

English 581
Studies in Commonwealth and Postcolonial
Literatures

Hybridity and Subalternity in the Caribbean
Summer 2011
CRN 31048

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Course Description

I have designed this seminar around twin intellectual goals: first, to provide a roughly chronological survey of some of the major literary trends of the Caribbean since the early twentieth century; and secondly, to choose texts that will help us understand the ongoing tensions and interaction over time between nationalist and culturally hybrid conceptions of Caribbean identity articulated locally and from the diaspora. The first goal, providing minimal historical coverage, is integral to attaining the second goal, investigating literary and political discourses of hybridity and nationalism, because debates concerning the construction of Caribbean identity in the islands and amidst the diaspora inevitably shift over time as political dynamics change in response to historical and social pressures.

In exploring the development of Caribbean versions of nationalism and hybridity, we will read some of the best-known texts of Caribbean modernism, as well as some literary works that have been overlooked or marginalized. The most recognizable texts of the 1930s-1960s, such as Aimé Césaire's epic national poem *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Frantz Fanon's explicitly nationalist writings, George Lamming's novel of rising black consciousness *In the Castle of My Skin*, and Jean Rhys's late-modernist (or early postmodernist) response novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* will thus be supplemented by an unpublished and nearly forgotten play by Una Marson about religious syncretism, *Pocomania*, and the creolized or

nation-language poetry of Louise Bennett. Later generations of writers, such as the theorist, novelist, playwright and poet Edouard Glissant's politicized theoretical text *Caribbean Discourse* and Jamaica Kincaid's screed against neocolonialism, *A Small Place*, will be supplemented with texts whose hybridity is thematized in different, less refractory ways, such as Erna Brodber's novel of hybrid belief-systems, *Myal*, and Earl Lovelace's novel of utopic national hybridity, *Salt*.

Students in the seminar will gain an advanced introduction to the field of modern and contemporary Caribbean literature through discussing novels, poetry, essays, drama, stories and films by many of the major cultural figures in the field, and by reading theoretical and historical texts that offer specific cultural grounding for, and raise questions about, extant and historical theories of hybridity. The seminar will introduce students to the field's critical and theoretical impulses in historical terms, and synchronically in terms of vital intellectual debates that extend and complicate the discourses associated with cultural studies. Students will sharpen their critical skills and historical knowledge, and the instructor will evaluate students' willingness to engage with course materials, through oral presentations and written essays.

I will present in class, and post afterwards, a longer course description.

Required Texts

George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953; 314 pp.)
Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; 103 pp.)
Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (1988; 96 pp.)
Erna Brodber, *Myal* (1988; 112 pp.)
Earl Lovelace, *Salt* (1996; 272 pp.)

Course Reader

Much of the course content will be available as part of the Course Reader. I will expect students to bring printed hard copies of these materials to class on the due dates. Printing costs for these

materials are part of your book costs for the course.

Summer Course Structure

Considering the collapsed structure of this summer graduate course (a 14-week course in 7 weeks), I know that there will be extra time pressures placed on you and me. This is not only because we have to read and discuss everything in such a short time, but also because digesting new ideas, working up research, writing and grading all have to happen so much more quickly as well. I have created our course syllabus with this unique time-frame in mind. The weekly reading load is almost always under 250 pages, although it varies in quantity (and density) from week to week. This will mean, nonetheless, that you have a lot to read each week, in addition to preparing your oral presentation and researching your final essay. Most of the assigned texts are relatively “writerly” or *scriptible* (to use Roland Barthes’s problematic but handy term), meaning that they purposely call for an active and alert reader; yet I certainly hope and believe that the selections will be fascinating (and even fun!) for you to read.

Like any single-semester course, and perhaps even more so because of its compressed structure, this course can only include a sample of writing from the field and period we are covering. The course by no means offers a comprehensive survey, although I have chosen texts that give some sense of chronological, cultural, and stylistic breadth. I hope you will recognize that the field of (postcolonial) Caribbean studies is vast enough to offer many other possible approaches—and that you will consider this course as an entrée meant to whet your appetite for more.

