





ANN5244  
LAC







This is an authorized facsimile, made from the microfilm master copy of the original dissertation or master thesis published by UMI.

The bibliographic information for this thesis is contained in UMI's Dissertation Abstracts database, the only central source for accessing almost every doctoral dissertation accepted in North America since 1861.

## **UMI** Dissertation Services

A Bell & Howell Company

300 North Zeeb Road

P.O. Box 1346

Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-1346

1-800-521-0600      734-761-4700

<http://www.bellhowell.infolearning.com>

Printed in 2001 by digital xerographic process  
on acid-free paper

DPPT



## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

The negative microfilm of this dissertation was prepared and inspected by the school granting the degree. We are using this film without further inspection or change. If there are any questions about the content, please write directly to the school. The quality of this reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original material

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. Manuscripts may not always be complete. When it is not possible to obtain missing pages, a note appears to indicate this.
2. When copyrighted materials are removed from the manuscript, a note appears to indicate this.
3. Oversize materials (maps, drawings, and charts) are photographed by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

**UMI** Dissertation  
Information Service

A Bell & Howell Information Company  
300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106



**UMI Number: 9947805**

---

**UMI Microform 9947805  
Copyright 1999, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized  
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

---

**UMI**  
**300 North Zeeb Road**  
**Ann Arbor, MI 48103**



## **NOTE TO USERS**

**This reproduction is the best copy available.**

**UMI**



**CREOLIZING WOMANHOOD: GENDER AND DOMESTICITY IN EARLY  
ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN NATIONAL LITERATURES**

**A Dissertation**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School**

**of Cornell University**

**in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

**Leah Reade Rosenberg**

**January 2000**

©2000 Leah Rosenberg

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Leah Rosenberg received a B.A. in classics from Johns Hopkins University in 1986. She studied German romanticism on a Fulbright Fellowship in Munich in 1987 and stayed there to complete a project in creative writing with a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship in 1987. She received an M.F.A. in fiction from Brooklyn College in 1991 and studied at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus in 1997. She begins teaching in the Department of English at Grinnell College in the fall of 1999.

for my parents, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Ernest Rosenberg

and

The University of the West Indies

and

The National Library of Jamaica

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Creolizing Womanhood” is the product of universities and libraries in the United States and the Caribbean. It is based on archival material available only in the Caribbean, where I was able to conduct research with the generous support of Cornell University, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. I am very conscious of the limited funding available for graduate students at the University of the West Indies. The economic dynamics of research and publication call on scholars in the U.S. like myself to find means of counteracting the imbalances between Caribbean and U.S. academic institutions, of developing ongoing relationships with faculty and libraries in the Caribbean, and of working in these relationships to strengthen the Caribbean institutions that make our work possible.

In particular, I would like to thank Victor Chang, who invited me as a visiting student to the Department of Literatures in English at University of the West Indies (U.W.I.) in Jamaica, and whose generosity as a host greatly contributed to my work and well-being. Other U.W.I. faculty gave me invaluable help -- in Trinidad, Kenneth Ramchand and Bridget Brereton and in Jamaica, Velma Pollard, Maureen Warner Lewis, Patrick Bryan, and Glen Richards. I would like to thank Nadi Edwards in particular for taking time from his hectic schedule to read my work, as well as James Robertson for his never ending help in negotiating the National Library and Archives.

I must also thank the staffs of the West Indies Collection at the UWI library in Mona and in St. Augustine, and at the National Library of Jamaica, where I became a virtual resident. I am indebted to the National Archives of Jamaica and of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Heritage Library of Trinidad and Tobago, the Jean Rhys Collection at the Special Collections Department at the University of Tulsa, the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections and interlibrary loan services of Cornell University Libraries. I would like to acknowledge Lennox Honychurch for his

generosity and trust in permitting me to use Phyllis Shand Allfrey's papers. As executor of Alfred Mendes literary estate, Michele Levy has given me copies of Mendes's unpublished work, xeroxes of her own research, and answered my endless questions about Trinidadian.

My committee, Nathalie Melas, Molly Hite, and Anne Adams allowed me the freedom and provided the support for me to find a subject and method of analysis of my own. Viranjini Munasinghe helped me to articulate my arguments in the chapters on Trinidad. Elaine Savory and the readers for The Jean Rhys Review gave me invaluable feedback for my chapter on Rhys. Karen McRitchie spent many hours in solving my crises of formatting.

I could not have completed this dissertation without the help of my friends, who commented on drafts, suggested sources, improved my ideas, and sometimes fed and housed me. In particular, I would like to thank Jen Hill for her patient and fast editorial assistance. Mary Hanna's hospitality enabled me to complete my research in Jamaica. Over the past two years, she has contributed important ideas to both my chapter on de Lisser and my chapter on Rhys and has helped me in my work in immeasurable ways. I am also deeply indebted to Carla Boyer, Jani Scandura, Hugh Stevens, Estelle Tarica, and Keith Williams for their academic and moral support. I am greatly indebted to Lawrence George Hutson, whose love and generosity, taught and nurtured me for the first two years that I worked on this dissertation. My greatest debt is, of course, to my family, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Charles Ernest Rosenberg, Jessica Marion Rosenberg, Alvia Golden, Drew Faust, and Claudia Koonz, who have helped me, often at significant sacrifice to their own work. Finally, I want to express my deep gratitude to Brian Carl Robison, who has given me love, shelter, and, most importantly, hope that will last me for a long time to come.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: "The Place where Pandora fill'd her box": Creole women and the Racialization of Domesticity	31
Chapter 3: English Literary Masters and the Black Amazons of their Imagination: the Destabilizing Presence of Afro-Caribbean Women in late 19th-century English Travel Narratives	80
Chapter 4: Black Matriarch and White Witch: Herbert de Lisser's 'Nationalism' and the Politics of Race and Class in Jamaica.	107
Chapter 5: Wombs of Uncertainty and Pleasure without Paternity: the Gender and Degeneracy of Trinidad's White Ruling Class	165
Chapter 6: Douglas in the Yard: Creolization in Trinidadian Yard Fiction	207
Chapter 7: "The rope, of course, being covered with flowers": Metropolitan Discourses and the Construction of Creole Identity in Jean Rhys's Black Exercise Book	261
Epilogue	300
Appendix: Illustrations	310
Bibliography	330

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“Creolizing Womanhood” was inspired by Rhonda Cobham’s observation that women were the central protagonists of Jamaican literature from 1900 to 1950, the period in which national politics and trade unions developed in the British West Indies (“The Creative Writer” 195-247). With few exceptions, this observation holds true for the entire region. Yet, as Cobham points out, as soon as nationalism became entrenched and West Indian literature gained international visibility with the emergence of writers like V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming in the 1950’s, women disappeared from the center stage of literature and became subordinate players in the West Indian literatures of nation building. “Creolizing Womanhood” argues that one reason for nationalist literature’s subordination of women and its general masculinist nature from the 1950s to the 1970s was the writers’ need to radically diverge from the protonationalist literatures of 1900-1938, which in making women prominent had emasculated Afro-Caribbean men in much the same ways that English colonial discourse had at least since the 18th century.

The main project of this dissertation is to explicate the contemporary political significance of protonationalist representations of gender. What did Herbert de Lisser’s representation of the white slave mistress, Annie Palmer, as a voodoo priestess and domineering nymphomaniac mean to the Jamaican readers of his 1929 White Witch of Rose Hall? How did this portrait participate in de Lisser’s anti-labor, pro-capitalist political agenda articulated through his editorship of the conservative Daily Gleaner and his alliance with the ruling class? How did Trinidadians, residents of the impoverished barrack yards and of the wealthy merchant and planter homes, read the comic and sexualized images of the black working class women of “Yard Fiction” published in Trinidad and The Beacon between 1929 and 1933? How did yard fiction and the other fiction published in these magazines participate in the larger and very

ambivalent political agenda of The Beacon? And finally, how are we to read the early work of the exile Jean Rhys in relation to her contemporaries who published in the Caribbean? Can her deep concern with creole women's sexuality and respectability be seen as sharing with de Lisser and the Beacon group a point of reference in English discourse on the West Indies as well as the project of critiquing that discourse?

De Lisser, the Beacon group, and Rhys took their stock characters -- the black yard woman, the seductive brown woman, and the sadistic or sexually deviant white woman -- from English travel accounts and novels of the West Indies, written during two specific periods, the rise of the English middle class and the debate over slavery between 1774-1838 and the crisis of English imperial identity and the rise of scientific racism in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> These early twentieth-century Caribbean writers also share a complex engagement with the English middle class ideology of domesticity of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Whether they embrace it as de Lisser did, flaunt and repudiate it as the The Beacon group did, or critique its racialized construction as Rhys did, protonationalist anglophone Caribbean writers consistently represented Caribbean national identities in respect to an English conception of domestic womanhood.

Their appropriation of English representations of Caribbean women and domestic ideology is made more complex by the significant role West Indian women played in English ideology of domesticity. Starting at the end of the 18th century, English discourse on the West Indies, deeply embedded in domestic ideology, employed images of Caribbeans in general and Caribbean women in particular to define the West Indies as a place lacking domestic virtue and therefore lacking the manhood

---

<sup>1</sup> These periods leave out Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) even though I include that novel in my discussion of English discourse. The representation of West Indians in the novel mirrors the rhetoric of women anti-slavery writers; that is, Jane Eyre expresses an anti-slavery position in the post-emancipation period.

and virtue necessary for political autonomy. How could anglophone Caribbean writers of the early twentieth century fashion a positive image of the nation while basing their literature on negative stereotypes of creole women and a domestic ideology that denied political legitimacy and masculinity in particular to the entire region? And yet, how could they do otherwise if their models of literary and political thought were British?

Because of the complexity of the relationship between English and protonationalist anglophone Caribbean writing, I approach the representations of gender in these early Caribbean texts along two lines of inquiry. First, I examine anglophone Caribbean writers' complicated appropriation and transformation of both English representations of Caribbean women and of English domestic ideology. Second, I explore the political implications of these appropriations for the Caribbean societies in which they were produced. How does the focus on women and sexuality inherited from English domestic discourse effect protonationalist West Indian literature's ability to represent the majority working class population as politically competent or powerful? How does this focus shape the literature's representation of the nation as creole; that is, as a nation composed of multiple ethnic groups?

I find that protonationalist writers redefine the core terms of English discourse on the West Indies by shifting the definitions of race and domestic virtue. My findings are consistent with Simon Gikandi's analysis of 19th century anglophone Caribbean texts, in which he argues that colonized writers were able to resist colonial discourse by defining its central terms while writing within the conventions of colonial discourse (xviii). De Lisser, for instance, employs English representations of creole women and ideas of domesticity to redefine the whiteness of the Jamaican upper class to include Middle Eastern immigrants and select light-skinned Afro-Caribbeans. Yet in appropriating characters from English discourse, early anglophone Caribbean writers also appropriated the logic of class and race oppression. Perhaps the most significant

example is de Lisser's and The Beacon's transformation of the figure of strong black women, so prominent in English travel narratives of late nineteenth century, notably Froude's The English in the West Indies (1888) and Charles Kingsley's At Last a Christmas in the West Indies (1871). In these texts, English writers were struck -- both amazed and deeply horrified -- by the sexual and economic independence of black working women. Their focus on black women is significant because their economic independence as market women, their prowess in carrying heavy objects (particularly on their heads) are some of the clearer inheritances from West African cultures.<sup>2</sup>

English travel writers translated these African cultural practices, already adapted to the Caribbean, not only as transgressions of English femininity but as evidence of the lack of proper manhood in the region. English writers typically presented Afro-Caribbean women's sexual and economic independence as evidence of West Indian men's lack of manhood. This lack of manhood in turn was used to argue against West Indian self-government. If men could not rule their women, Froude contended, how could they rule their own country? Using similar images of black working women, anglophone Caribbean protonationalist writers feminized and depoliticized the working class, producing an image of working class Caribbeans as unworthy of political power much in the same way that English writers had argued against the political rights of the region as a whole.

We gain much from placing the later anglophone Caribbean nationalist writers' assertion of a masculine national identity and political competence in the context of the historical emasculation of African and Asian Caribbeans both by English discourse and by protonationalist writers. To claim political autonomy was thus almost necessarily a gendered act. Thus a nationalist claim meant a turn away from the early literature in

---

<sup>2</sup> In West African cultures women were responsible for selling at market and for the task of carrying.

which women were not only the protagonists but in which their prominence correlated with a combined denial of black political rights and masculinity. Belinda Edmundson's Making Men (1999) supports this hypothesis. Edmundson bases her analysis of both male nationalist writers and contemporary Caribbean women writers on her observation that Caribbean male writers shared a deep investment in English Victorian culture, and that their model both for literary production and nationhood relied on an English conception of masculinity – the English gentleman (1-5); that is, “for the English the idea of nation was essentially tied to the idea of masculinity, such that Caribbean men would have to prove themselves the masculine equals of the Englishmen who currently dominated the imperial landscape”(8).

“Creolizing Womanhood” derives its title from Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s conception of creolization as the social and cultural interaction of people from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas that has produced and defined anglophone Caribbean societies. For Brathwaite, creolization is both acculturation, “the process of absorption of one culture by another” and interculturalization, “a process of intermixture and enrichment” (Brathwaite “Contradictory Omens” 11). And it is the process of making the intermixtures of these cultures “native” to the Caribbean. A pidgin language is a simplified mixture of languages shared by two groups of people who have separate mother tongues. Creole languages are formed from a number of languages, primarily West African and European, but these languages are the mother tongue(s) for their respective countries. “Creolizing Womanhood” explores these processes of creolization in the case of literature and in the case of ideas of womanhood; it explores the process through which anglophone Caribbean literature and womanhood emerged out of an integration and transformation of cultural practices from England, Africa, and the Caribbean. It analyses how these become defined as therefore creole and national. Finally, it analyses the political implications of these new creole literatures and

womanhoods on the process of creolization within anglophone Caribbean (proto) nations during the first four decades of this century.

“Creolizing Womanhood” contributes to theories of creolization in Caribbean studies and to theories of hybridity in postcolonial studies. By addressing the role of gender, ethnicity, and class, it complicates or extends the model of “black/white” creolization Brathwaite puts forward in The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica (1971) and Contradictory Omens (1974).<sup>3</sup> My analysis of early twentieth-century fiction illustrates that creole societies made strong distinctions in terms of ethnicity, class, and gender, and that these categories were so intertwined in the process of creolization — both in literature and in social divisions — that one can not separate them or discuss creolization effectively without reference to their intersections.

