

# *Myal-ing Criticism: Beyond Colonizing Dialectics*

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I<sub>N</sub> 1975, Erna Brodber suggested that social work needed a “methodological shift from traditional social work practice” in order to work with “the individual-in-his-community. Emphasis would be on helping the individual to grow within his community and on helping him to make use of the resources within his community towards his further growth” (*Yards* 61). If, however, the primary goals of “cultural engineering by imperialism” have been “the destruction of Africa[n-based] cultures, and the construction, in their place, of foreign cultures of the colonizer” (Saakana 9), how are Jamaican individuals within their community to negotiate the gap between the community as it has been constructed by imperialism and the community which might be constructed in such a way as to empower individuals? Post-colonial theory has been struggling with this point for some time, concerning itself more perhaps with theorizing the present polyvalent state of affairs than with positing future, truly *post*colonial, states of community. As postcolonial critics, we most often look at issues related to writing “back” to a colonial centre<sup>1</sup> or living on the periphery of colonial space, finding it difficult to posit a theoretical space in which the centre might not hold. Post-colonial writers, however, have sometimes been less reticent. A comprehensive theory of “possibilities” of existence beyond the colonial dialectic might profitably base itself on work being done in the area of Postcolonial or Commonwealth fiction.<sup>2</sup> Erna Brodber’s *Myal: a novel* (1988), for instance, begins by identifying “contemporary” local and global levels and processes of imperialist cultural and social “spirit thievery.” This text ultimately, however, constructs an active, supportive community which both

deals with the problems of the colonial dialectical space and moves beyond them to begin building a non-colonized, and non-colonizable, social space. In doing so, *Myal* intervenes in critical debates about the place and nature of education in the Caribbean, the actual and ideal sites of cultural production and identity (including gendered identity), and the possible constitutions of community.

*Myal* may be said to consist of two intertwined plots, both of which focus on a young woman. In one, Anita is the object of the aging Mass Levi's spirit thievery as he attempts to prop up his failing sexual powers by stealing her energy, psychically raping her. In the other, Ella becomes the object of spirit thievery when her foreign husband, Selwyn Langley, takes her memories of Grove Town and crafts them into an extremely racist, and very profitable, coon show. *Myal* focusses on the cultural and social processes leading up to the thieveries, while at the same time exploring the myal-ing which purges the characters and the Morant Bay<sup>3</sup> community of exploitative activities. The two non-linear plots are linked through a series of characters who live "doubled" lives and who heal on both an individual and a social level.

*Myal* interrogates the results and causes of an iniquitous vertical power system, colonialism. The text is a tale of the positionality of individuals functioning within and without Jamaica told through the psychic and physical landscape of Jamaica.<sup>4</sup> In *Myal*, the process of spirit thievery is paradigmatic of the issues postcolonial cultures face on a day-to-day basis. On a very basic level, spirit thievery is the illegitimate use of another person's body or energy (usually for nefarious purposes). According to the text's Reverend Simpson, however, spirit thievery is also a process whereby persons, both individually and as a people, are convinced by "Conjure men, voodoo men, wizards and priests" (66) of their inadequacy to hold power; they therefore give up a way of looking at life, a way of knowing, that empowers: "The two first principles of spirit thievery [are to] let [people] feel that there is nowhere for them to grow to. Stunt them. . . . [and] Let them see their brightest ones as the dumbest ever. Alienate them" (98). Thus, the unscrupulous have ruled those split from

themselves, “working zombie[s]” (67), from the time of Joseph and the Pharaohs. And given Erna Brodber’s membership in the Twelve Tribes of Israel (O’Callaghan 73) and G. E. Simpson’s (perhaps suspect) proposal that Rastafarians believe “black men are the reincarnations of the ancient Israelites and were exiled to the West Indies [hell] because of their transgressions” (Brown 128), Brodber’s choice to locate the origins of spirit thievery (sin) with those involved in the sale of Joseph in Egypt (66) leads to interesting conjectures about the nature of the West Indies as home. Willie’s contention that “some have to root” (67) where they are, creating a type of “practice pitch” (68) for those who might one day “make [their] way home,” returning to Africa on Marcus Garvey’s “Black Star line” (67), also gives rise to such conjectures. While G. E. Simpson contends that Rastafarians believe “the emperor of Ethiopia will arrange for African expatriates to be returned to the homeland [heaven]” (Brown 128), *Myal* clearly proposes a process of “redemption” much more active, communal in nature, and Jamaica-based than this.<sup>5</sup>