To offer you avenues for reading more deeply into the course materials, I have included an optional secondary readings section alongside each biweekly assignment. I encourage you to pursue these secondary readings, if you have extra time. I am also very happy to offer, in office hours, additional primary and secondary

reading suggestions, so please consider making an appointment with me.

Because the course is very compact, there will also be an added need for planning on your part; we move so quickly through the texts that you will need to think about your oral presentations and final essays virtually from the first week of class. I will be more than happy to provide feedback on your ideas before you start to write, so please make use of office hours if you would like to discuss your work. I will also endeavor to quickly return your work with comments so you will have time to digest my responses.

I am especially open to hearing your suggestions, given the compressed structure of the semester, as to how things could be made easier for you. You and I will be under similar time pressures, so let us be helpful to each other in making this summer course both useful and exciting.

Course Grades

Final course grades will be determined as follows (as a percent of the final grade):

- 1) Class preparation and participation: 20%
- 2) An oral presentation (1700-2000 words [apx. 7-8 pp.] and 10-15 minutes spoken), to be submitted in writing prior to your presentation: 30%
- 3) A final research essay (5000-5500 words [apx. 20 pp]), due August 22. A working thesis (including mention of the context, evidence, and significance of your project) and an annotated bibliography must be submitted by August 4: 50%

Grades will be assigned according to the following English Department guidelines:

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	76-79
B	68-75

I will give you ample notice of any changes to the syllabus.

If you have a disability, please let me know so I can help to accommodate you.

Computer use in the classroom

I have found that computer use during class is often a source of distraction. If you feel you must use a computer in class, please refrain from using it for any activity not directly related to class.

Late submission policy

I know that completing your work on time requires self-discipline, and I want to reward students who meet their responsibility to turn in assignments when they are due. To be fair to these students, I will deduct credit for assignments turned in late (5% per day). I will grant submission extensions under some circumstances, if you let me know at least a week in advance. Please give me documentation if there is a medical or other emergency situation for which you are requesting an exception to this policy.

Policy on unwarranted absences

Graduate seminars are participatory experiences, so please endeavor to attend every class. I realize that, occasionally, life's exigencies interfere with the best laid plans; please let me know if you must be absent for a class. The department additionally requires me to set a policy for unwarranted absences, which I consider any unexcused absences beyond two during the term; additional absences will result in a reduction of your course grade by 5% per absence.

Policy on academic integrity

Academic integrity is a sign of your interest in helping to build and support an intellectual community. Please be aware of, and adhere to, the UVic academic integrity policy (in the official Calendar). The department recommends that I set a policy on plagiarism and academic integrity. Using someone else's ideas or writing

without attribution (plagiarism) or other forms of academic dishonesty may result in your receiving a failing grade for the course. I may submit your writing assignments to TurnItIn.com for an originality review.

Grade extension policy

The department recommends that I set a grade extension policy. Extensions of the final essay submission due date may be granted at the end of the term only with very good cause—i.e., reasons of health or extenuating circumstances such as the death of a family member. I may set a deadline for submission of all materials at any time prior to the end of the following term.

Inclusivity and diversity

In 2010, the English Department affirmed the Senate's January 1999 statement regarding inclusivity and diversity: "The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive, supportive and safe learning and working environment for all its members."

Oral Presentations

During the semester, students will prepare an oral presentation of approximately 10-15 minutes, with a written version of 1500-1800 words to be posted to online to our Google Group (engl581-2011) in advance of the class presentation. We will select presentation dates in the first class (or prior to it via email)—*the first two brave presenters will receive an automatic 5% bump up in their grades for the presentation*. The assignment for the oral presentation is to answer one of the "probe questions" I have prepared for our assigned texts, or to develop a question of your own about the text and to offer a plausible answer to it. I will give you private feedback on your oral presentation style, and I will provide written comments and a grade on your posted essay. I recommend that you consult at least two critical secondary sources prior to writing your presentation, and that you make brief reference to these sources. Your presentation should not be on the same topic or text as your final course essay (I will consider rare exceptions to this).