The intertwined nature of race, class, and gender is reflected in English descriptions of the racial mixing of the West Indies as a process that radically reorders almost all categories of English social order: race, gender, sexuality, and class. English texts attempted to contain this disorder by describing creole societies as governed by a race and class hierarchy that fixed white people at the top — a mythic image referred to in chapter two as the “Great House.” Yet English texts still describe white women as not only African in their cultural practices but also masculine. Lower class whites, Bryan Edwards warns us, assume a familiarity with upper class whites shocking to English men. Wealthy and independent Brown women problematize race, class, and

---

<sup>3</sup> Here Brathwaite defines creolization was “the single most important factor in the development of Jamaican society.” What defined creole societies was “not the imported influence of the Mother Country or the local administrative activity of the white elite, but a cultural action— material, psychological and spiritual — based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and — as white/black, culturally discrete groups — to each other. This cultural action or social process has been defined ... as creolization. (Creole Society in Jamaica 296). The work of M.G. Smith, in particular, The Plural Society in the British West Indies (1965) addressed similar questions before Brathwaite. Yet his work has not had the same impact on contemporary scholarship as Brathwaite’s.

gender distinctions by exhibiting the wealth and culture associated with English white womanhood and the social and economic independence associated with white masculinity.

In the conclusion of Contradictory Omens, Brathwaite alludes to the challenge contemporary multi-ethnic societies posed to his theory of creolization, writing that

The entire notion of creolization has been based on the assumption that it is a process that relates to dominant and sub-dominant groups. This does little to explain and/or account for the action between equal subordinates: lateral creolization: the ‘leakage’ between, say, poor white and coloureds; between Syrians, Chinese and Jews; between these and blacks; between blacks and East Indians and between East Indians and others; and what happens, in the post-colonial world, when, with the removal of the imperial dominant, these erstwhile sub-dominant laterals begin to compete with each other, so that a new cycle of (inter)-cultural confrontation and (probable) sub/domination begins all over again...

(Edward Kamau Brathwaite Contradictory Omens 63).

“Creolizing Womanhood” focuses particularly on these ethnic “leakages” and their intersections with gender, illustrating, as Kelvin Singh’s Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State Trinidad, 1917-1945 has, that the period leading up to independence was characterized by a struggle between ethnic groups and classes for political and economic power. De Lisser’s Planters’ Punch indicates that as early as the 1920s Brathwaite’s categories of dominant and dominated, white and Afro-Caribbean were being redefined and reconfigured. When de Lisser cemented a political and social alliance among upper and middle class Jews, Middle Easterners, British creoles, expatriates and light skinned Afro-Caribbeans, he was redefining both race and class lines.

As these examples indicate, I view creolization in the early 20th century anglophone Caribbean as a process of breaking down but also of remapping barriers of race, ethnicity, and class – a process in which gender and representations of women in particular played a critical role. In paying close attention to the power and gender dynamics of creolization and in seeing creolization as process which has not created egalitarian societies, my work closely follows that of Natasha Barnes and Shalini Puri. Barnes, for instance, criticizes Caribbean historians, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Franklin Knight for valuing the inter-racial sexuality of plantation society as evidence of social exchange without fully acknowledging the relations of domination which governed enslaved women’s sexual relations with white men (49-51). Similarly Puri criticizes dominant theories of creolization, particularly those of Brathwaite and Walcott, for not taking into consideration the power relations that shaped creolization, in particular in relation to Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians (20-21). Puri argues that approaches to hybridity, particularly, multicultural corporate capital and scholars of the academic left, such as Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Antonio Benitez-Rojo displace the issue of equality and the politics of hybridity onto a poetics of hybridity (Puri 12-13; Barnes 49-51 and 176).

This close attention to specific instances of creolizations contributes to the field of postcolonial studies by examining the theoretical concept of hybridity. In particular, my dissertation examines one historical instance of hybridity as Bhabha theorizes it in “Signs Taken for Wonders” and links this analysis of colonial discourse to his contention in the introduction of The Location of Culture that interstitial identities have the power to redefine collective identities and alliances. In “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Homi Bhabha proposes that colonial discourse necessarily produces “hybridity” by exporting its texts and practices to colonies, where they are appropriated and transformed by the colonized. These transformed versions of colonial discourse

necessarily undermine the absolute difference between colonizer and colonized and challenge the authority of colonial discourse. In the instance Bhabha explores, the translation of the English bible to India, the Indians who adopt the Bible do not purposely undercut its authority. Rather they construe it in a way that makes sense to them as vegetarians and as people who are denied knowledge and privilege by a Brahmin elite. However, in so doing they significantly alter Britain's conception of Christianity. The translated Bible in concert with this Indian application of it constitute Bhabha's hybridity. In this model, the colonized people resist the Bible, but Bhabha does not attribute to them conscious agency, asserting that

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention...

It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses....(10)

Early anglophone Caribbean writing constitutes an instance of Bhabha's hybridity in that West Indian writers appropriated the form of the novel and short story as well as the domestic ideology and scientific racism from English culture. They applied and interpreted these as they saw fit in the context of early twentieth century Jamaica, Trinidad, and Dominca. Yet unlike the Indian converts, protonationalist writers explicitly challenge the colonial discourse even as they appropriate it.

Their ability to do so recalls Bhabha's discussion of late twentieth-century African American artist Rene Green and writer Toni Morrison, in which he argues that people who inhabit in-between or interstitial identities have the ability to challenge and dislodge categories of identity like race and gender and to construct new identities and alliances.

It is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference -- that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are

negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc)? (2)

Though not poised at the edge of the millenium as the artists Bhabha addresses, the anglophone Caribbean writers I address were interstitial figures between upper and lower classes and between colonialism and nationalism. They wrote interstitial texts that imbricated European, African, and Caribbean cultural traditions. They lived in interstitial societies, defined almost since European conquest as a quintessential site of hybridity. Their resistance to colonial discourse and their deployment of it against the working classes indicates the value of joining Bhabha's two projects – the analysis of colonial discourse and that of anti-colonial or postcolonial discourse. It is not sufficient to investigate the impact of hybridity on colonial discourse and the metropole; we must also investigate the impact of hybridity on the shaping of new national identities and societies and integrate the projects of colonial discourse analysis and the study of postcolonial society and culture. In the case of the early 20th century anglophone Caribbean, gender is a critical category of analysis for this project. The class politics of literature – the intellectuals' critique of the upper class and their ambivalence towards the working class -- became articulated through the prominent representation of working class women and women's sexuality more generally.

Consciously writing national but not yet nationalist literature, early anglophone Caribbean writers inhabit another arena of hybridity, that of the space between colonialism and independence. In studying the complexity and complicity of this period, "Creolizing Womanhood" contributes to the current project in postcolonial studies of complicating older visions of the relationship between colony and metropole,

and of the transition between colonialism and nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Leela Gandhi describes this trend as a recognition that “the anti-colonial perspective neglects to acknowledge the corresponding failures and fissures which trouble the confident edifice of both colonial repression and anti-colonial retaliation”(124). “Rarely,” she writes, “did the onslaught of colonialism entirely obliterate colonised societies. So, also, far from being exclusively oppositional, the encounter with colonial power occurred along a variety of ambivalent registers”(125). This is certainly the case in the British West Indies, where independence resulted from progressive government reform rather than violent revolutions.

“Creolizing Womanhood” participates in this project by examining the deep ambivalence intellectuals had about English colonialism and about working class political rights during this period of transition. It delineates the continuities and discontinuities between colonial discourse and proto-nationalist writing, which in turn helps us to map the continuities and discontinuities between colonialism and nationalism. These in turn help us to understand the complex hierarchy of race, class, ethnicity, and gender that still governs the anglophone Caribbean nations.

Again, “Creolizing Womanhood” demonstrates that gender is a critical lens for the investigation of hybridity in the transition from colonialism to nationalism. West Indian intellectuals negotiated their role during this transition in terms of gender. They both asserted and doubted their masculinity, while tending to produce emasculating representations of the working classes. Further, the significance of domestic ideology to 19th century English nationalism and colonialism is reflected in the fact that Jamaica and Trinidad claimed manhood as an essential process of claiming nationhood.

The first task of “Creolizing Womanhood” is to establish and explicate what I

---

<sup>4</sup> Dominica did not become an independent nation until 1978, so the 1920s may not constitute such an intermediary period though they like the larger islands participated in the West Indian Federation 1958-1962. (Check dates)

will call the English discourse on the West Indies. From the late 18th century into the 20th, England produced a specific discourse on the West Indies, one that consistently portrayed the West Indies as an inversion of English domestic order and virtue. The depiction shifted from a moral narrative in the pre-emancipation period, 1770-1838, to a scientific narrative in the late 19th century without significantly shifting the logic underlying the argument that the West Indies needed colonial rule because it lacked domestic virtue. This discourse on the West Indies was articulated through a body of apparently disparate texts – travel narratives, memoirs, novels, colonial reports – and was imbricated in the systems of economic, political, and physical power exerted on colonized people who though deeply disempowered resisted, participated in, and shaped the discourse.

In insisting that colonized and enslaved Caribbeans played a role in English discourse, I differ from Said's conception of orientalism, which I have taken as a part of departure for understanding English discourse on the West Indies. Said is famous for arguing that the "brute reality" of people living in the "Orient" was in some respects unrelated to the European discourse that represented the "Orient"(5). Though English discourse certainly strove to define and control the West Indies through a complex interaction of ideas, texts, and institutions, Caribbeans' many cultural practices, their "brute" physical strength, their numbers, their sexuality, their articulateness among other things all contributed to English discourse -- if only as a motivation for English discourse to redefine these practices as inferior and these strengths as weaknesses.

Representations of the West Indies in English domestic discourse contributed to the construction of a metropolitan bourgeois identity and the codification of the flaws and inferiority of the English aristocracy and working classes. English colonialism didn't merely record and define (middle class) England as virtuous and the West Indies as immoral; it produced England as a place of domestic order and virtue in part by

producing the West Indies as a place of aberrant domestic practices -- white male employees were often, for instance, allotted Afro-Caribbean concubines; slaves had no legal right to marry.

In seeing English discourse on the West Indies as linked at a fundamental level to an English ideology of domesticity, I am echoing the findings of scholars of colonial discourse. In Imperial Leather, Anne McClintock argues that “the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, dimension of male as well as female identities...an indispensable element both of the industrial market and the imperial enterprise” (5). Similarly Ann Stoler “treat[s] bourgeois sexuality and racialized sexuality not as distinct kinds... but as dependent constructs in a unified field” and argues European concern with domesticity is directly linked to fears of the threat empire posed to the domestic household (97). She argues, as I do, that colonial discourse did not just represent the colonial subject as sexually transgressive, it produced sexual transgression, particularly through the concubinage system that required most white employees to have non-white partners and punished them, their partners, and their children by denying them full membership in a white and respectable class. Similarly supportive of my argument is her contention that metropolitan constructions of colonial identity were constitutive of the ostensibly European, bourgeois discourses on sexuality through which the bourgeois subject was formed in the 19th century (Stoler 97-100).

The consistency within late 18th-century and early 19th-century English discourse on the West Indies results from the fact that all texts held the same fundamental imperial principles -- that domestic virtue was a sign of political worthiness and that the goal of labor policy in the West Indies was to produce a system in which planters maintained control over labor. These principles created continuity in an otherwise agonistic discourse produced through the metropolitan struggle between

the pro-slavery lobby and the anti-slavery movement, between aristocrats allied with the plantocracy and the English middle class, between mercantile and free trade capitalism.

Yet the discourse is fundamentally ambivalent when examined through the lens of gender. This ambivalence is expressed most explicitly in its representation of Afro-Caribbean women, who are depicted alternately as the most desirable of women and the most repulsive. Their transgressions of English domestic ideals of womanhood provide the strongest evidence for arguments in support of colonial rule, while their industry, beauty, and independence reveal the invalidity of those arguments.

In seeing English discourse on the West Indies as fundamentally ambivalent and focused on sexuality, my project appears to mirror Robert Young's central argument in Colonial Desire. Like Young, I hold that colonialism produces a deeply ambivalent sexual desire for colonial subjects and that this desire constitutes a "nightmare" for Europe because it produces inter-racial people who undermine the purist definitions and hierarchies of race which legitimated European imperial power. However, Young bases his work almost exclusively on a body of European theories and therefore finds the cause of this ambivalence within these theories. In contrast, I maintain that specific material practices in the colonies constitute part of the discourse and help to explain the ambivalence which characterizes it.

In understanding colonialism as a discursive system, in which power is exerted and resisted, I like Said, am grounding my analysis in a Foucaultian model of discourse. However, I use term "ideology" in order to isolate the conflict within the discourse that I see as causing the ambivalence towards Afro-Caribbean women. By ideology, I refer to the set of articulated values and norms of behavior that the English middle and upper classes used to legitimate their claim to power in Britain and its colonies. I view this ambivalence about Afro-Caribbean women as resulting in large part from a conflict

between the English justification of imperial power based on an idea of white, European supremacy and the *de facto* practice of racial integration that characterized English colonialism in the Caribbean. To be an imperial power, England had to espouse a belief in racial purity. Because it undercut the idea of racial purity and hierarchy, the *de facto* practice of racial integration in colonialism necessarily threatened both English identity and English power.

In the second chapter, ““The Place where Pandora fill'd her box": Creole women and the Racialization of Domesticity,” I suggest that English domestic ideology articulated in novels, travel narratives, and histories written in the late 18th and early 19th century (1770-1838), the set of beliefs about proper gender roles and sexual behavior, played a critical role in negotiating the conflict between England’s need to engage in colonialism in order to be a strong nation and the threat racial integration in the colonies posed to English national identity. English domestic ideology defined racial and cultural interaction as illegitimate; it provided the moral logic for the laws which restricted the economic and political rights of illegitimate people. It thus limited the threat the *de facto* policy of colonial integration posed to white hegemony in the colonies and to the metropolitan ideology of racial purity and supremacy. Yet it also produced a striking ambivalence in English texts, particularly those written by white men. These texts produce heightened negative and positive depictions of Afro-Caribbean women in response to the conflicting pressures of colonial ideology that defined Afro-Caribbean women as abject and colonial practice that defined Afro-Caribbean women as the appropriate partners for white men.

In the third chapter, “English Literary Masters and the Black Amazons of their Imagination: the Destabilizing Presence of Afro-Caribbean Women in late 19th-century English Travel Narratives,” I argue that English writing after emancipation continued to deploy domestic ideology to legitimate English rule in the West Indies and continued

to express a deep ambivalence towards Afro-Caribbean women. Travel narratives by prominent English intellectuals, Anthony Trollope, Charles Kingsley, James Anthony Froude and W. P. Livingstone focused on the Caribbean's strong black women and found in their independence and "masculinity" proof of black men's femininity and incapacity for political power. At the same time, their admiration of black women's strength and independence undercut their claims for blacks' laziness and ultimately their arguments for direct colonial rule.

In the fourth chapter, "Black Matriarch and White Witch: Herbert de Lisser's 'Nationalism' and the Politics of Race and Class in Jamaica," I begin my analysis of anglophone Caribbean writers' appropriation of English discourse on the West Indies. Herbert de Lisser is one of the first and most powerful people to write self-consciously Jamaican literature. He redeployed English arguments that blacks were essentially incapable of domestic virtue in such a way that strengthened the already existing social hierarchy that divided Jamaicans along racial, economic, and moral lines, a hierarchy in which dark-skinned, unmarried, unskilled Jamaicans remained as large pool of exploitable labor for the wealthier, lighter, married upper classes. Further, he used the rhetoric of English domesticity to foster the integration of Jews and immigrants from the Middle East into the category of the white ruling class. De Lisser strove to "creolize" English domesticity, presenting Jamaica's identity as a modern nation based on domestic virtue. However, just as Afro-Caribbean women defied the racial categories of 19th century English writing, they also reveal the inconsistencies in de Lisser's construction of the upper class elite and ultimately undermine his construction of the new white ruling class.