Spirit thievery, then, occurs on two intimately connected levels: the individual, as demonstrated in Selwyn’s patronizing treatment of Ella, and the social or cultural, as seen in Reverend William Brassington’s theft of “his” people’s individuality, the English school system’s interpellation of its black students, and Selwyn’s coon show. Naturally enough, the individual thieveries are symptomatic of the systemic or cultural thieveries. For instance, Reverend Brassington’s ministry “exorcise[s] and replace[s],” taking away “people’s spirit” (18) without adequately filling the space he ought not to have left behind in the first place. Though Reverend Brassington does not mean to harm his parishioners, the members of his flock are left like “the cleansed man into whom seven devils more powerful than the first entered” (18). Selwyn’s appropriation of Ella’s self and of her past bridges the two registers. Selwyn is the paradigmatic white man who uses “Othered” women as an entry point from which to rape “Othered” cultures. Most insidious, however, are the texts taught in the English school which work to internalize the students’ acceptance of the system of “benevolent colonialism” as practised in Jamaica. *Myal* focusses in particular on a “pernicious

allegory" (Tiffin 32) built around a group of recalcitrant farm animals clearly standing in for the "new caught sullen peoples / Half devil and half child"<sup>6</sup> (6) who must learn the justness of the Master's rule. The author of this allegory has "robbed his characters of their possibilities. . . . And left them to run around like half-wits, doing what the master has in store for them" (106). Thus, "it is not art, literature or history . . . but submission and acquiescence" (Tapping 53) which the school children of St. Thomas parish are taught. In fact, the desires of the nineteenth-century imperialist regulators of class and race segregation shape and control the author's tale. The Colonial Office, for instance,

advocated religious education, the requirements of small farmers, and a grammatical knowledge of the English language 'as the most important agent of civilisation for the coloured population of the colonies', and felt that 'the lesson books of colonial schools should also teach the mutual interests of the mother-country and her dependencies; the rational basis of their connection, and the domestic and social duties of the coloured races' [Earl Grey, Prime Minister, to the Treasury, 21st July 1835]. An Inspector of Schools reported in 1838, however, that the planters and employers would not support education unless it seemed to accept 'that the finger of Providence evidently points out the estate or the plantation as the natural field of industry for the majority of the rising generation of the poorer classes in these islands' [Latrobe, Inspector of Schools, Windwards and Leewards]. (Ramchand 20)<sup>7</sup>

The farmyard allegory manages to incorporate most of these elements into a seemingly innocuous "story" about animals who run away from the farm and come back again.

One of the tragedies of systemic spirit thievery (that is, colonialism) is that it creates situations in which it is not simply "them versus us." It is also "us versus us" and "I versus I." The lessons of the text become fully internalized.<sup>8</sup> Mass Levi's repeated psychic rape of Anita is an extreme manifestation of his life-long hunger for "control" (32) over the weak. Levi replicates the gaze and behaviour of the colonizers. His is the wrong way of knowing, the sort which assumes that the power imbalance created when one usurps the role of dictator is enabling. In this context, it is noteworthy that "Mass Levi had been DC—district constable—in the old days" (31). In another split of self and community,

