



**Professor Gloria L. Cronin  
Professor of English  
Brigham Young University**

**College of Humanities Professorship**

**Professional Biography**

Professor Gloria L. Cronin was born in New Zealand in 1947, and graduated from Canterbury University, Christchurch, in 1968 with a double major in English Literature and Comparative Religion. She was awarded a postgraduate Advanced Teaching degree from Christchurch Teachers College in 1969. In 1974 she emigrated to Utah and attended Brigham Young University. She received an MA in American Literature and Middle English studies in 1976, and a Ph. D. in American Literature and Folklore in 1980. After a one year faculty position in the BYU English Department, she joined the faculty at BYU- Hawaii with a joint assignment in the English Department and Editor of Publications of The Institute for Polynesian Studies. She served as Editor of *Pacific Studies* from 1980-84, and Associate Editor from 1984-2003. In 1984 she returned to a faculty position in the English Department and became Associate Editor of *The Saul Bellow Journal* and in 1990, and Co-Editor in 1991. She has served as Executive Director of the International Saul Bellow Society since 1991, and published widely in the fields of Jewish American and African American literatures. In 1990 she was one of three founders of the American Literature Association, in which she continues to serve as Board Member and Executive Director. She has served in the National Endowment for the Humanities, and for the past 15 years she has run a variety of Symposia for the American literature Association. At Brigham Young University she teaches African-American, Jewish-American, Women's and Twentieth Century Anglo-American literatures, Postcolonial literature, and Contemporary Theory. Her current research involves fieldwork in African American religious communities.

**Professional Activities:**

Executive Coordinator :American Literature Association, 1988 to present.

Founder and Current Board Member: African American and Literature and Culture Society,  
1989 to present.

Executive Committee: African American and Literature and Culture Society, 2005 to present.

National Endowment for the Humanities Grants Committee 2002-2007.

WNET American Masters Documentary Series/American Novel Consultant.

Executive Director: International Saul Bellow Society, 1982 to present.

Editor: *Saul Bellow Journal*.

Associate Editor: *Pacific Studies: A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Pacific and Adjacent Areas* 1980-2002.

Conference Director: ALA Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium, 1993- 2008.

### **Awards:**

College of Humanities Professorship, awarded 2007.

African American Literature and Culture Society Editors and Authors Award, 2007.

Scholarship Award 2006 , BYU English Department.

Silver Key Award 2003, 2005, Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Association.

Service Award 2003, American Literature Association. For service to American Author Societies.

In 1991 her *Sixty Other Jewish Fiction Writers: An Annotated Bibliography* (9,000 entries) won the Pozner Bibliography Prize awarded by the Jewish Library Association.

### **Current Scholarship:**

Professor Cronin is particularly interested in the numerous syncretized and hybrid religious formations in postmodern multicultural American fiction. She is currently working on two books, one on Zora Neale Hurston's Afromystical postcolonial critique of Christianity, and another on the Afromystical dimensions of contemporary African and Afro-Caribbean American literature.

**Book-length publications:** Co-Editor, *Jewish American Literature Encyclopedia*, vol 5. of a *Multi-Ethnic American Literature Encyclopedia* by Facts on File, New York, 2009; *A Room of His Own: Bellow in Search of the Feminine*, Syracuse University Press (2001); *Conversations with Robert Penn Warren*, Eds. Cronin and Siegel University of Mississippi Press, 2005; *Jewish American and Holocaust Literature: Representations in the Postmodern World*. Eds. Berger and Cronin. SUNY Press, 2005; *Small Planets: Saul Bellow as Short Fiction Writer* (2000) University of Michigan Press, Eds. Bach and Cronin.; *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Essays* (1998) G. K. Hall; *Conversations With Saul Bellow* University of Mississippi Press (1994); *Jerzy Kosinski: An Annotated Bibliography* Garland Publishing Inc. (1991) Eds. Cronin and Hall; *Saul Bellow in the 1980's: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1989) University of Michigan Press. Eds. Cronin and Goldman.

### **Afromystical Metaphysics in Contemporary America:**

Many 20<sup>th</sup> century African American black writers, influenced by the post-colonial, Africana Womanist, Black Aesthetics, and postmodern politics of the 1970s, sought for a restorative model of history outside of Christianity and Western humanisms. Afrocentric metaphysics provided a pre-Middle Passage non- Judeo-Christian or Greek model, and had the further

advantage of being uncontaminated by American colonial history. Contemporary black writers such as Ishmael Reed, Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor, John Wideman, Toni Morrison, Edwidge Danticat, Ernest Gaines, Toni Cade Bambara, August Wilson, Alice Walker, Octavia Butler, Charles Johnson, and literally dozens of others, wrote novels with heavy deposits of Voodoo/hoodoo metaphysics. Many styled themselves as textual conjurers, root doctors who recovered much of the religious knowledge of the African ancestors. These writers recuperated these ideas out of community religious traditions, African ethnography, research on plantation slave religion, their own travels in Africa, and even from direct personal involvement. These writers, as well as others of the African Diaspora, have encoded countless novels with recuperated Afromystical knowledge. While this is certainly not the only mythos present in these sophisticated literary texts, it is the one most readers lack the reading codes to unravel. More interestingly for us as Americans and Mormons, is the history of how the Afromysticism or Vaudoun of the original African slaves became syncretized with an ecstatic Christian evangelical protestantism that swept through plantation life in American South, and with the French Roman Catholicism that dominated plantation life in Louisiana and New Orleans. This lecture will primarily describe this fascinating collision of religions in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century American history, the black Christian religious and theological practices that emerged, the actual metaphysics of Yoruban Afromysticism, and what all this might have to do with contemporary American life, and ancestor-conscious Mormons.

The accompanying Powerpoint lecture will include archival and photographic depictions of early plantation-era religion, contemporary African-based religious practices, and diagrams of Afromystical cosmography and theology.