In contrast, the intellectual group around The Beacon, whose work I address in chapters five and six, attacked the bourgeoisie and the colonial hierarchy of race and color by attacking domestic ideology -- particularly its late 19th-century manifestation

in “Victorianism.” Their stories illustrated that bourgeois restrictions on sexuality produced degeneracy. Incest and adultery were products of colonial restrictions of white female sexuality and the exclusion of non-whites from the class of people the upper class could marry. Their work argued that Victorianism’s domestic morality transformed the processes of creolization – cultural and sexual -- into perverse, violent and degenerate practices. While it strove to break down the social hierarchy by attacking its ideology, The Beacon’s choice of strategy limited the magazine’s ability to be representative of creole society. It excluded much of the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian classes, who fought for social legitimacy on the basis of their respectability. To be an effective oppositional force, the magazine needed significant contributions from all ethnic groups; their choice to attack respectability made that a social impossibility. This opposition to respectability also restricted The Beacon’s vision of the creole nation to the sphere of sex and morality. Where later writers Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul portray Trinidad’s creole society as characterized by a struggle between Africans and Indians over national culture, Alfred Mendes and C.L.R. James produce images of sexualized inter-racial figures, whose cultures become reduced to their sexual desirability. Such a vision ultimately reflects an ambivalence towards the integration of Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians into positions of political power, as is indicated by The Beacon’s strident arguments against universal suffrage. The Beacon’s ambivalence about the Indo-Trinidadians’ integration into national culture is illustrated in Mendes’s horror at the Afro-Indo-Trinidadian annual festival for the La Divina Pastora, at Siparia. Ironically, The Beacon’s strategy of attacking respectability resembles de Lisser’s pro-domestic policy; both contain further integration of different racial and ethnic groups particularly as it relates to political power.

In the final chapter, “‘The rope, of course, being covered with flowers’:

Metropolitan Discourses and the Construction of Creole Identity in Jean Rhys's *Black Exercise Book*," I argue that Rhys's private journal engages in a dual critique of English domestic ideology and Freud's theory of seduction and female masochism. I read her description of her childhood both as a critical rewriting of *Jane Eyre* and of Freud's *Dora*. Rhys draws comparisons between her experiences of being beaten and seduced and Afro-Caribbeans' experiences of being flogged and sexually violated as slaves. In so doing her account illustrates the critical importance of the history of race and empire to the middle class conceptions of the nuclear family and marriage -- conceptions which are the foundation for both Brontë's novel and Freudian psychoanalysis. Rhys's *Exercise Book* illustrates that psychoanalysis takes the nuclear family as a universal norm and disregards the ways in which domestic ideology has historically defined marriage and legitimacy as white and metropolitan. Though Rhys reiterates aspects of English colonial discourse, her construction of creole womanhood deconstructs the racialization of key subject positions in Caribbean "mythology" -- particularly the idea that inter-racial women are mistresses and that all Afro-Caribbean women stand outside of wedlock and domestic virtue. If the myth of the Great House with its white planters, brown mistresses, and black field workers, is one of the central myths in perpetuating racialized politics in the anglophone Caribbean, then Rhys's deconstruction of the racialized femininities of the Great House contributes to reconceiving national and creole identities on less fixed racial terms.

In addressing both Brontë and Freud, Rhys's engagement with domesticity significantly differs from both de Lissers' and *The Beacon's*. Further, Rhys lived and published in England. Her work belongs to the modernist canon; its form often differs significantly from other Caribbean writers, particularly in its rejection of a linear narrative. As a writer in exile, her work stands at a significant remove from the daily politics of her homeland, Dominica. This is in sharp contrast to de Lissers' novels and

The Beacon which were very much embedded in the daily politics of their countries. They were published as part of journalistic projects and were written by men who were or who became significant political players. Finally, as the daughter of an expatriate government officer and member of a planter family, Rhys had deep historical roots in plantation culture as a white creole that most other white writers I examine simply did not have, with the possible exception of Jean de Boissiere.

Thus Rhys's narrative techniques, her biography, the venue and the reception of her work distance her from the other anglophone Caribbean writers active in the 1920's and 1930's. Yet, placing her work beside that of de Lisser, C.L.R. James, and Alfred Mendes illustrates that Rhys's near obsession with white creole women's sexuality, particularly with their rejection as legitimate wives, participates in a broader pattern of concern among anglophone Caribbean writers of her generation. Nearly all anglophone Caribbean writing of this early period was deeply concerned with the conflict between the English ideal of womanhood and Caribbean femininity. Nearly all defined creole identity in relationship to the question of marriage and domesticity.

In insisting on the importance of these early texts to understanding the following generation of writers like V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming, "Creolizing Womanhood" participates in the current trend of remapping the anglophone Caribbean literary canon. The contradictions I focus on -- the fact that this early generation of writers both resisted colonial discourse and redeployed aspects of colonial discourse to undercut the black, working class struggle for political power -- are precisely what have led scholars to exclude most proto-nationalist literature from their scholarship and from anthologies of West Indian literature. Many scholars will, no doubt, contradict me, arguing that this literature has been overlooked because it is badly written, as Donnell and Welsh phrase it euphemistically, "somewhat embarrassing and naive" (14). Yet, I would submit that these artistic shortcomings are often linked to a political and

cultural conflict: the desire to write authentically Caribbean literature in an Empire in which Victorian English literature remained the dominant literary model. This political contradiction was embodied in the form of early Caribbean literature. For instance, the failed and tortuous plot of Thomas MacDermot's One Brown Girl and — (1909) is structured as a romance in which two or three elite women ought — conventionally — to end the novel married. Instead, their lives become consumed by a campaign to save one Afro-Caribbean woman from sexual temptation, a goal for which they are willing to sacrifice their own happiness and the lives of highly valued, well-to-do white men. These marriage plots are abandoned but remain in the novel partly constructed, like the many unfinished homes in the Caribbean whose naked cement blocks and steel cable testify to unfinished plans. The novel ends with the resolution of one of perhaps ten plots, no marriages, and the death of most white male protagonists. As what may have been the first in a projected series of novels for which there was neither the funding nor perhaps the time to complete, MacDermot's only full-length novel is very much like those many houses; its incompleteness is its final form. Yet, if this is a failure, it is intriguing in that it reveals much about the negotiations Caribbean culture made before it produced writers like Kamau Brathwaite, Erna Brodber, or Merle Collins, whose work integrates Afro-Caribbean subject matter and cultural form.

Yet, the anglophone Caribbean literary canon that provided the foundation for contemporary Caribbean studies had little space for these intriguing failures. The canon was established by scholars in London, the intellectuals of the newly independent countries of the Anglophone Caribbean — men like Kenneth Ramchand, who participated in the Caribbean Artists Movement in the 1960s and 1970s and who worked with West Indian writers of the 1950s boom like Naipaul, Lamming, and Andrew Salkey. With the very significant exception of Naipaul, West Indian literature of this movement focused on predominantly Afro-Caribbean experience. Writers

challenged not only English colonialism's denial of Caribbean culture, but a conservative literary establishment in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, the conservative literary establishment was embodied in J.E. Clare McFarlane's literary history of the Caribbean which cherished Victorian English literary culture and rejected creole as a language unworthy of literature (Donnell and Welsh 12).

Thus, the anglophone Caribbean literary canon established in the 1970s, necessarily assumed a sharp break between English and anglophone Caribbean writing. It presumed an almost categorical opposition between Victorian English culture and Caribbean nationalism, while privileging texts that could be seen as fitting into a tradition of resistance against colonialism and racism, texts which had a clear place in a progression towards nationalism. This political and cultural progression was perceived largely in racial terms. Thus, texts which focused on whites were often not included in the canon -- witness Brathwaite's famous rejection of Jean Rhys as a Caribbean writer on the grounds that "white creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify or be identified, with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea" (Contradictory Omens 38). The depiction of Afro-Caribbean characters, particularly from the working class or peasantry, and the inclusion of creole language became markers of a text's Caribbeanness. To a certain extent, this strategy was effective. In Claude McKay's writing, for instance, the representation of Afro-Caribbeans and the use of vernacular language correlates with an anti-racist, anti-colonial, pro-labor politics and the project of expressing both a Jamaican national and a diasporic identity.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> One could, I suspect, argue that McKay's work is included in the canon because it is of higher literary quality than the work of MacDermot or de Lisser. This may be a contributing factor, but it is not the only factor.

However, in other cases, the representation of black characters does not correlate with nationalist or clearly anti-racist politics, but such texts are still included in the canon. This is the case with de Lisser's first two novels Jane's Career (1914) and Susan Proudleigh (1915) and with some Trinidadian yard fiction. In these texts, the representation of black women rearticulates the late nineteenth century colonialist argument that black men lack the masculinity necessary for political autonomy. While de Lisser published roughly twenty novels, only the two novels with black protagonists are included in the literary canon.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the Beacon group produced two genres of fiction, yard fiction about Afro-Caribbeans, and, what I call, fiction of white degeneracy. The two genres functioned together to critique the colonial bourgeoisie, and to legitimate middle class intellectuals, yet the literary canon has only preserved yard fiction. In both the case of de Lisser's enormous literary corpus and the diverse body of fiction produced by the Beacon group, the political significance of the writing only becomes clear when viewed as a whole. The canon's selective inclusion of texts has obscured the writers' broader political agenda.

Until the 1990s, there existed basically only two studies devoted to this early literature, Cobham's dissertation, "The Creative Writer and West Indian Society:

---

<sup>6</sup> De Lisser actually published four novels and one short story with black protagonists: "The Story of the Maroons" (1899), Jane's Career (1914), Susan Proudleigh (1914), Jamaica Nobility (1926), which is really a long short story, and Myrtle and Money (1941) which is a sequel to Jane. Neither Jamaica Nobility nor Myrtle and Money were ever printed as books -- both appeared only in the magazine, Planters' Punch and "The Story of the Maroons" is only available in the 1899 Jamaica Times. These would have been much less accessible than Jane's Career which was published in book form in England and in Jamaica. Jane's Career is the first of de Lisser's novels and the one with the most hints of respect for his black heroine. It is thus a logical choice for canonization. Susan Proudleigh is mentioned as worthy by Mervyn Morris and has been analyzed in Rhonda Cobham's dissertation. There has been little further work on it. De Lisser's The White Witch of Rosehall, a novel about whites, has received some acclaim but this is partly a result of its role in popular culture and the Jamaican tourist industry.

Jamaica 1900-1950" (1981) and Reinhard Sander's Trinidad Awakening (1988). Now, however, a growing number of scholars are working on early anglophone Caribbean writing. Ironically, Ramchand, who formulated the idea that the Caribbean was "life without fiction" prior to the 1940's, has been one of the major figures in collecting early Caribbean writing from newspapers and literary magazines. Selwyn Cudjoe has reprinted early Trinidadian novels, A.R.F. Webber's Those that Be in Bondage (1917) and Philip Maxwell's Emmanuel Appadoca (1854). Alison Donnell and Sarah Welsh made a strong effort to reshape the canon by including many early and obscure texts in The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature (1996). Two biographies were recently published of early women writers, Delia Jarrett-Macauley's The Life of Una Marson and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's Phyllis Shand Allfrey: A Caribbean Life, which includes previously unpublished short fiction by Allfrey. In addition, Michele Levy has recently edited a collection of Alfred Mendes's short stories and will soon publish his autobiography.

Why, if there is such an abundance of neglected literary texts from this period, have I focused on three of the better known writers and institutions -- Herbert de Lisser, the Beacon group, and Jean Rhys? Rather than to produce a comprehensive guide to proto-nationalist literature, I have sought to shape a hypothesis by analyzing three of the most powerful or visible figures of this period. In my discussion of Jamaican literature, I chose to focus on Herbert de Lisser because as author of roughly twenty novels, several non-fiction books on Jamaica, and editor of Jamaica's most widely read daily paper, The Gleaner from 1903 to 1944, he was probably the single most powerful figure in establishing a local literature in Jamaica. However, in focusing on de Lisser, I have omitted several important writers on the grounds that they exerted less influence on the development of Jamaican literature in Jamaica: McKay, MacDermot, Una Marson, and McFarlane. In a comprehensive literary study, I would

include material from MacDermot's efforts to foster Jamaica literature, the short story contests in The Jamaica Times and his series of local fiction, "The All Jamaica Library" (1903-1909), in which his two works, Becka Buckra Baby and One Brown Girl and -- are particularly important.

In addition, an extensive analysis of black middle class writers Claude McKay, J.E. Clare McFarlane, and Una Marson would be necessary to a broader study. Though he lived most of his life in exile, McKay was the first Jamaican to publish books of verse in creole, Songs of Jamaica (1912) and Constab Ballads (1912). McFarlane and Marson were central figures in the Jamaican literature establishment from the 1930's to the 1960s. McFarlane was president of the Jamaica Poetry League and author of what may be the first literary history of Jamaica, A Literature in the Making (1956) and editor of the first anthology of Jamaican poetry, Voices from Summerland (1929). Marson wrote two of the first Jamaican plays to be performed in Jamaica and four books of poetry; she was the first Jamaican woman to found and edit a journal, The Cosmopolitan (1929-31), and develop and host a BBC radio program, "Caribbean Voices" which supported many of the writers who came to define the West Indian literature of the 1950s and 1960s.

McKay's "When I Pounded the Pavement" (1932) reveals English colonialism's use of domestic ideology to suppress Afro-Caribbean political rights and masculinity with a brutality and clarity striking in comparison to all other literary texts I have read from this period. This rejection of domesticity seems to contrast with Marson and McFarlane who propound propriety. Yet in fact all three writers struggle with domesticity and English cultural models -- all three produce conflicting images of nation and sexuality. McKay's novel Banana Bottom (1933) suggests that Jamaican

national identity is founded in marriage and privileges English culture.<sup>7</sup> Una Marson celebrates Jamaican folk culture and decries the constraints of middle class domesticity on women in her play, Pocomania (1938), yet the play ends with the admonition that middle class women must renounce that folk culture along with its sexual freedom in order to marry and gain their place in the middle class. J.E. Clare McFarlane wrote a number of lengthy poems – Beatrice (1918), Daphne (1931), and The Magdalen (1957) – on the value of black women’s chastity and criticized Marson for her expression of sexual desire in poetry. Yet he published (and republished in several forms) a book-length argument, Sex and Christianity in support of polygamy – a practice English domesticity defined as the antithesis of virtue and the epitome of the evils of African culture. Though Marson and McFarlane may have failed to create the nationalist literature of the 1950s, their work is essential to understanding the negotiation between English and Afro-Caribbean cultures that was necessary to the emergence of that literature.