When you are writing your presentation, think about the question you are answering: what kind of reader would ask or answer such a question? What work does the question do? In other words, think about the process of coming up with a useful question about the text you are discussing as well as about your response. Your presentation should present an argument: why do you think this question is a good question, and why is your response to it a useful or explanatory response?

Essay Submission

Please post your oral presentation write-up to the course Google Group site before the date on which you are presenting (see the posting instructions below). The electronic file you post must include *your last name as part of the document's file name* (e.g., “shlensky-581-oral-presentation.docx”). Please email me (you need not post) your final essay, with the same instructions regarding the file name. I may also request a hard copy of your final essay. Be sure to keep a copy of all the written work you submit.

Oral presentation posting instructions

For the purposes of posting shared work and maintaining discussions, I have created a Google Group for our class, very prosaically titled “eng1581-2011.” Please join this group when you receive an invitation from me via Googlegroups (you may use whatever email address you like to join), or request an invitation from me by going to <http://groups.google.com/group/eng1581-2011>. To view the group, once you are a member, go to <http://groups.google.com> and click on the group's name in the left sidebar. You can post questions or comments there for discussion among class members and me, and you can also post your oral presentation write-up there prior to presenting.

There are two ways to post documents to the group. The best way, by far, is to do so from within Google Docs <http://docs.google.com>. Once you have created your document in Google Docs (or uploaded it there), you can

then click the “Share” button and add the following email address for our group as your recipient: eng1581-2011@googlegroups.com. Alternatively, a less preferred way of sharing a document is to simply email it to the above group email address.

Messages posted or sent to the group, including posted documents, will be sent out as notifications to the email addresses of everyone who is a member. We will all thus have a chance to respond and dialogue with each other—and I very much encourage you to respond to discussion postings by your student colleagues (and me). Please send me an email note if you have any questions related to joining or participating in this group.

Final Course Essays

Your final essay, which is due on August 22 (except for those who need an early course grade), needs to be planned early! Because of the collapsed structure of the course, you may not have time to read ahead far enough to know for sure what you wish to write about. Consider this an opportunity to write about a text that you do not necessarily have a specific interest in pursuing beyond the course. To help you make a decision about what your essay topic, I suggest skimming through some texts in advance, and also reviewing the probe questions I have written for the assigned texts. These may give you at least an inkling of what you would like to write about, and your making such a commitment early will help you to prepare to write your seminar essay soon enough to give it due attention.

To help you plan your time, I am asking you to turn in a thesis statement of up to a paragraph, and an annotated bibliography (in which you list your references and explain why you are using them) by August 4. I hope you will already be well along the way toward writing your essay before this, but I want to have some idea of what your project is by that time. I also hope that having these materials due then will help you to prepare early enough so that you are not under even more pressure at the end of the term.

Your final essays can be thought of as following the same basic structure as the oral presentation. You may choose, if you wish, one of my probe questions as a starting point, or you may develop your own question about a text. Use your intuition to guide your first efforts to think about the text, and then develop a way of thinking about what makes a good question to ask about a text. How can you tell the difference between an open question and a closed question (that is, a question that can be factually answered and one that cannot be definitively answered)? Which of these kinds of questions generates the most dialogue in your own mind—or with a friend or student colleague? What kind of reader asks the questions you are most interested in posing? We will speak more about such questions in class.

Once you have identified a question that generates your own interest and enthusiasm, you may want to pose a few potential answers to the question without judging between them. Imagine yourself as a debater who needs to build equally valid cases for a ‘pro’ or ‘con’ position. Could you do so? What evidence would you bring in to fortify your views, one way or the other?

Once you have a question in mind, it is probably time to seek out secondary sources. Be creative in finding these sources. Of course, it is always worthwhile checking the usual databases for books and articles (JSTOR, Project Muse, MLA, WorldCat, Google Scholar, and the library’s book search). What is less obvious, however, is how to know what to look for. Sure, searching for an author’s name or the name of a text is an obvious strategy, but what other thematic or historical or formal or ideological aspects of your question might lead you to a particularly fruitful source of information and insight? I am happy to discuss this with you, and I also encourage you to bring this up with your peers. The course will have some sort of online component to make this easier—Google Groups or Moodle or Wikispaces or plain old email—so get comfortable with and make use of the

technology to start a discussion about your interests.

