The Idea behind the Course:
“Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness”
As a site of expanding interactions, the Black Atlantic reveals an irreducibly transnational understanding not only of historical events but of peoples. The premise behind “Novels of the Black Atlantic” is that Black Writing teaches us “to read history anew” (in Wendy Walter’s words). The course brings together Caribbean, African, Black British, and U.S. novels for a detailed exploration of historical memory and representation, focusing on the role of the genre (and gender) in such recovery efforts. According to Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic themes and techniques “transcend ethnicity and nationality to produce something new.”

Required Texts:
Jean Rhys. *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) - CP
Course Packet

Recommended Texts:

After this course students will [hopefully ☺] demonstrate the ability

- to present individual ideas to the class and persuasively discuss the complexity of the texts and the contexts under discussion and, consequently, their different interpretations.
- to understand the basic generic conventions behind the novel;
- to interpret and analyze the novels on our syllabus using the basic terminology of literary
criticism;
- to write short essays of literary criticism that demonstrate knowledge of basic generic
conventions, incorporating contemporary critical discourse while demonstrating mastery of the
conventions of Standard English;
- to develop research skills, including the ability to search data bases, evaluate published
materials, and incorporate information gleaned from articles of literary criticism, source texts,
and works of historical/social background into their own critical writing skills to produce a final
paper as final evidence they have “joined the conversation.”

Assignments and Portfolio Grading:
You must complete ALL written work to pass the course. You are also responsible for ALL
readings--whether or not we have time to fully discuss them. Your final grade will depend
upon attendance, active and engaged participation, including the two discussion questions
for every class (25%) and progress in writing critically: a midterm essay (25%), an essay of
literary criticism that incorporates recent scholarship (35%), and the oral presentation of
your argument (15%) will be assessed.

I tell all my students on the first day, the highest grade they can anticipate (if they do not talk
in class) is a B- even if they can write like God herself. So if you think you are shy, this class is
not for you. I thought I was shy once... We need to look at specific passages TOGETHER, to
argue about interpretation, so the readings will have to come to class with you--your memory
of the texts will not be enough. I will reserve the right to send you home if you show up
without the novels.

WRITING: Papers are to be typed, preferably Times New Roman 12’ font, with 1.5 spacing
and 1” margins. Your name, the title of the course, my name, and the date the paper is turned
in should be typed on the top-left of the page, single-spaced; the title should be centered on
the page, below all that. No name and page number on title page (yes, I disagree with MLA
format here). There will be a header with your last name and page number starting on page
2. The paper should be stapled together. Do NOT include a cover page or a fancy folder.

THE CENTER FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: Tutors at the Writing Learning Center
(210 Milne Library) can help you with brainstorming ideas, organization, some grammar,
and revision. Bring the assignment and editing questions, and allow yourself enough time to
take advantage of the tutor’s advice. For more information go to http://www.geneseo.edu/english/writing_center.

SUNY Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for students with
documented physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. You should contact
the Assistant Dean for Disability Services (Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, Erwin 106 A)
and also talk to me to discuss needed accommodations as early as possible in
the semester.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS: This schedule may change at any time according to class needs
and demands. When a teacher puts a syllabus together, she does not know what to expect,
for each group is different. This is a new course, so you will have to be really patient with me.
I will always look at the syllabus as a work in progress—old course or new.

Week 1
8/31-9/4 Overview of the course/shared assumptions about literature/ what is the Black
Atlantic?/ What’s a novel?
Student-centered discussions, the “moves that matter in academic writing,”
research paper (with oral presentation) and portfolio grading explained.
The function of genre expectations


**Week 2**
9/7 M  No class: Labor Day
9/9-11  Jean Rhys. *Voyage in the Dark* (1934)

**Week 3**
9/14-18  *Voyage in the Dark*

**Week 4**

**Week 5**
9/28-10/2  Slavery and Art: *Specters of the Atlantic*


**Week 6**
10/5-9  *Feeding the Ghosts*
10/12 M  Fall Break: No classes

**Week 7**
10/14-16  Isabel Allende. *Island beneath the Sea: A Novel (P.S.)* (2009)

**Week 8**
10/19-23  *Island beneath the Sea*

**Week 9**

**Week 10**
11/2-6  *At the Full and Change of the Moon*

**Week 11**

**Week 12**
11/16-20  *A Mercy*

**Week 13**
11/23  *A Mercy*

THANKSGIVING BREAK

**Week 14**

**Week 15**
12/7-11  *The Lost Child*
Week 16
14 M Editing Day for your final paper (in class)

15 T Study Day Office Hours: 12:30-1:30

FINAL EXAM DAY: Wednesday, 12/16, 3:30-6:50 pm-- Oral Presentations
PORTFOLIO IS DUE on Friday, 12/18 by 3 PM (my office)