In the case of early Trinidadian literature, I focus on The Beacon because it has been traditionally identified as the institution that brought together literary and political national movements in Trinidad. Because The Beacon has been preserved in the anglophone Caribbean literary canon in such a reduced form, I have felt it important to extend the scholarship by considering the relationship between the fiction and non-fiction, between the literature on whites, Afro-Caribbeans, and Indo-Caribbeans.

In focusing on The Beacon, I have omitted a number of fascinating but obscure

---

<sup>7</sup> McKay’s Banana Bottom is heavily invested in English Victorian culture. It depicts the Jamaican nation as a marriage between an English-educated black woman and a black male peasant, orchestrated by the figure of cultural authority, the English gentleman, Squire Gensir (Edmondson 73). Edmondson writes, for instance, that “it is his political philosophy that accounts for his inclusion in both the West Indian and African American canon, despite African American puzzlement at his ‘English attitudes’”(74).

romance novels: A.R.F. Webber's Those that Be In Bondage (1917) and Yseult Bridges's Questing Heart (1934) and Creole Enchantment (1936). In choosing the genre of domestic romance, Webber and Bridges rearticulated the colonialist sentiment concomitant with the genre - a central concern with marriage, a racialized conception of domesticity and womanhood, and the idea that only well-to-do or educated people can be protagonists. Despite the generic Englishness of their texts, both Webber's and Bridges's novels illustrate that adapting the romance plot to the ethnic and racial politics of Trinidad and Tobago necessitated fundamentally altering the form -- perhaps most significantly, heroines are no longer virgins until marriage.<sup>8</sup> In omitting these romantic novels, I have omitted an important contrast with The Beacon, since one of The Beacon's revolutionary moves was to abandon the romance as a plot. In so doing, it rejected the much of the conservative ideology implicit in that form. When the goal of fiction and image of the nation was no longer the sexual union of lovers, addressing issues of class and representing the majority became possible.

Although it was published after WWII and thus falls outside the period of my study, Seepersad Naipaul's short stories and journalism constitute another significant contrast to The Beacon. The Beacon includes no fiction written by Indo-Trinidadians; its fiction represents Indo-Trinidadians with the same ambivalence with which English discourse depicted Afro-Caribbean women -- either as objects of extreme desire or extreme repulsion. Naipaul's text sidesteps many of the contradictions which characterized The Beacon perhaps because he wrote for Indo-Trinidadians and participated in their debates in the 1930's and 1940's over religion and culture (9).

---

<sup>8</sup> Webber's novel is the most dramatic in this respect, requiring an incestuous love and ultimately the marriage of first cousins, the abandonment of priesthood, the burning of cathedrals, and gender reversal in order for the two lovers to unite -- and then they can only do so in England, outside of their homelands, Trinidad, Tobago, and Guyana. Webber's novel also provides the most extensive literary representation in this period of the sexual politics and violence involving Indian women on plantations.

Naipaul's depiction of the Indo-Trinidadian community does not privilege women as yard fiction does. But it does place Indian women in positions of significant power vis-a-vis the protagonist, Gurudeva, whose life and narrative are framed and shaped by the entrance and departure of women. Though its criticism of physical violence towards women may seem to repeat the inflammatory images through which English discourse presented arranged marriage as a form of slavery, Naipaul criticizes both the system of arranged marriage and the Americanization of Indian women which resulted from the U.S. presence in Trinidad during WWII.

That this larger group of writers also foreground women and sexuality and negotiate national identity in terms of domesticity supports my hypothesis that protonationalist writers express their ambivalence towards independence and majority rule through a focus on women, particularly black, working class women. That Seepersad Naipaul, a later, Indo-Trinidadian writer, deviates from the protonationalist model I propose may point to the historical specificity of the model. My argument pertains to the primarily white and light class of intellectuals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who stood in between colonial and nationalist rule, people who had a precarious, if also powerful, position in each. Ultimately, the protonationalist focus on femininity and the nationalist focus on masculinity illustrate the importance of gender to the inter-related projects of colonialism and nationalism in the anglophone Caribbean.

#### A Note on Terms

18th- and 19th- century English discourse divided the British West Indies into three major racial categories, of which there were subdivisions: "Negroes," "Mulattoes," and "Whites" "Negroes" were divided between those born in Africa and creoles born in the West Indies; and occasionally into tribes or nations, "Ibo" or "Coromantee." "Mulattoes" or "Coloureds" were a visibly inter-racial class, often

subdivided into finer distinctions -- for instance, mustee, mustiphini, quadroon. Whites were divided between European-born and creoles, and between a wealthy cultured class and a poor, uneducated class. Further distinctions were made among Europeans and "near whites." For instance, in the 18th century Jews did not enjoy full legal rights; in the early twentieth century, Trinidadian Portuguese were "off-white." Jamaicans who look white but have non-white relatives are sometimes referred to as Jamaican whites as opposed to white Jamaicans.

I employ a variety of racial terms, most frequently black, brown, and white, respectively, to refer to these three groups. I use Afro-Caribbean and much less frequently Afro-Creole to denote all Caribbeans of African descent, usually in situations in which English discourse is reacting to all non-whites and non-Asians in the colonies. I use these rather than the English terms not because they are still in current usage in the anglophone Caribbean and are less directly embedded in the English colonial discourse than "negro" and "mulatto." Yet we must note the inability of these terms to adequately represent creole populations. De Lisser, for example, creates a category of white that includes immigrants from the Middle East and browns who are wealthy, and light enough not to too visibly shift the English definition of whiteness. In that case, I have used the phrase the light elite. In Trinidad, the douglas -- people of combined Indian and African descent -- clearly complicate the term Afro-Caribbean because they are both Afro- and Asian Caribbean.

Despite these many short-comings, the tripartite division -- black, brown, white -- has proved necessary to my analysis not only because English discourse articulated this division, but because each group had a different history of political rights. In Jamaica, Trinidad, and Dominica, wealthy browns had political rights in the early 1830s in contrast to most blacks who first got the vote with universal suffrage in 1944. Voting rights were also tied to property requirements; thus, the franchise was almost

never a right based on color or race alone. The social stratification was so strong that property requirements could effectively function as racial exclusionary laws. For black Jamaicans political authority, even cultural authority is much more recently gained than for brown Jamaicans and thus has a different significance. And it is for this reason and the power of the Great House myth that endowed each of these racial identities with a particular social, economic, and moral place that the terms, however, problematic remain in my analysis.

When I began writing this dissertation, I used the term anglophone Caribbean to refer to the region in contradistinction to “West Indian,” which has been seen as problematic because it is an English (mis)construction of geography and identity. However, in sections about English discourse, I use the term, West Indies, because I am discussing precisely that English invention -- the West Indies.

Finally, I would like to explain the terms I use to refer to class because issues of class are central to the chapters on Jamaican and Trinidadian literature. I use the term bourgeoisie to refer to the mostly urban class of merchants whose interests determined colonial policy. In the early 20th century, merchants had such large investments in plantations that the historical split between the two groups had been considerably reduced. In addition, an elite class of planters and merchants were using “whiteness” to foster solidarity across ethnic differences -- British, French, Spanish. I refer to this combined group of planters and merchants as the ruling class or upper class, occasionally as the elite, because the colonial government acted in their interests, and they held significant power over government policy as members of the legislative council. This category excludes small-scale planters and small and middle -scale merchants. In Jamaica, de Lisser tries to unite petit bourgeoisie -- Middle Eastern and Chinese retailers -- with the established bourgeoisie of white creoles, many of whom were Jewish. In Trinidad at the same time period, the white bourgeoisie was struggling

against the petit bourgeois Middle Eastern shopkeepers and there was not yet a unification of these two classes (Singh Race and Class 101-104).

I use the term middle class in the context of the anglophone Caribbean to refer to clerks, civil servants, office workers, teachers, non-white ministers, and smaller scale business men and planters. The majority of this class assimilated the English bourgeois ideology of respectability that defined the colonial bourgeoisie.

## Chapter 2: "The Place where Pandora fill'd her box": Creole women and the Racialization of Domesticity

The Dunghill of the Universe, the Refuse of the whole Creation, the Clippings of the Elements, a shapeless Pile of Rubbish confusd'ly jumbl'd into an Emblem of the *Chaos*, neglected by Omnipotence when he form'd the world into its admirable Order.... The Place where *Pandora* filled her box. (Ned Ward *A Trip to Jamaica with a True Character of the People and Island* (1700) 13).

It's true, indeed, he had caught her tripping at Jamaica, but that he thought was not so much the fault of the woman as of the climate, believing that cursed malevolent planet which predominates in that island and so changes the constitution of its inhabitants that if a woman land there as chaste as a vestal, she becomes in forty-eight hours a perfect Messalina, and that 'tis as impossible for a woman to live at Jamaica and preserve her virtue as for a man to make a journey to Ireland and bring back his honesty. (W.P. *Jamaica Lady* (1720) 110)

From the 18th into the 20th century, English histories, travel accounts, memoirs, and novels produced a consistent image of the British West Indies as an inversion of English domestic and gender order, a place where men slipped into femininity, women into masculinity, whites became African, and Africans started to look white. Imbricated with legal, economic, religious and social institutions, these texts constituted a colonial discourse on the West Indies, less elaborate, more conflicted but otherwise similar to Said's conception of orientalism. Underlying this representation was the question of political sovereignty. The West Indies did not merit political sovereignty because it lacked England's domestic virtue; its men did not merit suffrage because they lacked the Englishman's masculinity.

English discourse undercut West Indian claims to sovereignty by representing West Indian society as governed by large plantations, an image that has come to be known as the "Great House." In this Great House vision of the West Indies, a social hierarchy pertained in which class and race were coterminous and fixed.<sup>9</sup> Whites were

---

<sup>9</sup> I have taken the phrase "Great House" from Lucille Mathurin Mair. An indication of the model's importance is that two important historical works have chosen to challenge it. Mair's in many ways definitive "A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica,

by nature of their whiteness always wealthy but morally degenerate – the men unfaithful husbands, the women undesirable and infertile. Inter-racial people, usually referred to as “Mulattoes,” were always skilled and household workers, best known for their sexually promiscuous and unmarried women, lovers typically of the master; “mulattoes” were by definition the children of illicit unions between master and slave. Blacks stood always at the bottom, unskilled workers, oversexed and prone to venereal disease and polygamy.<sup>10</sup> English discourse was thus a profoundly domestic discourse – based on the structure of the planter’s home, particularly the sexuality of its residents.

Historians of the independence era have consistently challenged the Great House image by documenting the diversity of slave societies in the anglophone Caribbean. Brathwaite contends that of the roughly 30,000 whites in Jamaica in 1820, only 1,189 were men of significant wealth and property (134). Whites were divided by class and by nationality; white West Indian communities included English, Scots, Irish, Sephardic Jews, and Europeans. Most white males were employees, bookkeepers and overseers. The majority of white women were middle and lower class, small-scale proprietors, teachers, and seamstresses.

Though the majority of inter-racial people were a product of non-marital relations between white men and Afro-Caribbean women, a significant number may well have resulted from legally married partners or from white women and Afro-

---

1655-1844" emphasizes the power of the image of the Great House in disseminating the idea that there was "a uniform white way of life and that it was wealthy" and dedicates herself to revealing the falseness of that image as it pertained to women (192).

<sup>10</sup> I employ the term brown to refer to the recognized inter-racial population, comprising the many categories slave owners and English writers devised to delineate color.

Caribbean men.<sup>11</sup> Beckles reminds us that though the offspring of a white man and an enslaved Afro-Caribbean woman would be born a slave, the children of white women and enslaved men would be born free. These unions of white women and enslaved men were not, Beckles asserts, as infrequent as conventional history has led us to believe (7). Though most “blacks” were enslaved, they did not work exclusively on large scale plantations, but in a wide variety of enterprises -- from salt production to the Royal Navy as the narratives of Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano recount.

In contrast to the static racial hierarchy presented in the Great House image, West Indian societies were defined by the processes of creolization -- the interaction of Europeans and Africans (and in certain colonies Amerindians). In The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820, Kamau Brathwaite firmly asserts the power of creolization, claiming that

the single most important factor in the development of Jamaican society was not the imported influence of the Mother Country or the local administrative activity of the white elite, but a cultural action - material, psychological and spiritual - based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and - as white/black, culturally discrete groups - to each other.(296)

Numerous creole cultural forms developed in the 17th and 18th centuries: syncretic, creole religions like obeah and myal, creole languages derived from varieties of English dialects and African languages, creole music, creole carnivals, cuisines, couture, and modes of thinking. Creole sexual and domestic practices produced inter-racial people.

---

<sup>11</sup> Brathwaite’s research shows that a number, though not a great number, of legal marriages occurred between whites and near-whites. Whites seem to have exchanged whiteness for economic security and near-whites to have exchanged wealth to secure whiteness because Jamaican law made anyone at fifth remove from their African heritage legally white (Brathwaite 148-9).

Yet few if any creole cultural practices were accepted as legitimate.<sup>12</sup> Though a significant number of inter-racial people gained freedom, wealth and even political power, this did not at first radically challenge the colonial status quo. The process of creolization in the anglophone Caribbean has tended to rebuild social barriers even as it deconstructed them, reproducing the hierarchy of the slave plantation in social hierarchies of color, class, and ethnicity.

Yet, paradoxically, creolization offered the promise of freedom and the redistribution of wealth and privilege. Inter-racial people threatened colonial hierarchy because they pointed to the instability of English identity -- the anxiety that “even for the European-born, the Indies was transformative of cultural essence, social disposition, and personhood itself. ... ‘Europeanness’ was not a fixed attribute, but one altered by environment, class contingent, and not secured by birth”(Stoler Race and the Education of Desire 104).<sup>13</sup> On one hand English identity was by definition white, ostensibly tied to birth in England and to ancestry. On the other hand, Englishness was defined culturally -- through the assimilation of bourgeois, domestic culture; “what sustained racial membership was a middle-class morality, nationalist sentiments, bourgeois sensibilities, normalized sexuality, and a carefully circumscribed ‘milieu’ in school and home” (Stoler Race and the Education of Desire 105). That some inter-racial creoles were better educated, could speak more proper English, converse in a more cultured fashion and dress with more sophistication than many white creoles fundamentally destabilized the conception of whiteness in the West Indies. Thus, inter-racial people challenged racial categories, and ultimately undermined the English

---

<sup>12</sup> Inter-racial sex was characterized by inequality -- the slave status of the woman, the freedom and sometimes proprietorship of the male. Syncretic religions were often forbidden, as were some forms of creole music; creole language was seen as a bastardization of English; creole food was often described as slaves’ food.

<sup>13</sup> Stoler is referring to the East Indies, but the same holds true for the West Indies.

principle that Europeans were culturally distinct and superior to non-whites – a principle on which rested the justification of Empire. Their wealth also challenged the economic and political domination of the planter class. The anxiety over this challenge is reflected in the Jamaica Assembly's 1763 vote to limit the amount of money brown children inherit to 2000 pounds.

