, as she has admitted, she takes creative license with historical details and grounds her poetics not only in the duress of dictatorship and the intricate socio-historical terrain of class structure - and its impact on relationships between Haitians and immigration - but also in the spirituality of Haitian life and culture that transcends time and place. Such transcendence marks her first two novels and more so her third, which explores cross-cultural manifestations of mysticism through a narrative that weaves a path across different locations (Haiti, Ireland, Canada, France, and the United States) and from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. The excerpt below, focused on the 2010 Haitian earthquake, is drawn from her novel in progress.

Chancy's investment in Caribbean, Haitian, and, concurrently, issues of social justice, is also illustrated by the talks and creative readings on these subjects that she has delivered as an invited guest speaker in national and international contexts. A recent editorial advisory board member of PMLA (2010-2012) and of the Fetzer Institute (2011-2013), Chancy currently sits on the editorial board of the «Journal of Haitian Studies» (UC, Santa Barbara), and the advisory board of «Voices For Our America» (VOA) housed at Vanderbilt University.