

**CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN OF CANADA  
MANITOBA CHAPTER, INC.  
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# Cultural Awareness Workshop

Caribbean Literature

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# What is Caribbean Literature



# Caribbean Diaspora

- Blacks who live in various parts of the world outside of the motherland Africa

# Stories of the people

- Definition of Literature (Wiki)
- The body of all written works; The collected creative writing of a nation, people, group, or culture;

# Why tell stories

Some of the reasons:

- Transmit knowledge from one generation to the next
- To build common memory about events, people, places and language we use;
- To build a collective memory of important cultural events, vernacular language and people who were significant to our development

# Caribbean Diaspora

## **ENGLISH SPEAKING:**

**Antigua**

**Barbados**

**Dominica**

**Dominican Republic**

**Guyana**

**Jamaica**

**Montserrat**

**St Kitts and Nevis**

**St Lucia (English)**

**Trinidad and Tobago (English)**

## **OTHER LANGUAGES:**

**Cuba (Spanish)**

**Haiti (French)**

**Martinique (Dutch)**

**Surinam (Dutch)**

**French Guyana (French)**

# Literary themes

West Indian literature ranges over subjects and themes as wide as those of any other "national" literature, but in general many West Indian writers share a special concern with questions of:

- identity
- ethnicity
- language

that arose out of the Caribbean historical experience.

# Historical context

- Slavery
- Displacement
- Rootlessness
- Racism
- Oppression
- Identity

# Language

- Patois or Broken English
- Proper English
- Literature is expression in language
- Creolese
- Class/education

Dr. Louise Bennett Coverley at a 2003 Independence and Emancipation Celebration in Jamaica was quoted as saying



Dr. the Hon. Louise Simone  
Bennett Coverley  
September 7, 1919 - July 25, 2006

"We must celebrate our culture, it is ours...when you talk, talk Jamaican,"

# Louise Bennett

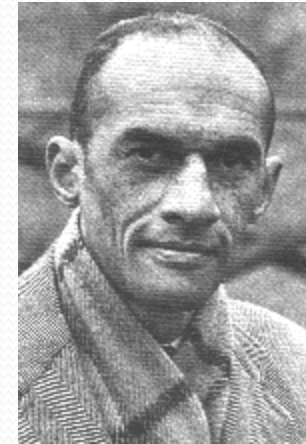
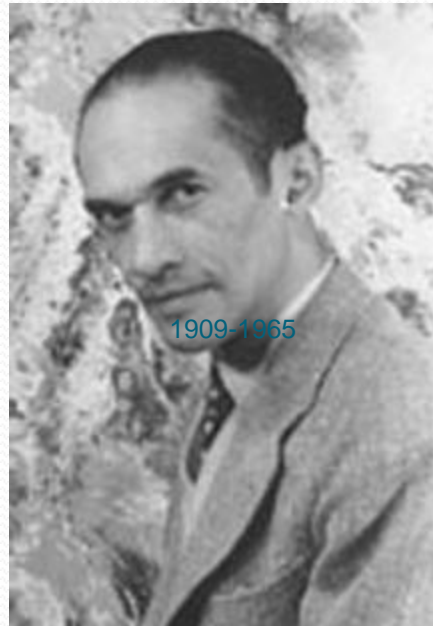
- Jamaica author
- Popularized vernacular language
- Lingering contentions of vernacular vs a vs good English
- Historical longing to emulate the colonizers and all their symbols to feel be accepted.

# Excerpt poem (Ms Lou)

- **Dutty Tough - Louise Bennett**
- Sun a shine but tings no bright;  
Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;  
River flood but water scarce, yawl  
Rain a fall but dutty tough.
- Tings so bad dat nowadays when  
Yuh ask smaddy how dem do  
Dem fraid yuh tek it tell dem back,  
So dem no answer yuh.