Final Thoughts:
(1) You cannot take this course as a correspondence class. What happens in every class cannot be made up by borrowing notes or doing extra work. If coming to every class is going to be a problem, this course is not for you. In order for this class to run smoothly, each of us must make a commitment to come to every class, to be here on time, and to meaningfully engage the readings.
(2) You should keep all the work I return with comments in a folder—I DO NOT have a gradebook and need to see all your work again to reach a decision about your final grade.
(3) If you fall behind, TALK TO ME. Don’t disappear. I’m not assigning late penalties for papers, but don’t take advantage of that.
(4) You will be able to revise your first two essays as many times as it takes for an “A.” I will let you revise the final paper if you hand it in before Thanksgiving Break.
(5) Plagiarism is intolerable. Refer to the College Policies in your Handbook.

If in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, attend one of the Fall 2015 Plagiarism Workshops:
Wednesday, September 9, 3:30-4:20 Room: Milne 104
Thursday, September 10, 6:00-6:50 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, September 15, 4:30-5:20 Room: Milne 104
Monday, September 21, 2:30-3:20 Room: Milne 104
Wednesday, September 23, 7:00-7:50 Room: Milne 104
Monday, September 28, 5:00-5:50 Room: Milne 104
Friday, October 2, 2:30-3:20 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, October 6, 4:30-5:20 Room: Milne 104
Thursday, October 8, 6:00-6:50 Room: Milne 104
Monday, October 19, 2:30-3:20 Room: Milne 104
Wednesday, October 21, 7:00-7:50 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, October 27, 5:30-6:20 Room: Milne 104
Monday, November 2, 4:00-4:50 Room: Milne 104
Tuesday, November 3, 5:00-5:50 Room: Newton 214
Wednesday, November 11, 6:00-6:50 Newton 214

Guiding Questions [for when you revise your short papers]:
1. Read the introduction to the argument. Is it effective? Why or why not?
2. What device does the writer use to convince you that her argument is worth pursuing? Can you think of a better way?
3. Are there any significant “facts” left out?
4. Write down what you think the thesis of the paper is. Is the thesis what you intended? Learn to be a critical reader of your own writing.
5. How would you characterize this writer’s ethos. Cite examples from the paper to explain your characterization. How do you sound like?
6. How is the paper organized? Briefly outline the paper. Are there ways to improve the flow of the argument?
7. Read back over the paper. Have you varied your sentence structure or do all sentences sound the same?
8. Look over the paragraphing. Does it seem coherent and logical? Are transitions effective? Do topic sentences need sharpening? Make sure you do not sound like you are merely paraphrasing the poem.
9. How does the paper end? Does the writer leave you with a provocative thought? Does she merely summarize what has come before? If it is merely a summary, your teacher will write “weak ending” next to it.
10. Do you find your title catchy? Appropriate as a “doorway into your argument?”
11. Check the paper for any mechanical or grammatical problems. FIX THEM.
12. Have you used the Present Tense throughout?

**The Research Paper:**

The first step for the success of this assignment requires that you find something you want to argue about one of the novels on our syllabus. A good starting point, experts believe, is for you to find out more about the author and the context surrounding the text you plan to enter the existing critical conversation. Once you know more about both (writer and context), you will be better equipped to focus your questions to develop your own original thesis. The more focused the argument, the stronger the paper. I need to hear your voice (ethos) throughout. You need to sound intelligent and balanced for your claims to be considered. Never praise the author of the text you are writing about. And PLEASE do not sound condescending. Your audience is someone who knows the text very well, so avoid (plot) summaries. Only include the facts from the text (logos) that are central to your argument.

Pay special attention to focusing your introduction. I usually write my introductions last. You only really know what the paper is going to accomplish once you are done drafting it. The introduction makes a promise it must fulfill. Think of a catchy title and of a first sentence that really grab your reader. Finally, make sure your introduction announces the organizational layout of the whole paper. It must.

Remember that you may change the sequence of paragraphs (the organization of the paper) for the best effect as many times as you revise, so you need to make sure transitions are always present and the topic sentence is focused enough. Remember that topic sentences advance the argument and are (preferably) thematically connected to the whole. Remember also to write in the Present Tense throughout (reading the paper out loud more than once is the only way to spot tense inconsistency).

Avoid unnecessary repetition of words.