Reverend Brassington's mother was a black Jamaican rumoured to have been "left [with the] seed" (16) of a very important Englishman, and it is Brassington's self-alienation which his wife Maydene thinks she can help by bringing a similarly awkwardly positioned Ella into their household. Self-division generates the disease which Ella contracts when she "trip[s] out in foreign" (4), experiencing "psychic trauma" when she finally comes face-to-face with the "surrogate self" (Saakana 13) she has created in response to education in the tradition of British literature. Even though functionally white, Ella is unable to successfully inhabit the fairy-tale English world constructed for her by texts such as *Peter Pan* when she travels to a white space, Baltimore. Ella's unreal world crumbles while she views Selwyn's distorted version of her heritage and of herself recreated bodily on stage. Forced finally to see herself as affiliated with the "wrong" end of the Manichean allegory, and yet unwilling to be the "white" character in a coon show, she becomes angry with herself for having helped Selwyn to appropriate and debase her heritage. She accuses herself of complicity: "It was you who let him take everything. You gave him everything" (84). Interpellated as the native informant, Ella internalizes the destructive psychic split attendant on living a pretence and comes close to dying. Only the intervention of the myal-man, Mass Cyrus, can bring her bodily relief. Her healing is not complete, however, until she learns that there are ways of short-circuiting the system, of refusing complicity.

Complicating this already complex set of interrelations is the question of gendered oppression. Elaine Fido comments that "the new decolonization battle being fought in the Caribbean is that of woman against man, and the parallels with the more familiar decolonization struggle are many" (37). In particular, it would seem that Brodber is working at defusing the stereotype common to the West Indian writing tradition of the "highly sexed and sensuous Coloured woman" (Ramchand 41). Selwyn, for instance, explains to a previously unconcerned Ella "that she was coloured, mulatto and what that meant, taking her innocence with her hymen in return for guidance through the confusing fair that was America" (43). What Ella's colouredness "means"

for Selwyn is actually presented in his vision of "a white-skinned girl . . . chased by outstretched black hands grabbing at her and sliding" (83-84) who is not "pedigree[d]" enough to bear him official children (80). *Myal* investigates the social forces contributing to the birth of many children "without the benefit of wedlock" in the cases of Mary and Euphemia. The discouraging prevalence of these forces reveals itself in Amy Holness's suspicions that Maydene has uncharitable designs upon Ella: "This blasted white pillow case with a string tied in the middle. These white people just wan tek people pickney fi practice pon. Want Mary good-good pickney fi pasture out to her two red-face son. Is pumpkin belly dem wan send this one back home with too?" (20). The basic inequities of the Brassingtons' early interactions, and the situation which develops between Mass Levi and his wife Iris, show up other dangers inherent in the acting out of restrictive and prescriptive gender roles. It is because Mass Levi cannot deal with his own impotence (and his powerlessness over his own body) that he tries to acquire power through psychic abuse of Anita's body, that he thinks he has the right to "use the young girl's spirit to get him back his powers" (76). Levi's rejection of his wife at this point leaves her frustrated in her attempts to fulfil her role as wife; Mass Levi turns completely away from Iris when he cannot prove his masculinity through sex: "Then Mass Levi added something new which really hurt his wife. He was now fasting. 'What am I for?' she said to herself. 'Not even cooking for my husband? Mercy!'" (63). And it is Reverend Brassington's misuse of his position as "head" of the family which allows him to engineer Ella's "migration from the family, from Grove Town, from Morant Bay and from Jamaica, and into Baltimore, USA" (45) and ultimately into Selwyn's lecherous grasp. Everywhere, the fact that "the God of the garden had stacked the cards so that [a black, a brown, or a white woman] could not say 'No'" (87) comes into play as an obvious consequence of the intersection of race and gender oppressions.