# Edgar Mittelholzer

## 1909-1965



# Edgar Mittelholzer

- Born in Guyana
- First Writer of note to come out of the Caribbean
- Bi-racial, mixed blood Mulatto
- Racism, angst of identity, inadequacy theme of his work because he was “swarthy” – a disappointment to his father – he showed too much African feature

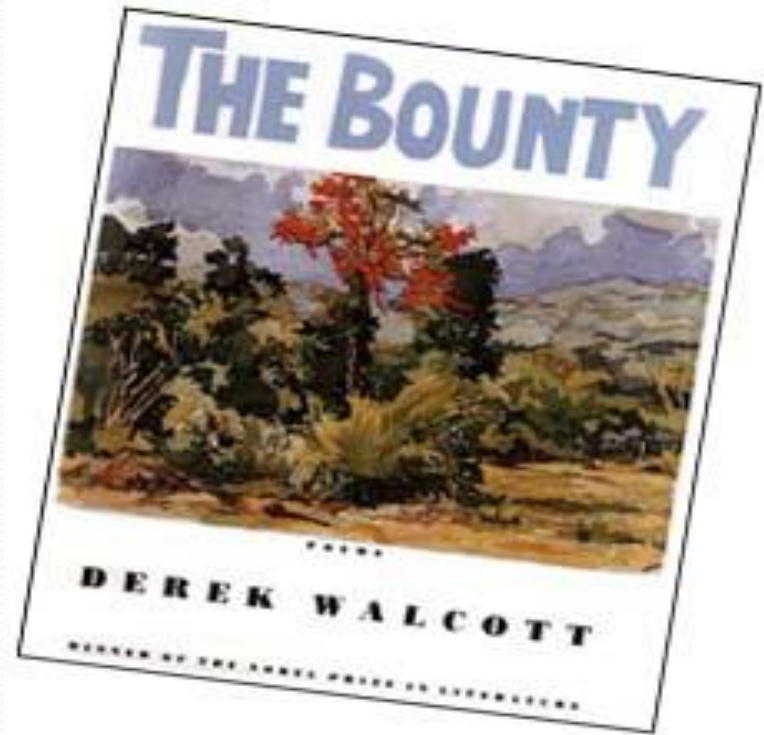
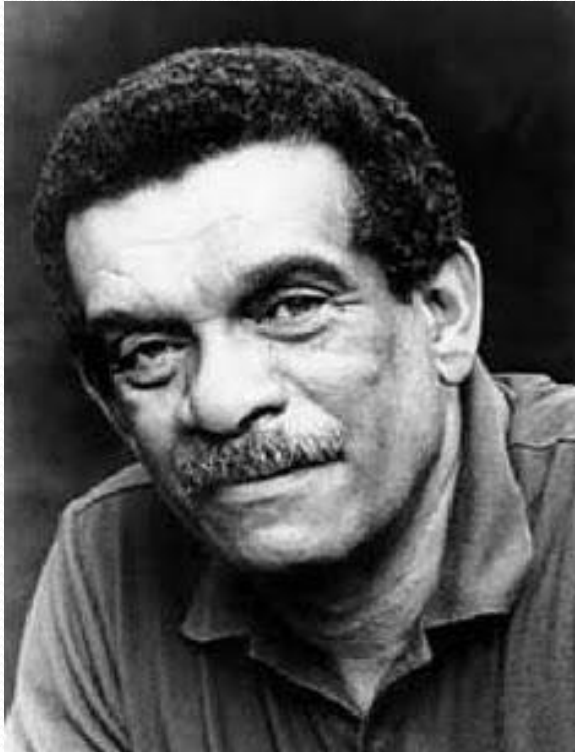
# Mittelholzer

- In these days I did not feel like a boy, and it was because my mother treated me with a sentimentality peculiarly her own. First of all, she felt she had to protect me against my father's impatience; I was the Dark One at whom he was always frowning and barking. Secondly, she was very feminine and just could not help being fonder of me than of my sister [...]. Thirdly, like my father himself, she was enough of a negrophobe to treasure my dead-straight European texture hair. The result was she let my hair grow long right to my waist like a girl's [...] (p. 28).