Another important aspect of a successful research paper is for you to vary your sources: a book, an essay from a critical anthology, a journal article, a web source, an interview perhaps. All your references must be recent (within the last five years) otherwise your teacher may suspect plagiarism.

Make sure you achieve a balance between instances where you paraphrase what other writers have said (you still need to use the MLA format for parenthetical citations) and times when the other critic’s voice is required. Are you ultimately in charge of the researched material? You will write in the first person point of view, and vary the way to bring other voices into your “symphony” (vary the ways to introduce quotes). "Say" is an extremely weak verb, for example. Figure what the quote is doing and introduce it properly: according to “so and so,” “so and so” suggests, notes, emphasizes, argues, points out, claims, rejects, etc. should be used accordingly.

Anticipate possible objection(s) to your argument and build a plausible refutation. If there is a passage in the text that contradicts what you are saying, do not hope that Maria will not know it’s there... Bring it in. Your argument will be stronger if you attempt to refute it.
Finally, a strong conclusion does not merely repeat everything you have already said in the paper.

EDITING QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH PAPER (You will exchange drafts with a classmate)

Your name: __________________________________________________________

The other writer’s name: _____________________________________________

First read the introduction to the paper carefully.

1. Does the introduction to the paper provide the background you need to understand the argument/analysis that follows? Does it attract your interest? How would you improve it? Write down the essay’s argument in your own words, as you understand it from reading the introduction.

2. Read every topic sentence of every paragraph at least twice. Does it introduce the paragraph well? Does it flow nicely from the last sentence of the paragraph that precedes it? Suggest ways of improving transitions and topic sentences.

3. Does the writer use quotations well? Circle at least two examples in the paper itself. Are there page numbers after every quote? Does the writer remember how to punctuate with quotation marks? How well do the quotes contribute to and support the writer’s argument?

MARK ANY HIT-AND-RUN QUOTATION(S). Is there any section in the paper that would benefit from more quotes from the text? How many indented quotes are there? Are they 1.5 spaced without quotation marks and period inside the parentheses? Remember that you only indent if the quote is longer than four lines (we are using the MLA format).

4. How much does the writer vary the way to introduce her quotes? Evaluate all verbs used to introduce quotes and paraphrased information. Suggest ways of improving them. Remember that “SAY” is a weak verb.

5. Can you recognize the writer’s voice, the writer’s ethos, throughout the paper? Mark the passages in the paper where you miss the writer’s presence. Good writing means never exaggerate, nor condescend—watch for these too.

6. Do you disagree with any of the assertions made about the text(s), either interpretations or evaluations? Are there ways in which you would have handled the argument differently? Suggest ways in which the writer might incorporate your objections (by refuting them) into the paper.

7. Has the writer varied her sentence structure often enough? Could she have combined sentences more effectively? Remember “the arms of your sentence.”

8. Read over the concluding paragraph. Does it merely summarize the paper? What emotion/idea/question does the writer try to leave you with?

9. Has the writer used the Present Tense consistently?

10. Tell me how reading this paper has given you a new perspective on the essay you are working on yourself?

11. Do you find the title appropriate to the argument? Is it catchy? Can you suggest another one?

12. What about the works cited page? Are the sources recent? Is the format MLA?

Dates to Remember and some Extra-Credit Opportunities:
September 9 English Majors Welcome Event, 3:30 Welles 111
Monday 9/21 - poet John Gallaher, 7pm, location TBC
September 22 Alumni Lecture, Dr. Jacqueline Jones, “Embracing the Cultural Context: Reading August Wilson’s Gem of the Ocean as a Neo-Slave Narrative,” Time and Room TBA

September 23 All-College Hour Speaker, Maria Helena Lima: “Worlds in Translation: The Future Lies in Comparisons,” 2:30 CU Ballroom

Friday 9/25 - poet Carey McHugh, 2pm, Doty Tower Room

Wednesday 10/14 - fiction writer Karen Russell, 6pm, MCU Ballroom.
http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/authors/karen-russell

October 14 All-College Hour Speaker, George Kuh-Inaugural All-College Lecture, 2:30 CU Ballroom

October 19-24 Cultural Harmony Week – all events count as extra-credit if you write a response.

October 23 Upper Level Writing Workshop and Track Application Deadline, 4pm Welles 226

November 11 Last day to withdraw

November 16 Harding Lecture, 7:30 Doty Recital Hall

November 18 All-College Hour Speaker, Kris Dreesen, 2:30 CU Ballroom

December 9 All-College Hour Speaker, Paul Rogat Loeb, 2:30 CU Ballroom