Just as there are many ways and types of spirit thievery, there are many ways of acting to short-circuit the propagation of that thievery. *Myal*-ing, or healing, is achieved through a process of working with "the individual-in-her/his-community." At its most

basic level, this process involves the refusal of violence, the return of the violent gesture to its perpetrator by and through the community. It is thus that the Morant Bay community rejects the violence of Mass Levi's obeah acts. His murderous energy is returned to its source by the joint effort of Miss Gatha (a spirit worker or myal-woman), Reverend Simpson (the Baptist minister), Maydene Brassington, Ole African (an African stiltman, the arch-punisher), and a host of supporting characters. Unfortunately, in the case of Selwyn's use of Ella's spirit and past, the scope of the act is not restricted to the community; Selwyn's violence cannot be delivered back to the perpetrator himself and is loosed upon the world. "Pain, confusion and destruction is what these new people bring to themselves and to this world" (3) comments Mass Cyrus. The process of myal-ing this pain, however, also initiates the "short circuit[ing of] the whole of creation" (4), which enables Ella to see the message hidden behind the school's animal farm stories.

Ella's realization is the culmination of some six hundred years of planning. If colonialism and the colonial education system have interpellated their subjects, the psychic alter egos of Mass Cyrus, Reverend Simpson, and Ole African (Percy, Dan, and Willie) have spent more than a half-millennium culturing a virus with which to inoculate the colonized and, thereafter, the colonizer. Reverend Simpson teaches Ella how to empower herself as a critic when he deconstructs the assumptions underpinning the role of the teacher: "You have a quarrel with the writer [of the animal allegory]." Simpson says, "He wrote, you think without an awareness of certain things. But does he force you to teach without this awareness? Need your voice say what his says?" (107). Thus, Ella comes to an understanding that she can intervene in the process by which the "subject" is "fashioned *in the first instance* as the effect of colonialist education as it circulates and regulates the valency of literary meaning" (Slemon, "Teaching" 153). When Ella begins to teach "the text in terms of what it was designed to inculcate . . . teaching so as not to interpret or elucidate its meaning as pure text, but to point out whose interests the story and its allegorical elucidation were designed to serve, the effect it was intended to have on its readers" (Tiffin

33), she begins to strengthen her schoolchildren's psychic immune systems so that they may fight the systemic disease, "carried" by the voodoo men of the British Museum, which eats away at their self-worth. And *Myal* ultimately suggests that the British Museum and Whitehall will in turn be interpellated to such an extent that "the under secretaries [will be] bowing their heads and saying: 'Yes, yes, yes. We are spirit thieves. We shouldn't have done it'" (109). Thus *Myal*, through an insistence on the unstoppable force of a coherent community effort at education in the positive rather than eradication or fossilization, resists a belief that "if we start by introducing a single foreign element [into our native civilization], we are driven, ultimately, to introduce a whole set of foreign elements. Our choice, in a word, is between all or nothing" (Debraprasad Bhattacharya in Blaise 120). Foreign elements notwithstanding, then, Ella, having had the benefit of the myal process, now takes up myal-ing. She is going to "[s]hort circuit the whole of creation"; "That little gal's gonna break it up and build it back again, man" (110). Ella has learned, in Sylvia Wynter's words, that

[t]he degree of thistleness or figness in the products turned out from the schools, depends to some extent on us. Wherever there is a failure in the system, it is partly our failure. After all, WE ARE THE SYSTEM.

. . . if we continue to believe . . . that our role is merely to receive fig trees and help them grow into figs, then we can continue to indulge in . . . buck-passing . . . But if we believe in a dynamic process . . . then we accept that the buck stops right here.

. . . the only possible role for this most expensive piece of equipment, put down in a poor society, is the role of transforming thistles into figs or vice versa; or failing that, to devise ways and means by which thistles will be far more useful and valuable — than those much over rated figs, which I for one, have at all times found unpalatable.<sup>9</sup> (Brathwaite 65)