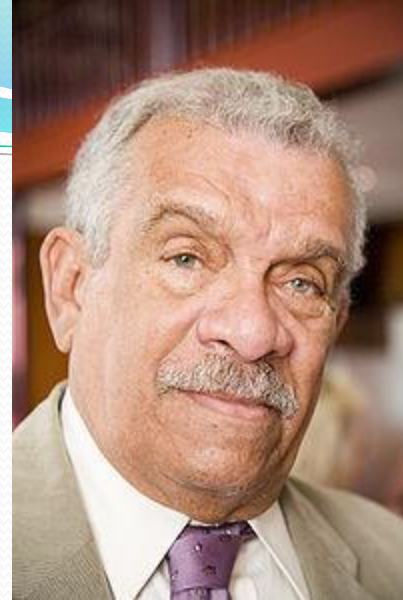
# Excerpt of Edgar Mittelhozer

- [...] I was born at 2 a.m. on the sixteenth of December, 1909. For my father, it was an occasion of momentous disappointment. I turned out a swarthy baby! Himself fair-complexioned with hair of European texture, [...] and his wife also fair-complexioned and European in appearance, he had, naturally, assumed that chances were heavy in favour of a fair-complexioned baby. [...] However, there it was. His first-born – a swarthy boy!  
(p. 17)

# Derek Walcott ( 1930)



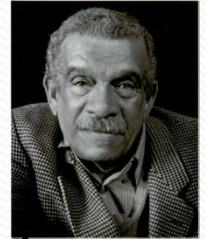
## Derek Walcott (1930 ) Nobel Laureate 1992



- West Indian poet and playwright noted for works that explore the Caribbean cultural experience. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992.
- Walcott bemoans the lasting effects of over 400 years of colonial rule. He reflects on the West Indies as colonized space,. He states: “...we are all strangers here (10). [...] **Our bodies think in one language and move in another...**”.

# Derek Walcott (1930 )

(contin)



- While recognising the profound psychological and material wrongs of the colonial project, Walcott simultaneously celebrates the hybridisation of Antillean cultures. His epic poem Omeros exposes the complex cultural strains that converge in his native St. Lucia, celebrating at once the European, Amerindian, and African heritage shared by the islanders.

# Exerpt from Derek Walcott

- **The Saddhu Of Couva by Derek Walcott**

When sunset, a brass gong,  
vibrate through Couva,  
is then I see my soul, swiftly unsheathed,  
like a white cattle bird growing more small  
over the ocean of the evening canes,  
and I sit quiet, waiting for it to return  
like a hog-cattle blistered with mud,  
because, for my spirit, India is too far.

# Walcott cont'd

- And to that gong  
sometimes bald clouds in saffron robes assemble  
sacred to the evening,  
sacred even to Ramlochan,  
singing Indian hits from his jute hammock  
while evening strokes the flanks  
and silver horns of his maroon taxi,  
as the mosquitoes whine their evening mantras,  
my friend Anopheles, on the sitar,  
and the fireflies making every dusk Divali.

# Derek Walcott



# Derek Walcott



# Dionne Brand ( 1953)



She has been an active fighter for the rights of marginalized communities, especially black people and women.

# Dionne Brand (1953)



- Being an Afro-Caribbean Canadian poet and writer, Dionne Brand is a particular kind of exiled woman who has made a strength out of her experience of multiple displacements. Of African descent, her cultural and linguistic history has been truncated by the forcible displacement of her ancestors from Africa to the New World.

# Dionne Brand (1953)

- Her life in the Caribbean has been affected and coined by the unavoidable impact of colonialism, namely the linguistic and cultural displacements which she often deals with in her poetry.