The number of secondary sources you bring into your essay will be up to you, but please remember that fewer than four or five secondary sources would probably not adequately demonstrate your ingenuity in researching your topic. Likewise, too many sources that are older than fifteen or twenty years would indicate that you are not engaged with other scholars in a recent *dialogue*. Try to become part of the scholarly conversation—that is a very worthy goal for a course essay (and, indeed, for a more elaborate project).

You may want to create separate files for yourself during the planning phase of your project that would include: a thesis statement, evidence, significance, and context. Drop materials into these files, including your own drafting of ideas, as you go along.

Once you have most of your materials together, I would encourage you to think about the structure of your essay as a whole. Try to front-load your essay with the argument at the beginning, rather than leaving your reader to wonder what point you are making. A happier reader, who understands why you are writing about a particular scene or dilemma, is much more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt than a reader who is confused as to your intentions. You can subtly address your reader by pointing out where you remain uncertain about whether your argument is convincing enough; this strategy works, however, only if you have clearly laid out the argument in the first place.

When you have completed a first draft of your essay, consider having a student colleague or friend read it before you work on the next draft. Most writers, for very good reason, go through a few major drafts in which they revise thoroughly, and any number of minor ones to make corrections, before they are finished with a project.

Please remember, finally, that I will be reading these essays under time pressure as well. It would help me if your final draft is as polished as can be and as direct as possible in explaining what you are doing in the essay and why you think it is important to do it.

About Me

It may be helpful for you to know a little about me. I am American-born and did my graduate work at the University of California, Berkeley, in Comparative Literature. My MA focused on the Enlightenment French *philosophes*, Rousseau and Diderot. My PhD dissertation was a comparison of the writing of two late-modernist/postmodernist writers, Aharon Appelfeld, an Israeli author who writes in Hebrew, and Edouard Glissant, a francophone writer from Martinique. I have since continued to work in both Caribbean and Jewish studies, writing on the francophone and, increasingly, the anglophone Caribbean, as well as on Hebrew literature and Middle Eastern topics. I am fascinated by the intertextual dialogue and rivalries between literary movements and eras, and by the ways that one generation departs from, or reformulates, what it construes as the dominant model of the former one. I am also interested in small societies, and especially those where the memory of a collective traumatic past becomes part of the larger cultural and political discourse. I am currently working on a research project on Glissant, and I am gathering materials for a prospective project on a young Jamaican poet, Millicent Graham. I have a side interest in film and semiotic theory, which was the focus of my undergraduate degree at Brown University. Just so you'll know, I have a newborn son, our first child, who I expect will someday understand why I will be spending so much time at school during his infancy this summer!

Schedule Of Assignments

Please read the assigned material before class and be prepared to discuss it.

Tuesday, July 5

Discussion of syllabus and course structure.

Preliminary surveys.

Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1936/1947; 27 pp); “Discourse on Colonialism” (1955, 24 pp); “Letter to Maurice Thorez” (1956, 7 pp).

Optional background reading:

Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (1997)

Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (2003)

Thursday, July 7

Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness” in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952; 31 pp)

Frantz Fanon, “On Violence” in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; 62 pp)

In class film: Isaac Julien, *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask*

Optional background reading:

Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, chap. 2 (1993)

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)

Françoise Vergès, “Creole Skin, Black Mask: Fanon and Disavowal.” *Critical Inquiry* 23:3 (1997).

Tuesday, July 12

Una Marson, *Pocomania* (1938; 30 pp); and selected poems: “In Jamaica” (1931), “Nigger” (1933), “Quashie Comes to London” (1937), “Kinky Hair Blues” (1937), “Cinema Eyes” (1937).