*Myal* thus creates a space in which the community is strong enough to rewrite the colonizer, one way or another.<sup>10</sup> If myal is the process by which one resists spirit thievery or recovers both those doing the thievery and those the thievery is practised upon, the processes and levels of myal-ing in this text are legion and work in concentric and interlocking circles. Implicated in these

circles, woven into them, no one can afford to situate herself on the outskirts of the community. She must and eventually will be an integral part of the process of re-creation. It is, therefore, from her site of involvement with all the positions and emplacements of the myal process that Maydene Brassington, as a representative of the outsider with a colonialist background, must be seen. The daughter of an embarrassingly philanthropic white liberal who cultivates blacks as some sort of goodwill project, Maydene rises above her training and insists on the value of her adoptive community. Maydene refuses the position of the sympathetic outsider, which is the way Reverend Simpson keeps trying to see her, and becomes a necessary part of the spirit group which works to heal, inoculate, and teach its community. After the death of Mass Levi, Miss Gatha initiates Maydene: “[Miss Gatha] paused and said teasingly, like a man giving his girl her special little name to be used by them only, ‘White Hen’. The spirits had finally acknowledged each other. White Hen became incarnate” (77). The white liberal body gains an animal (totemic) spirit and is “accepted into a recuperated Jamaican community—recuperated that is, from a destructive history of English political and textual control” (Tiffin 34). Maydene and Miss Gatha work together as the text itself does, as a negation of the idea that the exclusion of any element is warrantable. Maydene, and by extension all elements of society, must participate in the re-creation of community and they/we must do this while taking into account the crippling systems already at hand. Thus, the myal-ing that happens in this text actually effects an extraordinary co-optive move which alters the positionality of the whites in the Morant Bay community, making it possible for them not to be colonizers. They are enabled to become community members without the community absorbing white (colonizing) values. In fact, the community working as a whole is able to emphatically erase the colonizing values embodied in Mass Levi’s person.

Just as the text deliberates on the present and future place and nature of education and community in the Caribbean, its actual description of the events attendant on the myal-ings of Ella and Anita displays the way in which *Myal* participates in debates about the nature of artistic expression appropriate to a Jamaican com-

munity. If Kipling, *Peter Pan*, and coon shows are examples of the sort of colonizing “art” that segregates and oppresses, these two myal “acts” are “folk” festival and Yard performances<sup>11</sup> of which no one, including the reader, can refuse to be a part; all are, by implication, drawn in. If “One of the principles of Yard [spontaneous “street” theatre]<sup>12</sup> is/was the bringing together of ‘schooled’ and ‘unschooled’ artists: the elite and [the] mass” (Brathwaite 191) through the publication methods of the street, the events in *Myal* operate on an equally profoundly democratic and anti-“modernist”<sup>13</sup> level. While the text suggests that, during the myal-ing of Anita, the “drumming was faint in Morant Bay. Only those who had those kind of ears or who knew what the drumming could mean, could hear” (79), the language of the “animal spirits” of this text, indeed the language of the text itself, sets up an inclusive beat-based (drum-based) communication network which works to bring all, even those who must be taught to hear, into the action. The central section of the text in which Dan and Willie psychically communicate makes this act of artistic communication apparent. Covering three pages, the call and answer format of conversation slips into a rhythmic discourse through which Dan is encouraged to think through his understanding of both the source of colonialist oppression (an appropriation and misuse of “our voice” and “our song” [66]) and what must be done to rectify that original transgression (68). In the process of repeatedly replicating exchanges in which the theoretical and applied nature of imperialism is laid bare, the text writes over the reader’s understandings of these issues as well, inviting a readerly complicity in the dismantling of the Empire. The text undertakes to reify a process of perception and expression alteration which “short-circuits” the system currently responsible for organizing perception. If the British Museum (as a symbol for those who are unable to think and/or act outside a colonial paradigm) cannot think a concept for which it has not words, the myal process/group will give it words and concepts which work within (are produced by) the rhythms of an inclusive but non-uniform Jamaican culture, words, and concepts also offered to the reader.