Following Brathwaite, I suggest that this domestic discourse with its "Great House" vision was a discourse about creolization. I borrow from Ranajit Guha's reading of colonial discourse as a "prose of counter-insurgency." I am not analyzing Guha's subject, English discourse's denial of Indian political agency and organized resistance. But I share with Guha the awareness of having only accounts written by colonizers as sources of information about colonized people. Like him, I suggest that these texts distort the reality but that we can extract a significant amount of information from them if we identify their code. During the Santal revolt, English discourse denied the agency and power of Indians; in the West Indies, it denied the power of creolization. In India, English documentation of disobedience and revolt were indices of organized resistance. When an English colonial writer points to a West Indian practice with moral and cultural disgust, we can look at that practice as a probable instance of creolization. For instance, they define white women in terms of their "negro" practices, by which they mean their creole language, dress, and eating habits. They define brown women by their "white" habits, their taste for European dress and their successful performance of the role of white wife.<sup>14</sup>

This focus on creolization is important because it indicates that domestic discourse developed in relation to creolization, and that domesticity was deployed as a strategy to limit the threats creolization posed to English identity and English control in

---

<sup>14</sup> My reading of creolization here follows Brathwaite's chapter "Creolization" (The Development of Creole Society 296-305).

the West Indies. Creolization was colonial policy on the ground; domesticity was colonial ideology. I suggest that the strongest purpose of the domestic ideology in English discourse on the West Indies was to negotiate this conflict between the imperial ideals of domestic virtue and racial purity and the colonial practice of producing multi-racial cultures and people.<sup>15</sup> In Britain's Caribbean colonies, inter-racial concubinage was virtually institutionalized. Domestic discourse provided social mores that barred inter-racial marriage and legal codes that restricted the right of illegitimate children, the children of inter-racial couples, to inherit and thus to attain the political, economic, and social power to challenge the colonial hierarchy.

This chapter is devoted to a critique of English discourse on the West Indies because it played a central role in proto-nationalist writing in the anglophone Caribbean, in particular its representation of creole women. I focus on the central female figures of the "Great House" — the sadistic white woman slave owner, the seductive brown mistress of the slave master, and the strong, masculine black woman worker. These women arrived in the novels of Thomas MacDermot and Herbert de Lisser, C.L.R. James and Jean Rhys heavy with the baggage of their role in colonial discourse, its negation of West Indian cultural and political legitimacy.

I focus on the two periods of English discourse which most influenced early anglophone Caribbean writing: (1) 1770-1838 -- the period which fashioned the image

---

<sup>15</sup> Stoler claims that metropolitan discourse produced the immorality of the colonies and that this immorality rendered colonials inferior to the metropolitan middle class. The immorality of colonials functioned to define metropolitan bourgeois identity (Stoler 97-100). I agree that English discourse produced West Indian immorality. Yet, I read the threat posed by colonial practices more in terms of a conflict between colonial ideology and policy than does Stoler. England was able to deploy domestic ideology as a means of articulating metropolitan identity and defining it as a superior. England engaged in colonialism to produce new markets and more capital; the price of colonialism was interaction with non-Europeans, ultimately a creolization of English identity and a loss of English control over Empire. This was not a price England's bourgeoisie could acknowledge.

of the Great House in a profusion of texts produced by the debate over slavery and the concern over the wealth and power of the plantocracy; and (2) 1860-1906, the period which produced the figure of the masculine and independent black woman as a sign of the Caribbean's lack of real manhood – an image born of a crisis in English identity, articulated in a variety of travel narratives and monographs by prominent English literary men, most notably Anthony Trollope, Charles Kingsley, and James Anthony Froude. The depiction of the West Indies shifted from a moral narrative of what Catherine Hall calls “cultural racism” in the first half of the 19th century to a biological narrative based on scientific racism in the second; the message, however, remained the same: the British West Indies was devoid of the English masculinity and therefore in need of Englishmen.

In English texts written about the West Indies in the late 17th century and early 18th century, many of the individual elements of the later discourse existed. In Ned Ward's A Trip to Jamaica (1700) and in the anonymous Jamaica Lady (1720), for instance, Jamaica is represented in many of the same ways that it is in the latter part of the 18th century: as a place which destroys women's chastity, a place where white creoles are only superficially feminine and brown women are the mistresses of white men. Early historical texts, Richard Ligon's A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes (1673) and Hans Sloane's A Voyage to the Islands (1707) represent Africans as naked and polygamous. These descriptions parallel 19th century English complaints that slaves eschewed clothing and practiced polygamy. But it was only in the late 18th century that these elements were configured into one fixed representation of the West Indies which racialized domestic virtue, rendering white and English womanhood synonymous with one another and with sexual virtue, while defining brown and black women as inherently sexually immoral and leaving the white creole woman as a racial and moral in-between character -- physically white but morally and

culturally brown or black.

From 1770 to the early 1840s, the debate over slavery was the motivating force in producing English texts on the West Indies. As a result, English discourse itself was strongly divided between texts written in defense of slavery and those written in support of emancipation.

To illustrate the consistency of English discourse and its construction of the Great House, I analyse the representation of creole women in roughly fifteen texts of this period, including histories, travel narratives, and novels, some anti-slavery, some pro-slavery, some written by women, others by men. I include five historical accounts, Edward Long's History of Jamaica (1774), Bryan Edwards's The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies (1798), and J. Stewart's An Account of Jamaica and its Inhabitants (1808) and A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica (1823). These are all written by a politically and economically powerful class of men, who stood in-between the category of creole and English. They were long-time residents of Jamaica, often of established, wealthy planter families, but born and educated in England. During the 18th and 19th century, these are the only group of whites to articulate West Indian nationalism or sentiments approaching it. They are the closest approximation we have to a white creole voice. Yet without exception they all espouse English domestic discourse and thus define the West Indies, particularly its women, as lacking though their lack of English virtues and accomplishments.

I consider four travel narratives by English men, the first two well-known and oft-cited, J.B. Moreton's Manners and Customs of the West India Islands (1790) and Monk Lewis's Journal of a West India Proprietor published in 1834 but based on two sojourns in the island in 1815-16 and 1817. The remaining two are less well known, Cynric Williams's A Tour Through the Island of Jamaica, from the Western to the

Eastern End in the Year 1823 and George Riland's Memoirs of a West-India Planter (1837). J.B. Moreton presents himself as having worked in Jamaica as a bookkeeper; he writes a whimsical guidebook to the island for bookkeepers, giving them practical tips about sex and women as well as an abundance of salacious anecdotes. Monk Lewis, an absentee landlord, writes a journal of daily events on his plantation that focuses almost exclusively on Afro-Caribbeans. He and Moreton both include poetry, songs from slaves; Lewis, in particular, records Afro-Caribbean oral tradition, describing the woman story teller and recounting her Anansi tales. In Cynric Williams's account, we see slavery as a series of comic love encounters. Riland's text is an anti-slavery tract, written by a man who was himself a planter. All three present themselves as critical of slavery, and yet all three participate in slavery.

I refer to four travel narratives by women: Lady Nugent's Journal, Mrs. C.A. Carmichael's Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the white, coloured, and negro population of the West Indies (1833), The Youthful Female Missionary: A Memoir of Mary Ann Hutchins (1840), and Mrs. Lanagan's Antigua and the Antiguans (1844). The wife of governor Nugent in the first years of the 19th century, Maria Nugent was the embodiment of English domestic womanhood in Jamaica. Her diary records her attempts to bring Christianity and domestic virtue to the government slaves and her dismay at the failure of creoles of all colors to attain English cultural and moral standards. Though well-versed in anti-slavery literature and prepared to condemn slavery, Nugent finds that slaves are not badly treated. Carmichael, a long time resident of St. Vincent and Trinidad, and Lanagan, a long time resident of Antigua, are strong supporters of the plantocracy and defenders of slavery. In contrast, Mary Ann Hutchins' letters form a Baptist anti-slavery text, describing the life of a young wife and missionary in Jamaica during the last years of apprenticeship and the first year of emancipation.

These histories and travel narratives were widely available in England and influenced novelists. Sypher asserts that however far-fetched representations of West Indians in English literature may seem, they are usually based on historical accounts; he lists Long and Moreton as two of the most influential (Sypher 505). Charlotte Smith cites extensively from Bryan Edwards's history in The Wanderings of Warwick; some scholars suggest that Charlotte Brontë had read Nugent's journal which was printed privately in 1839 (Thomas "The Tropical Extravagance" 4; Nugent ix); Long's description of white creole women seems to be a blueprint for Brontë's Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre. So close or closed is the relationship between fictional and historical texts, that Stewart employs a scene from Smith's novel The Wanderings of Warwick as historical evidence of the character of white creole women in his 1808 Account of Jamaica.

I consider three novels in the tradition of women's anti-slavery writing Charlotte Smith's Wanderings of Warwick (1794) and The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer (1800), Maria Edgeworth's Belinda (1801), and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847). These contrast weak and immoral West Indian characters to strong and moral English figures with the result of defining English manhood and womanhood as superior. I include two novels written from a West Indian perspective: the pro-slavery novel, Marly, anonymously published in 1828, and Mrs. Henry Lynch's The Cotton Tree (1847). Both counter English discourse by portraying the West Indies as a moral and cultured society.

Despite the disparity in gender, political position, and genre, these books present a surprisingly consistent image of the West Indies. The continuity in the discourse arises from the shared investment in English rule in the colonies and in domestic virtue as a justification for colonial rule.

I borrow my model and understanding of domestic ideology from Catherine

Hall's White Male and Middle Class. Domesticity and anti-slavery were linked middle class projects, both campaigns of the evangelical Clapham sect, which exercised great influence over English politics and social practices. It was largely through domesticity that the middle class defined itself as different and superior to other English classes, the aristocracy and the working class. The ideal of domestic womanhood restricted women to the "private sphere," to their homes and to the two defining roles of womanhood: mother and wife. Economic dependence was absolutely essential to domestic womanhood. Accordingly, women were to be chaste until marriage, unaffected, religious, submissive, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. In Hall's description, the domestic woman was "naturally more delicate, more fragile, morally weaker, and all this demanded a greater degree of caution, retirement, and reserve"(85-6). Men were allotted the public sphere, action, reason, and economic power. With "grandeur, dignity and force," men were to rule and protect family and nation. Women were to domesticate or "regenerate" the family and nation (Hall 86).

Central to domestic ideology and to the definition of the middle class was a new and strengthened divide between gender roles — "between men and women, between public and private"(Hall 95-6). Thus, when the West Indies is criticized for its weak men and unfeminine women, it is being criticized for its failure to meet an English, middle class standard of domesticity.

## The Great House

### I. White Women

Represented with prominence greatly disproportionate with their numbers, white creole women are depicted from Long to Brontë, and Moreton to Smith, as the wives of wealthy planters -- women who were by definition poor imitations of bourgeois femininity. Their failure to be English ladies and their consequent loss of

white womanhood illustrated the instability of whiteness, indicating the extent to which whiteness was a function of culture, not phenotype or genetics. The slim demographic data we have indicates that the failure of white creole women to “pass” as English ladies may have as much to do with class as it does with their creole identity.

Wealthy white women had the highest rate of “absenteeism” in Jamaica; they were the least likely category of whites to live on the island (Mair 192). Many white women were small-scale planters and business owners. In 1817 in Barbados, white women made up 50% of slave owners of properties with less than ten slaves. In 1815 in St. Lucia white women were 48% of slave owners with less than ten slaves (Beckles 8). As married women’s property legally belonged to their husbands, these statistics are evidence of the large number of independent white women participating in the colonial project as entrepreneurs and small planters, not as dependent wives. But they were clearly not wealthy, and many were poor. The local vestries gave jobs, pensions, and passages to England to poor white women in order to avoid the spectacle of their visible poverty (Mair 208-9).

Thus, most white women simply did not have the financial wherewithal to secure the education and material possessions that would give them the linguistic and cultural skills, the clothing or the leisure to be real English gentlewomen. Because English discourse on the West Indies viewed whiteness as synonymous with upper class position, there was no legitimate category for white women of lesser means despite their majority. Unable to pay for the education to free themselves from the telltale signs of creole culture, these women lost their unquestioned right to whiteness. Thus, creole identity for white women meant an inextricable combination of class, race, and geographical status.

Both pro-slavery and anti-slavery texts made their case against white creole women by arguing that the brutality of slave society and the contagious nature of

African culture rendered white women unsuitable as wives because they could not nurture and educate English men.<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Smith's The Wanderings of Warwick (1796) provides a prototypical depiction of the brutal white slave mistress.<sup>17</sup> In Smith's novel, a young British lieutenant, "Jack," arrives early on his wedding day and glimpses his beloved Miss Shaftesbury, a Jamaican, administering a flogging to a young woman. Jack explains to his companion, Warwick, that,

My fair, my gentle Marianne, whom I have seen weep over fictitious distresses of a novel, and shrink from the imaginary sorrows of an imaginary heroine, walked with cool but stately steps before two old negro women who dragged between them a mulatto girl of ten or eleven years old, while another stout negro woman followed with the instrument of punishment in her hand, which I soon found was to be applied to the unfortunate little creature, who while one of the old monsters bound her and another endeavoured to stop her mouth, pleaded as well as she could for mercy to her "dear Missy" and pleaded in vain. (53-54)

---

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Sussman makes this same point in her discussion of Smith's novel: "Abolitionists, as well as pro-slavery advocates, feared that exposure to such scenes, in which a white woman came face to face with the cruelty imposed on black bodies would ruin both the female capacity for compassionate suffering and the lines between familiar relations and economic relations. Neither group imagined that domestic virtue could withstand the pervasive cruelty of Jamaican slave culture, but proponents of slavery thought the threat could be contained, while abolitionists argued that the danger to femininity was ineradicable and mortal" (268).

<sup>17</sup> Other writers who depict white creole women in stereotypical terms as cruel and violent to slaves include: Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Pringle, Cynric Williams, and Lady Nugent. In Jane Eyre, Rochester tells Jane that Bertha was unreasonable and violent with her servants. Cynric Williams describes a white woman's jealous wrath at a brown woman (317). Lady Nugent writes of one creole family, "as for the ladies, they appear to me perfect viragos; they never spoke but in the most imperious manner to their servants, and are constantly finding fault"(107).

As a result, Jack leaves without a word, never to speak to Miss Shaftesbury again, much less to marry her though the loss of her fortune will restrict him to a working life (53-55). In having her slave flogged, particularly in appearing "to enjoy the spectacle," Miss Shaftesbury revealed the falseness of her femininity.<sup>18</sup>

In his Account of Jamaica and its Inhabitants (1808) and A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica (1823), Stewart explains that "... the woman accustomed to the exercise of severity soon loses all the natural softness of her sex"(View 172). Being raised from early childhood to "lord over" another human being leads her to view corporal punishment as normal and to lose her feminine qualities of "humanity" and "benevolence"; these losses in turn negate her other feminine virtues — as Stewart writes, "without these, even beauty, wit, and accomplishments, would lose half their charms"(An Account 161-2). "Lording over" or being "master" of other human beings is for Stewart essentially unfeminine. "Being Master" was masculine. The loss of femininity Stewart describes, constitutes, in the binary gender system of domestic ideology, a masculinization of white creole women.