C. L. R. James, “Triumph” (1929, 7 pp).

Louise Bennett, “Jamaica Oman” (1982), “Colonization in Reverse” (1966), “No Lickle Twang” (1983?), “Dry-Foot Bwoy” (196?), “Back to Africa,” “Bans a killin” (1944), “Beeny Bud (Mussirolinkina)” (1957).

The Mighty Sparrow, “Dan is the Man” (1963; in Donnell & Walsh), and “Jean and Dinah” (1956)

CLR James, “Triumph” (1929; 7 pp) (in Donnell & Walsh)

Optional background reading:

Mervyn Morris, “On Reading Louise Bennett, Seriously” (1967; in Donnell and Walsh)

Anna Snaith, “‘Little Brown Girl’ in a ‘White, White City’: Una Marson and London (*Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 27:1 2008)

Thursday, July 14

George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953; pp. 9-108)

Optional background reading:

George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960)

Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *The Novels of George Lamming* (1982).

Curdella Forbes, *From Nation to Diaspora* (2005)

Bill Schwarz, *The Locations of George Lamming* (2007)

Tuesday, July 19

Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (pp. 109-227)

Thursday, July 21

Lamming, *In the Castle* (pp. 228-303)

Lamming, “The Occasion for Speaking” in *The Pleasures of Exile* (32 pp)

Tuesday, July 26

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; 15-97)

Optional background reading:

Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: an Unfinished Autobiography* (1979)

Delia Caparoso Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, chap. 3 (2002)

Patricia Moran, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma* (2007)

Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (2007)

Thursday, July 28

Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (98-171)

Tuesday, August 2

Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960; excerpt: pp. 19-47)

Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of an Epic Memory" (1992 Nobel lecture, 12 pp); "The Schooner Flight" (12 pp), and "The Sea is History" (3 pp), "Goats and Monkeys" (from *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, 1980).

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "English in the Caribbean: Notes on Nation Language and Poetry" (1979, 15-46); "New World A-Comin'" (9-11), "Tom" (12-16), "Folkways" (30-4), "Calypso" (48-50), "The Emigrants" (51-6), "Postlude/Home" (77-80), "Epilogue" (81-5) (from *Rights of Passage*, 1967).

Optional background reading:

On Harris:

Samuel Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, chap. 2 (2004)

On Walcott:

Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott* (2006)

Bruce King, *Derek Walcott: a Caribbean Life* (2000)

On Brathwaite:

Gordon Rohlehr, *Pathfinder* (1981)

Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Edward Kamau Brathwaite's Masks* (1992)

Thursday, August 4

Thesis statement and annotated bibliography for final essay due.

Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (1-26, 84-95, 120-134)

Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (80 pp); and "Girl" (3-5), "In the Night" (6-12), "My Mother" (53-61) from *At the Bottom of the River* (1984)

Optional background reading:

On Glissant:

J. Michael Dash, *Edouard Glissant* (1995).

Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles*, chap. 4 (1998).

On Kincaid:

Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Jamaica Kincaid* (1999).

General readings:

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (1993)

Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (1996)

Tuesday, August 9

Erna Brodber, *Myal* (1-111)

Optional background reading:

Selwyn Cudjoe, *Caribbean Women Writers* (1990) (essay by Brodber).

Shalini Puri, "An 'Other' Realism." *Ariel* 24:3 (1993).

Thursday, August 11

Earl Lovelace, *Salt* (3-133)

Optional background reading:

Earl Lovelace, "The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan." *Drama Review* 42:2 (1998).

Supriya Nair, "Diasporic Roots: Imagining a Nation in Earl Lovelace's *Salt*." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100:1 (2001).

Sandra Pouchet Pacquet, "The Vulnerable Observer." *Anthurium* 4:2 (2006).

Tuesday, August 16

Lovelace, *Salt* (134-260)

Thursday, August 18

Course wrap-up.

Course evaluations.

Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial* (2004; 20-41)

Junot Diaz, "The Sun, The Moon, The Stars" (1998; 66-71); and "The Haiti earthquake, a year later" (2010; 2 pp)

Edwidge Danticat, "Ghosts" (2008; 11 pp)

Monday, August 22

Final essays are due.