It is important to the myal-ing of faulty gender relations that the actual myal-workers, female and male, share the responsibility for healing, working out their relationships as they do so. In many ways, *Myal* fills “the gap between our understanding of male experience in Caribbean societies, as history has traditionally been defined, and our need for a picture of Caribbean societies that includes the experience of women of different social classes, ages, ethnicities, and races” (Silvestrini 3). It is Miss Gatha, Mother Hen, who controls the drums and drives out the violent sexualized assault of Mass Levi. Through her association with the inhabitants of Grove Town, Maydene Brassington is given (and willingly undertakes) a “ministry” (44) which gives her back herself, making her more than just “the parson’s wife” (20): “[William] looked under his eyes at her and looked away. But Maydene appeared not to notice him. This really scared the Reverend. Then he took a good straight look at her and saw that his wife was thinking. Her own thoughts. Her spirit was not there at ready waiting to take his orders” (89). Ella O’Grady, with the help of Mass Cyrus and Reverend Simpson, also moves through stages of disassociation from herself, connection with her flesh, and realization of her vocation and avocation in teaching, where she begins to act against the type of oppression she has earlier experienced. She takes control of her own life and body and answers her own expectations of agency:

If a passage has been opened in you, if substance had been drained from you, then your body was being purified to prepare you to produce. Selwyn was her architect. If he could not show her how to fill the spaces he had created and give her too, a chance to create, then what was the point of all this draining and changing and losing her friends? (82)

Women’s experience of and contribution to Jamaican society is spoken of through the interactions of women who exchange children, recipes, and knowledge, living their lives the best they can, and intervening in the zombification of society whenever and wherever possible.

Critics often point to the way in which Caribbean literature situates itself in sites of fracture because of its material basis in a cultural site of hybridity: “Caribbean writing exploits precisely

this terrain of the unspeakable. In the radical questioning of the need to totalise, systematise and control, the Caribbean writer is a natural deconstructionist who praises latency, formlessness and plurality" (Dash 26). *Myal* certainly explores the possibilities inherent in sites of fracture; it posits the effectiveness of short-circuiting History and the belief systems to which History gives rise. Because the "animals" or the spirit voices associated with the characters of Miss Gatha (Mother Hen), Maydene Brassington (White Hen), Reverend Simpson (Dan the mongrel), Mass Cyrus (Percy the chick), and Ole African (Willie the pig), occur historically and/or textually, as precursors to the Joe's Farm tale, the English "animal" tale itself occupies a reactive position, and the community of voices gets out of the "acting back" paradigm. If "all forms of discrimination against the colonized in Jamaica and the West Indies stemmed from the colonizers' general conception of Jamaicans and West Indians as animals, as something less than human and hence uneducable" (Brown 80), *Myal* enacts a preemptive strike which annihilates the allegorical purchase of that conception while at the same time refusing to give away the importance of an African totemic tradition. The alternate reality of *Myal* is based in a community which exists in and of itself, not solely as a strategy for working against cultural hegemony. Though *Myal* does take contemporary neo-colonial realities into account, its community is outside of binary necessities. *Myal* is thus a womanist "creole" text, one which (to use Huggan's comment on Brathwaite's use of the term creolization)

ultimately implies neither a perpetuation of 'white' (ex-colonial) values or a recuperation of 'black' (indigenous) values within the post-colonial society but an interculturative process within which a series of intermediary postures are struck up that elude or actively work against the binary structures (white/black, master/slave [male/female]) which inform colonial discourse but which have also survived in modified or transposed forms in the aftermath of the colonial era. (Huggan 31)