That both pro-slavery and anti-slavery texts depict women slave owners as pathological suggests that English writers perceive the position of master as inherently inappropriate for women in domestic ideology.<sup>19</sup> Since anti-slavery discourse held that

---

<sup>18</sup> Sussman analyses this scene at length, focusing on the falseness of Miss Shaftesbury's femininity demonstrated in her lack of sentiment. In the anti-slavery movement women are supposed to be inspired by the mistreatment of slaves portrayed in books to act against slavery; that is, their sentimental response to slavery should elicit anti-slavery action (Sussman 272). In this scene, the white creole proves herself insensible to sentiment. Sentimental novels do not produce or nourish a feminine sensibility in Miss Shaftesbury. Slavery, the novel suggests, has destroyed that sensibility.

<sup>19</sup> In The Mastery of Submission, John Noyes discusses the conflation or slippage European discourse made in the late 19th century between white women, who had authority over servants in the colonies and white women dominatrixes wielding whips over men in the metropole. In her article on de Lisser's The White Witch of Rose Hall,

slave owning was morally wrong and detrimental to all slave owners, gender ought not to have mattered. However, even in anti-slavery writing, there is something especially disconcerting about the female slave owner, which makes her very existence a perversion. In his appendix to Mary Prince's slave narrative, Thomas Pringle, secretary of the Anti-slavery society, chooses the image of the white woman slave owner as the quintessential image of slavery's evil. In describing this Brazilian slave owner as a sadistic prostitute, who beats her young female slave with such fervor that she does not notice that her blouse has fallen to reveal her breasts (Prince 113). Pringle conflates sexual license, physical cruelty, and a lack of sensibility. The multiplication of vices suggests an exaggerated antipathy towards the woman qua slave owner.<sup>20</sup> This choice suggests to me that for anti-slavery, as well as pro-slavery texts, women's power over other human beings is represented as perverse or pathological because women's power is a threat to patriarchy.

If white creole women are undesirable first because they transgress gender boundaries, they are unmarriagable in the second instance because they transgress racial boundaries. Although all creoles spoke creole, ate of creole food, and probably shared other creole cultural practices, English writers define the creole culture as "negro" or "African."<sup>21</sup> In so doing, they vilify creole culture, rendering it an antithesis to the

---

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argues that the woman plantation owner, Annie Palmer, disrupts the patriarchal power simply by virtue of being the master of large plantations and she must be vilified and then destroyed to restore the patriarchal order. Both Noyes's and Paravisini-Gebert's arguments point to intolerance of women in the role of master. I think that a similar phenomenon occurs in English discourse during the early 19th century.

<sup>20</sup> It is also significant that statistically most slave owners were men. We might note that slaves were particularly important property for white women, who could not so easily inherit land as their brothers.

<sup>21</sup> As there is today, there was probably a linguistic continuum. People spoke at different levels of this continuum and interspersed different levels of creole speech.

superior English culture. Stewart, for instance, maintains that white women's "involuntary imitation" of Afro-Caribbean servants led them to acquire "the very manners and barbarous dialect of the negroes" and thus to "exhibit much of the Quashiba"(160).<sup>22</sup> The stereotypical portraits were almost formulaic, always defining white creole women by their creole language, culinary, and dress habits, as well as their poor conversation skills. From the point of view of domestic ideology and the English middle class, "Africanization" rendered white creole women unfit for marriage. However, from the point of the historian of creolization, the africanized white woman, Stewart's "Quashiba," is a creolized woman.

White creole women may have the facade of English culture, but if caught at home, they will be found transgressing racial boundaries in any number of cultural areas: space, dress, food, and all other aspects of deportment.<sup>23</sup> Edward Long's description probably served as a blueprint for later writers, whose accounts become almost formulaic. If deprived of English models, Long explained, white creole women are prone to acquire the language and habits of their Afro-Caribbean servants. Long gives an inventory of the ways they constitute the binary opposite of the English ideal of domestic womanhood: white Jamaican women are often found in indecent clothes of slaves, "awkwardly dangling [their] arms with the air of a negroe-servant, lolling almost the whole day upon beds or settees, her head muffled up with two or three handkerchiefs, her dress loose, and without stays." They eat slaves' food and dispense with civilized habits of tables and silverware. "At noon," Long describes white creole women "as employed in gobbling pepper-pot, seated on the floor, with her

---

<sup>22</sup> Quashiba was the stereotyped, racist name of a woman slave; its counterpart for male slaves was Quashee.

<sup>23</sup> Even Mrs. A.C. Carmichael, who defends white creole women, describes them as unable to engage in cultured conversation, but she attributes this to overwork, not the assimilation of African culture (39).

sable hand-maids around her. In the afternoon, she takes her siesto as usual.... When she rouzes from slumber, her speech is whining, languid, and childish. (vol. II 279). When she's older, Long continues, the white creole will be so embarrassed by her intellectual weaknesses that she will refrain from speaking in public. "Lapsus linguae" is the phrase, Marly's hero uses to refer to a creole woman's slips into creole. He, for instance, finds his creole dance partner "a lively-good tempered girl, though only half educated, and rather *too much of the negro*. Once on his putting a question to her, when she was off her guard, she returned by way of answer, 'Him no savey, massa.' She caught herself in a moment, and endeavoured to laugh it off, but it would not do"(*my italics* 210). Marly's observation that his partner is "rather *too much of the negro*" makes clear that he defines creole language as black; anyone who speaks it as blackened by it. Lady Nugent observed "the creole language is not confined to the negroes. Many of the ladies, who have not been educated in England, speak a sort of broken English, with an indolent drawling out of their words, that is very tiresome if not disgusting"(131).<sup>24</sup>

Marly's creole partner is explicitly contrasted with the upper class, English-educated heiress, Miss M'Fathom, whom Marly is destined to marry. The narrator conveys the excellence of M'Fathom's linguistic and conversational skills by an implicit comparison with the stereotypical monosyllabic creole. He comments "she not only did not fall off in conversation, nor detract from the prepossessing opinion we are led to grant beauty"(119). She is the appropriate wife for Marly because she is the opposite of the typical creole, as demonstrated by her speech.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Nugent combines the stereotypical characteristics of creole language and poor conversational skills in her description of Mrs. C as "a perfect Creole" because she "says little, and drawls out that little"(72).

<sup>25</sup> That only the exceptional white creole woman is worthy of marriage undercuts the central argument of Marly that domesticity can be made to harmonize with creole

Published in 1828, over fifty years after Long's history, Marly follows Long's formula, when it describes George Marly's visit to his partner the day after the ball. He ...catches his fair partner, with her sister, and two other creole ladies, much to their vexation, devouring ... [from] an iron pot a sort of hodge-podge called okra pepperpot, completely in the negro fashion, dispensing altogether with the use of table, plates, spoons, and knives, and forks...(211)

Moreton's 1790 version of the scene is the most graphic version. He depicts a banquet given by a white mother for her two daughters, with the intention of finding husbands for the two. One daughter, Miss Laura can not eat the dinner with white suitors because she "had been that forenoon, as usual, in the cook-room, where she ate a calabash full of substantial pepperpot; she had a necessary call backwards"(117). The "call backwards" refers on a literal level to an attack of diarrhea and on a figurative level to the return to the primitive ways of Africans and animals. Going into the cook's space meant going into a space reserved for Afro-Caribbeans, eating pepperpot meant eating Afro-Caribbean food. The result is "disgusting": the pepperpot makes her violently ill; her dog, Yellow Legs, then consumes the result. Yellow Legs conflates the disgust associated with diarrhea and the disgust associated with racial difference. Yellow Legs is a figure for the woman herself, who becomes racially yellow by adopting Afro-Caribbean cultural practices and physically yellow as her legs are likely stained by diarrhea. Her behavior of running outdoors to defecate makes her additionally like the dog and like Afro-Caribbeans who were compared to animals.

Moreton finds the sisters unworthy of marriage but he is sufficiently attracted to them to go skinny dipping with them after dinner to receive their "wanton kisses"(117-18). He thus treats them much in the way English men treated Afro-Caribbean women

---

society and slavery.

-- with repulsion and desire.

This formulaic description of white creole women always concludes with the assertion that they are unfit wives and mothers (of English men). Long laments, “how unfit they are to be companions of sensible men, or the patterns of imitation to their daughters! How incapable of regulating their manners, enlightening their understanding, or improving their morals!” (2:279). Stewart contends that white women must be removed from the West Indies all together ( An Account 164). Marly and Moreton (110-111) simply do not consider the average white creole women as candidates for marriage.

On one hand, this portrayal of creole white womanhood contributes to the construction of English women. In an analysis of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847), Jane Austen's Mansfield Park (1814), Maria Edgeworth's Belinda (1801), Mary Hay's Emma Courtney (1796) and Smith's Wanderings of Warwick (1794), Jocelyn Stitt argues that the West Indies posed a threat to the English domestic family. This threat was usually expressed through concern about intermarriage between English and West Indian whites. In Belinda, domestic order is only achieved when the hero and heroine Clarence Hervey and Belinda reject creole partners for marriage and choose each other. Similarly, Rochester must free himself of his dark, drunken, insane, ill-educated, and violent creole wife, Bertha Mason before he can marry Jane, the model of domestic virtue.

Yet, white creole women's failure to be ladies has implications for the empire: As the producers of Englishmen and as their tutors in English culture, English women, their bodies, and their cultural whiteness were essential to the imperial project. The physical disgust with which English writers describe white creole women indicates that there is no middle ground. If the white woman cannot fulfill her imperial role, then she must be the opposite of that ideal: not the pinnacle of refinement but the nadir of

disgust. Englishness, whiteness, and English control over the empire seem thus to be absolutes. A woman is white, English, and bourgeois, or she is not white. The focus on the body may reflect the fact that white women's bodies were central to the production of Englishness. A contamination of the white woman's body signaled the contamination of the imperial body politic. Long draws this connection when he blames Jamaica's failure to become an independent white nation on white Jamaican women's failure to be appropriate wives.<sup>26</sup>

The most important aspect of white womanhood in the West Indies is that the position of wife was coded as white and opposed to the position of mistress or concubine which were defined as belonging to Afro-Caribbean women. These roles are defined through what I call the "colonial romance" of the Great House: the illicit relationship between the female slave and the male master. In so doing, it illustrates the interdependence of these racially defined womanhoods. The romance is the basis for the stereotypes of white and Afro-Caribbean women. In the romance, the white man (husband) rejects the white woman (his wife) in favor of a brown (possibly black) woman. The white woman is so jealous that she beats the brown woman incessantly. The cycle is a vicious one because the white woman's lack of attraction leads her to lose her mate to a brown woman, and, as a result of her ensuing jealousy, she becomes

---

<sup>26</sup> Long's logic is that education would produce marriages, which produce a larger white population. The larger white population would foster a sense of patriotism; whites would want to stay on the island rather than to return to England (vol. II: 279). To this end Long suggests that the state sponsor white women's education "Can the wisdom of legislature be more usefully applied, than to the attainment of the these ends," asks Long, "which, by making the women more desirable partners in marriage would render the island more populous, and residences in it more eligible; which would banish ignorance from the rising generation restrain numbers from seeking these improvements, at the hazard of life, in other countries; and from unnaturally reviling a place which they would love and prefer, if they could enjoy it"(vol. 2: 279).

a masculinized sadist. This renders her yet again undesirable.<sup>27</sup> In most English texts this “romance” is echoed in the portrayal of brown women as sexually desirable and white women as objects of scorn.

The second volume of Smith's Letters of a Solitary Wanderer (1800), The Story of Henrietta illustrates how English discourse defined the position of wife as belonging to white women while identifying the role of concubine as the domain of Afro-Caribbean women. The novel stands at a nexus of sentiment and slavery, of domestic and anti-slavery fiction. Henrietta's identity as a white and therefore sentimental woman depends on a strict racial segregation of bodies and identities. It suggests, much as the pro-slavery writer Stewart does, that there can be no true white women in Jamaica because Jamaican society constantly places white women in positions appropriate to women of color and thus compromises their racial identity. A Jamaican white raised and educated in Europe, Henrietta represents the group of white creoles English writers felt might escape the moral and cultural evils of the West Indies and be the domestic and social equals of English women.<sup>28</sup> On returning to Jamaica, Henrietta faces a series of threats to her womanhood: (1) the compromise of her racial identity by living in her father's home where no distinction of rank is made between her and her Afro-Caribbean half-sisters; (2) the marriage her father arranges with a vulgar, lower class white, Mr. Sawkins; (3) the abduction and marriage to an enslaved black man, Amponah; and (4) the abduction and marriage to one of the maroon leaders, where she would be one among several wives. Each of these would place her in the

---

<sup>27</sup> The jealousy of white women is repeatedly documented. For instance, Cynric Williams recounts buying a woman slave in order to remove her from her white master's lechery and his white wife's jealous sadism (317-18). In "AIR -what care I for Mam or Dad, J.B. Moreton records the story of a black woman reaping her mistress's jealous blows for bearing a child the woman falsely believed to be her husband's (154).

<sup>28</sup> Long, Edwards, even Moreton comment that creoles educated and resident in England can potentially escape the taint of creole culture.

position of a woman of color. She perceives each proposal for "marriage" as a death threat; that is, a complete destruction of her identity qua white domestic woman.<sup>29</sup> In this period, English women commonly compared arranged marriage to slavery (Ferguson 19). Henrietta heightens the stakes; for her, marriage to a man unequal in sentiment and fortune is both slavery and death.<sup>30</sup> She refers to herself as the future "slave" of Sawkins (61) and calls her marriage a "bill of sale, for what else can I call it? He has been used to purchase slaves, and feels no repugnance in selling his daughter to the most dreadful of all slavery!"(76) For Henrietta, arranged marriage constitutes death. Rather than a wedding, she imagines "a funeral will be the festival, if there is any; for I can die"(101).

To escape the slavery and death of arranged marriage, Henrietta accepts the offer of her servant Amponah to lead her to safety at another plantation. When he attempts to take her in his arms and proposes — "I no slave now...Missy, there be no difference now; you be my wife"(303) — she prepares to commit suicide by throwing herself over a precipice. Her action reflects that marriage to a slave would constitute the death of her identity as a white woman. She is saved by the shots of maroon soldiers, who kill Amponah, and bring her to the camp of their general. There she

---

<sup>29</sup> Sussman makes the point that Smith places Henrietta in the position of Afro-Caribbean women and thus deconstructs the distinction between black and white women. She writes, "Henrietta's lament [about her arranged marriage] seems to construct an unavoidable equality between herself and enslaved women — an equality not, as abolitionists would claim, between their domestic sentiments, but rather between their similarly disempowered positions in a patriarchal culture. As Henrietta's words make clear, if a white woman becomes the subject of physical force, her body becomes virtually indistinguishable from a slave's" (263).