# Dionne Brand (1953)

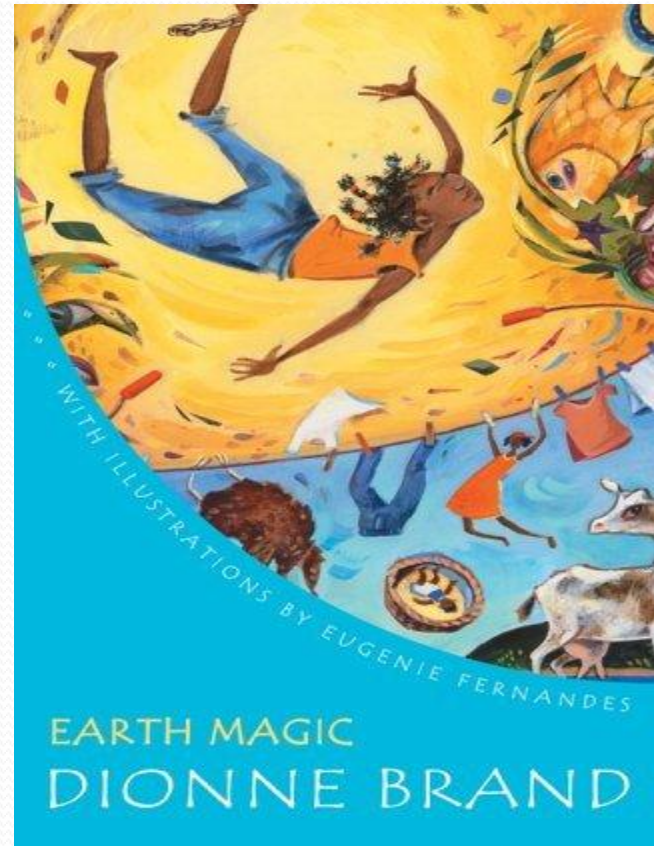
- In Canada, despite encountering racism and rejection, she has emerged as a multicultural and multifaceted poet and writer who has left a indelible imprint on the cultural mosaic of Canada.



Dionne Brand

## Toronto's Poet Laureate ( Sept 2009-2012)

- Laureate honours a Toronto poet whose work displays excellence and has written on themes that are of relevance to Torontonians.



## *Land to Light On*

- *Land to Light On* opens onto the landscape of Canada. “Out here I am...not even safe as the sea,” she writes. “If I am peaceful...is not peace,/is getting used to harm.” Brand writes about a place where she is an outsider – as any poet or painter must be – and also about the many outsiders who have come here and settled over the years, uncomfortable with the land and its people, uncomfortable sometimes with themselves.

# Dionne Brand



- No one writes about this country like Brand, free of post-colonial cant yet selvedge with Black suffering in the Americas. Speaking of memory but without a longing for the past, these poems hover between story and song; between groundings of life, wherever your landfall, and the grace of love and light. They ring with a poet's hesitations, a woman's praise and prayer for her people and their place. "It always takes long to come to what you have to say, you have to/sweep this stretch of land up around your feet and point to the/signs, pleat whole histories with pins in your mouth and guess/at the fall of words."

# Recognition

- Her ten volumes of poetry include **Land to Light On**, winner of the Governor General's Award and the Trillium Book Award in 1997; **thirsty**, winner of the Pat Lowther Memorial Award and a finalist for the Trillium Book Award and the Griffin Poetry Prize; **Inventory**, a finalist for the Governor General's Award; and the forthcoming **Ossuaries**.



# Accomplished

- **What We All Long For**, was published to great acclaim in Canada and Italy in 2005, and won the Toronto Book Award.
- In 2006, she won the Harbourfront Festival Prize for her contribution to the world of books and writing. Brand is Professor of English in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph.



# What Encouragement is there?

- Do you know of some family members, friends, kids, who are interested in contributing to art and culture in Canada?
- What encouragement do you give?
- Could you give more?
- Do you celebrate yourself ,your life and this land?

# Sites

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar\\_Mittelholzer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Mittelholzer)
- <http://images.google.ca/images?gbv=2&hl=en&sa=1&q=Derek+Walcott+website&btnG=Search&aq=f&oq=&start=0>
- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/634357/Derek-Walcott>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionne\\_Brand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionne_Brand)
- <http://www.mcclelland.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780771016455>
- <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/toronto/archive/2009/09/30/dionne-brand-is-city-s-new-poet-laureate.aspx>