The novel situates itself in a site of continuing historical resistance, and its definition and creation of community are clearly broad and inclusive. While struggling to move beyond the crippling need to be reacting always to the "givens" of a colonialist

dictatorial structure, the text intervenes in critical theoretical debates about vital issues affecting the relationship of Jamaica (and postcolonial cultures) to itself and the world around it. In 1978, Edward Brathwaite wrote that "the daughters of the Revolution are providing us with a way of seeing=thinking/feeling=saying: so that we are beginning to possess a literary criticism not of description (of parts, of features) but of *explanation*" (184). Erna Brodber's explanatory text enacts a myal process upon colonialist education systems and notions of community and identity, as well as upon critical dichotomies, by offering the reader alternate methods of perceiving. *Myal*, working through the fact that in "the Caribbean, . . . resistance is synonymous with the cultural reaffirmation of the people" (Cudjoe 66), produces a communal sensibility which leads the way towards a non-colonized, non-colonizable social space which empowers the individual-within-the-community.<sup>14</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 See, for instance, *The Empire Writes Back*, as well as current debates about subalter- nity and agency.
- 2 Stephen Slemon, for instance, suggests this in "Modernism's Last Post."
- 3 Morant Bay is a site of considerable historical and social significance. Victor Reid's *New Day*, for instance, "links the granting of a new constitution to Jamaica in 1944 with the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865" (Ramchand 100). Cudjoe further notes that "in the period prior to the Morant Bay Rebellion (1832-1865), there was a resurgence of African cults, and 'myalism,' a Jamaican mystical cult, became very important" (66).
- 4 This is not to say that the text is "universal." Like many of the other aspects of the text, its very localized quality is something which functions outside the simple either/or dichotomous value system implicit in the prescriptive act of judging a text "good" only if it transcends specificity in favour of dealing with *the* human condition.
- 5 See also the communal ridicule of Bada D in *Myal* (7).
- 6 It is an extremely ironic moment in the text when Ella O'Grady, the "alabaster" (7) black child, who later violently internalizes imperialist double-standards "[m]ade in the USA," stands up to recite "The White Man's Burden," a text written in 1899, "to encourage the Americans to invade the Philippines" (Goonetilleke 28). See Walker-Johnson on the metaphoric resonances of Jamaica-U.S. relations found in the relationship between Ella and Selwyn.
- 7 For an overview of the historical background of the Jamaican education system, see Ramchand's chapter on "Popular Education in the West Indies in the Nine- teenth Century," which documents a "history of administrative incompetence, unimaginativeness, lack of purpose and conflicting [including Christian denomi- national] interests with a social and economic depression" (19).

- <sup>8</sup> This point echoes a recurrent concern expressed in West Indian texts. See, for instance, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953): "The image of the enemy, and the enemy was My People. My people are low-down nigger people. My people don't like to see their people get on. The language of the overseer. The language of the civil servant. The myth had eaten through their consciousness like moths. Moths through the pages of ageing documents. Not taking any chances with you people, my people" (26-27). I am grateful to Dan Coleman for this reference.
- <sup>9</sup> Wynter is speaking of the University of the West Indies, but her comments apply to the educational system as a whole.
- <sup>10</sup> See Walker-Johnson for a somewhat less hopeful, more transition-based reading of *Myal* which places greater emphasis on Reverend Simpson and focusses on the specific divisions present within the Morant Bay community. Walker-Johnson also traces the variant positionality of a sometimes white, sometimes black Ella.
- <sup>11</sup> Ella's myal-ing also seems a thoroughly refurbished version of Kumina (or Cumina) ceremonies, and certainly the choice of Morant Bay as the place of action would seem to support such a reading (the area having a tradition of both public and private Kumina ceremonies and the main female Kumina singer there being referred to as "Mother of the Cumina" [Simpson 179]), but I don't consider myself well-versed enough on the subject to attempt a discussion of this topic.
- <sup>12</sup> See Brathwaite (181-85) on the specific place in which Marina Maxwell's Yard was performed and Yard's significance for Jamaican literature.
- <sup>13</sup> "Modernism" is being used here in the sense that "in order to create a national literature it was not enough just to write about national subjects"; one must "[measure] up to international standards" by focussing on "stylistic considerations" (Coulthard 9).
- <sup>14</sup> I would like to thank Dan Coleman, Simon Estok, Stephen Slemon, and Linda Warley for their comments on an earlier version of this article. I would like also to acknowledge financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in the form of a Doctoral Fellowship.

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