<sup>30</sup> Denbigh considers Henreitta a desirable partner because, as he explains, "our fortunes, our condition of life, and our ages, all seemed to unite in making an union between us desirable to both parties" (15). Sawkins, a "dependent" and the nephew of a "low woman" is an affront to Henrietta as a husband because he is of a lower social and economic class (66-7).

faints when she learns that she is to become one of the wives of the Maroon general, a position indistinguishable from that of women of color. Her loss of sensibility in a physical sense signals the threat being a wife in a polygamous marriage posed to her identity as a white, moral, domestic woman. Smith's novel defines any type of sexuality outside of Christian marriage as fatal to white femininity. If Henrietta had had sex with Amponah or the Maroon General and not killed herself, her fiancé would have considered her as good as dead. Denbigh laments, "I could determine to abandon her, though I were sure to find her disgraced and undone. I could die with her – (for I knew she never would survive the horrors I dreaded for her) – I could die with her, if to live with her were denied" (115).

Her father's household poses perhaps a more fundamental threat because it makes no distinction between Henrietta, the white legitimate daughter and the illegitimate Afro-Caribbean daughters. The Afro-Caribbean women see nothing incorrect with the household. Henrietta complains of the "insensibility to their situation" (57-8). That the women's presence literally colors the entire house is suggested by a syntactical slip in Henrietta's description of the home: "Do you know, Denbigh, that there are three young women here, living in the house, *of colour*, as they are called, who are, I understand, my sisters by half blood" (57 Smith's italics). In her sentence, the phrase "of colour" logically modifies sisters, but its proximity to "house" communicates the underlying reality for Henrietta and for domestic discourse: no house can contain illegitimate Afro-Caribbean women without being a house of color. And no English woman can live in a colored house.

Smith's narrative is important because it illustrates that English/white womanhood is defined through its opposition to brown and black womanhood. It is not so much that brown women are concubines but that concubinage is racially brown, not so much that white women are wives, but that Christian marriage and domestic

womanhood are white. It asserts a principle that even pro-slavery texts, like Stewart's end in espousing: the exigencies of slavery and creole society exclude the possibility of a genuine domestic white womanhood in the West Indies; only in England can women be white.

The only texts to contradict this image of creole women that I've found are Mary Prince's narrative and Mrs. Henry Lynch novel for young adults, The Cotton Tree: or, Emily, the little West Indian, a Tale for Young people. (1847). Prince represents a spectrum of white women, ranging from sadistic slave owners to victimized wives and daughters. Lynch's novel presents a positive image to the negative stereotype. Published in the same year as Brontë's novel and written by the daughter of a West India planter, Lynch's text has an almost uncanny parallel to Jane Eyre, but in Lynch's text, the moral protagonist is a young white creole woman sent to school in England. Like Jane, she is ridiculed. Jane's cousins torment her because she is poor. Emily's schoolmates torture her on the grounds that she has a creole accent and that she is associated with slavery. Jane is tutored to accept God and not to be discontent by the motherless Helen who dies tragically of tuberculosis; Emily is tutored by an orphan named Jane Lucille in the same religious virtues that Jane learns from Helen. Jane Lucille like Helen dies of tuberculosis. Creole Emily ends the novel by converting her recalcitrant father to piety and becoming a devoted wife and mother — both achievements parallel Jane's conversion of the recalcitrant Rochester and her happy ending in marriage and motherhood. The significant difference is that whereas Brontë depicts the white creole Bertha as the antithesis of Jane's model femininity, Lynch's text presents the white creole as the model of English domesticity. Lynch depicts her character carefully to refute the negative stereotype of white creoles as uncultured sadists, but she does not appear to challenge the principles of domestic discourse except in arguing for an inclusion of upper class white creole women into the

category of domestic womanhood.

### Brown Women

The depiction of Afro-Caribbean women – both brown and black -- is prominent in English discourse because the plantation economy depended on enslaved women's fertility to supply the labor force and because Afro-Caribbean women were the site of the fundamental contradiction between colonial ideology which condemned inter-racial sex and colonial practice which institutionalized it. As a result of this conflict between ideology and policy, English male writers represent Afro-Caribbean women in strikingly ambivalent and conflicted terms: as the most desirable and the most reprehensible of women.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> In tying the ambivalence of colonial discourse to the conflict between colonial ideology and colonial policy, my argument parallels Robert Young's assertion that colonial ambivalence derives from the fact that colonialism produces the desire for inter-racial sex and that desire constitutes a threat, a "nightmare" for colonialism. On one hand, Young argues, the European theories of race were based on a moral hierarchy in which European culture was defined as civilized and therefore superior and the colonial world is defined as uncivilized and therefore inferior (94). Metropolitan identity and superiority – the very justification for its exploitation and colonization of its empires -- relied on its cultural and racial difference from colonized people. Yet, as Young describes it, colonialism is a veritable machine for producing desire for inter-racial sex. "Nineteenth-century theories of race," he explains, "did not just consist of essentializing differentiations between self and other: they were also about a fascination with people having sex - interminable, adulterating, aleatory, illicit inter-racial sex"(181). In this Young argues colonialism inevitably produced inter-racial classes of people whose racial and cultural hybridity undermined the sharp racial and cultural distinctions on which European identity and superiority depend. "In that sense," writes Young, "it was itself the instrument that produced its own darkest fantasy the unlimited and ungovernable fertility of "unnatural unions"(98). As a result of this conflict, "the races and their intermixture circulate around an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion: a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and merge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain distinct and are set against each other dialogically"(19). I differ from Young in seeing specific historical institutions as productive of this ambivalence, in particular, concubinage.

White women writers, who were most often long-time residents of the West Indies, tended to depict brown women in particularly negative terms; their attitude probably reflects the fact that brown women constituted a direct threat to white women's social and economic status. In her defense of the plantocracy, Mrs. Carmichael defines brown women as people who set out to destroy domestic virtue: their goal in life is to seduce white men into non-marital sexual relations in order to extort money from them. "To allure young men who are newly come to the country, or entice the inexperienced," she wrote, "may be said to be their principal object"(71). Carmichael comments that "their constitutional indolence is so great, that it may prevent their employing the powers of their mind" and that "there is such a total want...of decency in the way they dress that they always appeared to me very disgusting" (74).<sup>32</sup>

In families in which the white male had both a white wife and an Afro-Caribbean mistress, white and brown women competed directly for the family's wealth and the man's attentions (Mair 253-5). These individual contests were mirrored in the social structure. Brown women took the place white women occupied in England. They were the de facto wives, house managers, the daughters, the nurses, the confidantes of white men. They proved themselves eminently skilled at the very tasks - being wives, mothers, and caretakers -- that defined white middle class womanhood. If they were providing these skills and services, what besides the legal distinction of marriage defined white women's role?

Brown women could accrue financial and social status monopolized by white women in England. There is an important exception. Whereas white women forfeited

---

<sup>32</sup> Yet Carmichael also claims that "among coloured females, marriage is not very general; but many of them, although not bound by the ties of matrimony, do live otherwise respectably with those who maintain them"(71). The contradictions in women's texts, however, tend to be much less marked than those in men's writing.

their property and legal identity with marriage under English law until the end of the 19th century, brown women, who did not marry, could retain their own property. As a result, they were able to break the racial hierarchy which made race coterminous with class. Their social and economic upward mobility produced both a middle and an upper class of Afro-Caribbeans. Because browns could petition for the status of whites, brown women and their families complicated racial identity, unlinking the status of whiteness from phenotype and blood (Brathwaite 169-70; Mair 423; Sturtz 2).<sup>33</sup> Mair writes, "Admission to at least some of the rights of citizenship through private Acts of legislation was one of the strongest incentives to mulatto women to strive after liaisons with whites, to recommend a similar course to their daughter, and in the process to reaffirm how favoured they were above others in the society" (423-4).<sup>34</sup> Such women were persons of authority and importance to the white establishment (Mair 441) – men and women whose wealth, dress, carriages might outshine those of the white plantocracy and even the governor at public events (Stewart *An Account* 303; Mair 422). Though upper class brown women might look indistinguishable from an upper class white woman, possessing the same skin color, accent, clothing, and dress, they in fact were products of social practices antithetical to the English domestic household and family structure – inter-racial non-marital sex and female headed brown

---

<sup>33</sup> Mair writes, for instance, that "in 1783, 42 coloured persons received Acts of Privilege, entitling them to "the same rights and privileges with English subjects, under certain restrictions..." The majority of petitioners seem to have been mulatto women, though some white men and one black woman also succeeded in petitioning (Mair 423).

<sup>34</sup> In an effort to protect the white planter class and its hold political and economic power, colonies granted Afro-Caribbeans fewer legal rights, especially in terms of inheritance. In Jamaica, for instance, an 1763 law limited to 2,000 pounds the amount of money and property white men could will to their inter-racial children. That the law was repealed in 1813 reflects the resistance among planters to this limitation – it reflects their desire to give their property to Afro-Caribbean domestic partners and children. The privilege acts existed even during the period the 1763 law was in place.

households. In showing that the performance of English bourgeois culture did not necessarily reflect domestic virtue or European identity, the legally white Afro-Caribbean woman undermined the racial hierarchy of English domesticity.

As an illustration of brown women's social status, Mair cites Reverend Bickell wrote in 1826: "I have known some married ladies pay visits to the kept mistresses of rich men, who were not relatives, though they would not look upon a more respectable woman of the same colour, who might be married to a brown man"(Mair 423; Bickell 105). Respectable white ladies sometimes were godmothers to the children of inter-racial unions(Stewart a View 175). Brown women of the great house could even claim intimate audience with a Governor's wife (Nugent 65,66,68,78,83). These social relations between white and brown women may belie the animosity so carefully constructed in English texts.

Because the Great House myth represented brown women almost exclusively as the mistresses of planters, it focused on precisely those figures who most clearly embodied the danger creolization posed to English discourse -- the physically brown but culturally white wealthy class of Afro-Caribbeans. In this way, English discourse heightened the threat brown women posed to the English hegemony in the West Indies. Between 1770-1838, only a small percentage of brown women would have qualified as white. Brown women, in fact, occupied almost all social levels of Jamaican society, from indigents to school teachers, shopkeepers, and wealthy proprietors. The majority of inter-racial children were the children of white employees, however, not of large-scale proprietors.

In the West Indies, marriage thus became the last distinction between the white planter's wife and the legally white, Afro-Caribbean mistress of the planter.<sup>35</sup> The

---

<sup>35</sup> The greatest legal discrimination against "freed coloureds" was probably that they did not have the same rights to give evidence in court as whites (Brathwaite 170). They also were not able to get exception from the deficiency law, as white men were.

legitimacy matrimony gave to a woman and her children provided a social boundary between “whites” and wealthy “free coloureds” -- a last means of distinguishing white from non-white.

Yet as employees, the majority of white males were barred from marriage both by hiring policy and the paucity of their wages. Instead, bookkeepers and overseers were expected to have an Afro-Caribbean woman on the estate see to their domestic and sexual needs.<sup>36</sup> According to Mrs. Carmichael, for instance, married men were not as a rule hired as bookkeepers (Carmichael 63). Stewart condemns the policy on the grounds that it undercuts white political and social control. “The wretched policy is indeed unaccountable,” he asserts, “particularly when it is considered, that... [it] inevitably leads, or contributes to lead, to an order of things in the colonies very different from present” (A View 191).

Yet this practice threatened their racial identity – Carmichael refers to white men with Afro-Caribbean mistresses as “white negroes” (59). Lady Nugent's description of how creole society destroys white men's virtue is typical of English historical narratives in its scorn for white working men:

It is extraordinary to witness the immediate effect that the climate and habit of living in this country have upon the mind and manners of Europeans, particularly of the lower orders. In the upper ranks, they become indolent and inactive, regardless of everything but eating,

---

This law required plantations maintain one white man per every ten slaves. White men, and after 1813, brown men could pay a fee to avoid hiring so many whites. However, all women were required to abide by the law. This Mair suggests is why so many women went to the cities rather than plantations, where the money could be made with fewer than ten slaves and the deficiency laws were not in effect. It was a law meant to keep power in white male hands (Sturtz 10).

<sup>36</sup> In the post-emancipation period in Jamaica, for instance, bookkeepers were assigned a woman worker on estate as a concubine. She was paid by the estate, a false task being assigned to her in the estate books (Bryan The Jamaican People 75).

drinking, and indulging themselves, and are almost entirely under the dominion of their mulatto favourites. In the lower orders, they are the same, with the addition of conceit and tyranny; considering the negroes as creatures formed merely to administer to their ease, and to be subject to their caprice. (131)

Stewart tells a similar tale:

The young tyro in vice and profligacy yields at length to their baleful influence, after a short and ineffectual resistance. He now can drink, wench, and blaspheme, without a sigh or blush! He sports a sable mistress. In short, his mind soon becomes a chaos of licentiousness, indecency and profanation; while his constitution and person proportionably suffer by the excesses to which they instigate him. (An Account 197-8)

The plantation system thus placed the newly arrived bookkeeper in a no win situation. It allotted him an Afro-Caribbean woman as concubine and then told him he was no longer quite European because he had sex with and kept house with a non-white woman. Yet all white men in the West Indies found themselves in a position similar to that of bookkeepers. They found themselves in a situation in which there were very few white women and many women of color, in which marriage required wealth and commitment and concubinage required neither.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> In Stoler's model, metropolitan discourse produced poor, immoral whites through the system of barrack concubinage and then vilified as sub-European. In English discourse on the West Indies wealthy white men were often described in equally negative terms as their employees. English opinion held that planters were sexually immoral and economically irresponsible (Holt 87). Anti-slavery missionary literature contains descriptions of planters in the same negative terms planters used to describe Afro-Caribbeans (Hall 212). The conflict between the middle class and the aristocracy/plantocracy this conflict and contradiction within English discourse on the West Indies.

The pattern is actually much larger. In order to succeed in West Indian society, white employees had to assimilate a number of practices which defined them as immoral and culturally inferior. They needed to speak creole languages to communicate with their workers; they needed an Afro-Caribbean woman if they were to have clean laundry and sex; they needed to be willing to administer physical punishment to participate in Estate discipline; they needed to define themselves as white in terms of a set of material achievements. Yet when they had assimilated these practices they were defined as sexually immoral, ill-spoken, brutal men, social climbers who cared only about luxury and material goods – “a Tribe of Fungi” in Lanagan’s words.

Stoler cites concubinage as an important example of how metropolitan discourse produced immoral colonial identities as part of the process of defining metropolitan bourgeois identity. In the East Indies, the concubines were arranged for by employers. Inter-racial concubinage was the official policy of the Dutch colonial government (Stoler Race and the Education of desire 180). Yet the employees, their concubines, and their children were defined as inferior, a threat to the domestic order of metropolitan Holland – and thus, not quite white. In the West Indies, a similar practice was followed but not officially acknowledged.

This metropolitan condemnation of sexual practices institutionalized and sanctioned in West Indian society fostered the striking ambivalence that characterizes men’s depictions of brown women. For example, Moreton first warns his readers against hiring a brown mistress on the grounds that “mongrel wenches from their youth up are taught to be whores,” and likely to be overpriced and diseased. Yet in the next moment, Moreton advises white men to seek out brown women as sexual partners:

... as there are many better than others among the tawny race, if you chance to meet an agreeable young woman, who upon enquiry (do not credit her own words) you will find was not much prostituted, if you

please and humour her properly, she will make and mend ail your clothes, attend you when sick, and when she can afford it will assist you with anything in her power, for many of them are good-natured. (131)

For Moreton brown women are absolutely to be avoided and absolutely to be sought; they are diseased and they are excellent healers. They are acquisitive and they are very generous.

A similar ambivalence characterizes Bryan Edwards' account of brown women. Because he sought to secure a future for white hegemony in Jamaica, Edwards vehemently opposed the unions of brown women and white men. "The accusation generally brought against the free people of Colour," he writes, "is the incontinency of their women; of whom, such as are young, and have tolerable persons, are universally maintained by White men of all ranks and conditions, as kept mistresses. The fact is too notorious to be concealed or controverted"(bk. 4, ch.1:21). Yet, he asserts that "the unhappy females here spoken of, are much less deserving reproach and reprehensions than their keepers" (bk 4. Ch. 1:22) because they had so many domestic virtues,

In their dress and carriage they are modest, and in conversation reserved; and they frequently manifest a fidelity and attachment towards their keepers, which if it be not virtue, is something very like it. The terms and manner of their compliance too are commonly as decent, though perhaps not as solemn, as those of marriage; and the agreement they consider equally innocent; giving themselves up to the husband (for so he is called) with faith plighted, with sentiment, and with affection.(Bk IV 23)

Rejected as wives by white men, these women, Edwards argues, had no choice but to

enter into the immoral institution of concubinage.<sup>38</sup> He asserts that

Thus, excluded as they are from all hope of ever arriving to the honour and happiness of wedlock, insensible of its beauty and sanctity; ignorant of all Christian and moral obligations; threatened by poverty, urged by their passions, and encouraged by example, upon what principle can we expect these ill-fated women to act otherwise than they do?(Bk. IV 22)

Though he admits "that this system ought to be utterly abolished," he is left asking, "but by whom is such a reform to be begun and accomplished?" (bk. IV 23).

For Edwards, there is no solution to the problem of concubinage. Otherwise put, there is no solution to the creolization of womanhood represented in the brown women's assimilation of British womanhood.

The guiding force in Long's description of brown and also black women is his desire to end miscegeny in order to foster a white Jamaican nation. He described interracial liaisons as "goatish embraces" and saw all women of color as "common prostitutes" (vol.2 327). The most striking characteristic of Long's description is his assertion that brown women are sterile because they are the product of two species.<sup>39</sup> He asserts that, "some few of them have intermarried here with those of their own complexion; but such matches have generally been defective and barren. They seem in this respect to be actually of the mule-kind, and so not capable of producing from one

---

<sup>38</sup> "No White man of decent appearance," he Edwards writes "unless urged by the temptation of a considerable fortune, will condescend to give his hand in marriage to a mulatto! The very idea is shocking"(22).

<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that Long is often cited as representative of colonial discourse, his strong white nationalism and his scientific articulation of polygenist theory of race were almost anomalous in English discourse on the West Indies. His political position correlated with his scientific theory of race. He asserted that Africans were not of the same species as whites, but rather inhabited an liminal category -- between orangutans and whites.

another as from commerce with a distinct White or Black"(vol.2 335).<sup>40</sup> Any children produced in brown-brown marriages must, Long reasons, result from the woman's infidelity with a man of another race. In defining brown women as sterile, Long deploys race science to support his political desire for white Jamaican nationhood.

Even Edward Long expresses a fundamental ambivalence toward brown women. Long claims that brown women are "well-shaped" and "well-featured," but "grow horribly ugly" by the age of twenty five. On one hand, "their behavior in public is remarkably decent." On the other hand, they are "lascivious" and "affect a modesty they do not feel." On one hand they are very caring and generous -- "excellent nurses," who "do many charitable actions, especially to poor white persons." On the other hand, Long maintains that "the mulatta" is very cunning in deceiving the white man into thinking she loves him; she appears to be jealous, but in fact has her own "favourites" and steals the white man's money (331-34). She may be generous and charitable, but she is also extravagant, spending "all the money they get in ornaments, and the most expensive sorts of linen"(vol.2 335).

Colonial society pressured white men both to refuse and to accept women of color as lovers. The men react against the conflicting pressures by expressing alternately exaggerated praises or condemnations. The dynamic mimics that of a seesaw. One extreme result is the inversion of the racial hierarchy of women which is

---

<sup>40</sup> Robert Young includes Long in the category of "straightforward polygenist" because he asserted the sterility of inter-racial people (18). Long actually only asserts that inter-racial people are sterile if mated with each other; if they mate with whites or blacks, they are fertile. This question of sterility is absolutely central to the polygenist argument because the ability to mate and produce defined the boundaries of the species. To prove that Africans were not human, polygenists had to assert that they were sterile. Since they showed evidence of being fertile, racial theorists, like W.F Edwards, George Gliddon, and Josiah Nott, refined the theories of straightforward polygenists like Long, by asserting that inter-racial populations became gradually weaker and sterile over a period of generations (Young 18). This was an assertion not so easily proved incorrect as Long's.

the foundation of English domestic ideology.

In his 1823 Tour through the Island of Jamaica, Cynric Williams inverts the English racialized hierarchy of womanhood, by defining brown women as the ideal to which white women must aspire. He describes his brown woman companion as exceeding European standards of beauty. She is, for instance, whiter than white creole women: "Diana...was a Quadroon, with a complexion very little darker than the European; nay, much fairer than any of the faces of men long resident in the tropics. Her skin was clear and glowing with a tint, though a very faint one, of the rose in her cheeks."<sup>41</sup> Though her hair reminds him of her African heritage, he sees that African heritage as a model for European beauty, "her hair was dark brown, by no means black, though there was something in the contour of it that reminded me of her African origin; still it was not woolly, but rather a mass of small natural curls, such as I have often seen imitated by the ladies in England." He compares his "Diana" to two beauties of classical heritage, Medici's Venus and Cleopatra. Williams writes "though, perhaps, taller than the Venus de Medicis, her figure was more slender and not less graceful. There was a sweetness and benignity in her countenance, that...made me think of the impression which Caesar might have felt at the first sight of the beautiful Cleopatra"(54). Williams describes her in terms of not English but of classical models of beauty. Classical beauties held respect in England because of the esteem for Greek and Roman cultures, but they made poor models of domestic virtue. Venus was promiscuous, Cleopatra a bride outside of wedlock and from North Africa, and Diana cavorted in the wild, unyoked by marriage or the duties of motherhood. Nonetheless if we compare Diana with the white women Williams describes, she is clearly the lady. Monk Lewis similarly places brown women above European women when he remarks

---

<sup>41</sup> Even the rose tint in her cheeks marks her as more European than white creoles who are remarked in Stewart, Long, and Edwards, as having a pallor in their cheeks -- never having pink cheeks.

that Mary Wiggins reminded him of "Grasini in 'La Vergine del Sole,' only that Mary Wiggins was a thousand times more beautiful"(69).

For Williams, brown women have so much become the measure of womanhood that he condemns white women when they fail to meet standards set by brown women. Williams stays at an inn near Bath in the Parish of St. Thomas, owned by a white woman named Mrs. White and her unmarried daughter. Everything is wrong. The building is dilapidated; the roof leaks. The daughter can't sing. Parodying the daughter who sings to show off her talent, she sings to hide the squawks of the chicken her mother is trying to kill. The food is meager and inedible. The mosquitoes and the bed are unbearable. In contrast, brown women were renowned for their skill as innkeepers, a business in which they held a virtual monopoly in the 19th century West Indies (Kerr - passim). M.G. Lewis claimed "inns would be bowers of paradise, if they were all rented by mulatto ladies, like Judy James"(63). Mrs. White and her daughter's failure is defined by their failure to live up to the standard brown women had set as innkeepers, cooks, and comforters. Williams's anecdotes indicates that brown women can be desirable even when they are not upper class, but white women can only be desirable if they are upper class. Mrs. White's failure as an innkeeper marks the barriers within creolization. Brown women can take the place of whites, but white women can't take the place of brown women and retain respect.

### Black Women

A similar ambivalence characterizes white men's descriptions of black women. However, because the vast majority of slaves were black, black women's sexuality was perceived as central to the production of labor and the economic status of the West Indies. In most slave societies in the British West Indies, the enslaved population did not reproduce itself and planters relied on the slave trade to maintain their work force.

This caused a particular anxiety once England abolished the slave trade in 1807 when planters became exclusively dependent on enslaved women's bodies for their workers. In respect to the economic health of the plantation system and those who profited from it in England, enslaved women constituted the crucial group of Caribbeans.

Anti-slavery writers deployed domestic ideology to argue that slavery must be abolished because it deprived enslaved women of their proper domestic role as wife and mother. A planter converted to anti-slavery, George Riland, is typical of anti-slavery writers in his focus on marriage and his criticism of British West Indian failure to legally recognize slave marriages:

But fresh evidence of the abject condition of our colonial bondsmen is at hand. What is their state with regard to marriage? Even the demonology of Africa, and the foul polytheism of Asia, recognise that connubial bond, which, in Christian colonies, is disowned and violated. At this hour the marriage of slaves is protected by no legal sanction!

(117)<sup>42</sup>

Riland bases his argument against slavery in his Memoirs of a West India Planter (1837) on the power of blacks' domestic sentiment as spouses and as parents. In his effort to convert his readers to anti-slavery, he describes how a black enslaved woman's maternal love converted his father, a West Indian planter, to an anti-slavery position. Riland's father buys an enslaved woman but leaves her young son on the auction block. The mother cries in anguish. When the planter returns home, he

---

<sup>42</sup> Slaves could marry in the dissenting churches but these marriages were not recognized by law. Anti-slavery missionaries viewed marriage as a central goal and saw their campaign to bring marriage to slaves as part of their campaign against slavery. Mary Ann Hutchins, an English Baptist missionary during the period of apprenticeship, asserts, "now here remark, that if religion has done nothing else, it has taught the people to live morally, and shun the abominable state of open concubinage, which was before the universal custom..." Hutchins' parishioners so equated marriage with christianity that they called themselves "the married family" (3/29/1836).

discovers that his daughter is very ill and hears his white wife utter the same cry of a mother's love he heard the enslaved mother cry on the auction block. The black woman's maternal love made her in the eyes of Riland's father a woman like his wife and thus a human being. Riland senior quickly saves his own child and returns to buy the enslaved woman's son. The unification of mother and child transforms the mother from an anguished and useless worker into a contented and diligent servant. The story illustrates both that Afro-Caribbeans are human by right of their domestic feelings and that the slave system will profit if it allows slaves to exercise those domestic feelings.<sup>43</sup>

The English anti-slavery movement deployed the image of the enslaved mother separated from her child on the auction block to move white English women to identify with slaves and to join the fight against slavery (Sussman 239). Mary Prince's description of her mother's pain and anguish at her children's sale serves as an example of this image as does Pringle's decision to supplement her account with a description of a slave auction in the Cape of Good Hope (51-52). Riland's scene participates in that discursive strategy.<sup>44</sup>

Despite their apparent embrace of black women as "sisters," anti-slavery writers believed that European culture was inherently superior to slaves' cultures. Other races might be brought closer to equality with English people if they could be

---

<sup>43</sup> The book is structured around a reunification of a father and son separated by slavers in Africa. The father's and son's joy at finally uniting further illustrates that blacks have domestic sentiment and therefore are like whites and ought not to be enslaved.

<sup>44</sup> As Ferguson, Sussman, and also Catherine Hall argue this "sisterhood" between free English and enslaved black women was hierarchical (Sussman 238; Ferguson 5/91; Hall 214). Texts like Smith's *The Story of Henrietta* illustrate how English women racialized domesticity ideology in order to maintain their cultural and moral superiority to their enslaved, black sisters. English anti-slavery activists and writers deployed their domestic sisterhood with enslaved women to legitimate their participation in the public sphere of imperial politics, to allow them to enter the ranks of imperial British citizens along side English men (Sussman 239/280-2; Ferguson 5-6).

brought to assimilate English culture – particularly domestic culture, marriage, monogamy, and maternal love. Emancipation combined with Christian education and morality, they argued, would transform the primitive African and sexually corrupted enslaved population into a diligent, rural proletariat living in married households (Hall 211; Bush 18-19; Holt 53). In fighting for emancipation, the anti-slavery movement sought to establish married households based on a gendered division of labor and a desire to accumulate wealth to support its women and children (Holt 77-78).<sup>45</sup>

The anti-slavery writers thus placed slaves in a category of potentially domestic and industrious people by portraying them as the victims of slavery. They accepted Afro-Caribbeans only in so far they would assimilate domestic ideology.<sup>46</sup> When emancipation did not noticeably increase the marriage rate, English middle class opinion swung against Afro-Caribbeans and towards the scientific racism and anti-black rhetoric of writers like Thomas Carlyle and James Anthony Froude. The contradiction with regard to Afro-Caribbean women in anti-slavery writing was immanent in the discourse, becoming explicit after emancipation.

For pro-slavery writers, however, black women and the question of racial and cultural creolization posed an immediate challenge. To counter anti-slavery's

---

<sup>45</sup> Holt cites the speech of a Jamaican special magistrate delivered to apprentices which links the goals of middle class marriage and the desire to accumulate commodities. "In order to obtain these, the comforts and necessaries of civilized life," he advised "you will have to labour industriously - for the more work you do, the more money you must obtain, and the better you will be enabled to increase and extend your comforts"(Holt 77). Wives would stay home to look after men's "household affairs," so that men could work harder and more cheerfully, assured "of finding every thing comfortable when [they] get home"(Holt 78). The men will need to work hard for their housewives, who now will "require their fine clothes for their chapels, churches, and holiday"(Holt 77).

<sup>46</sup> Sussman writes, that in "assimilating the African woman entirely into the categories of English domesticity," the anti-slavery movement, "made her accessible to abolitionist sentiments, but it erased her cultural specificity"(284).

accusation that slavery destroyed Afro-Caribbeans' domestic morality and therefore prevented slaves from physically reproducing themselves, pro-slavery writers maintained that black women's lack of domestic virtue — their promiscuity, prostitution, abortion, and venereal disease — caused the low birthrate. They describe black women as physically grotesque and diseased, and, at the same time, they depict black women as sexually desirable.

Bryan Edwards's account of black women illustrates this ambivalence. Edwards discusses black women in two chapters, one on enslaved "negroes," the other on "the Mulattoes and native Black of free Condition." In the first, Edwards describes black women in uniformly negative terms, in order to support his larger argument in favor of the slave trade. Edwards initially attributes the low birthrate to the disproportionately high number of male slaves, which was exacerbated by the black practice of polygamy.<sup>47</sup> Polygamy, in turn, sets in motion a series of practices which worsen the birth rate, including, a "shocking licentiousness and profligacy of manners in most of their women; who are exposed to temptations which they cannot resist." In turn this promiscuity causes abortions and venereal disease — two immoral practices which directly lower the birth rate. Edwards suggests that slaves "hold chastity in so little estimation, that barrenness and frequent abortions, the usual effects of promiscuous intercourse, are very generally prevalent among them." In addition, promiscuity makes enslaved women bad mothers — another domestic taboo: "To the same origin may be ascribed that neglect, and want of maternal affection towards the children produced by

---

<sup>47</sup> Edwards uses polygamy as evidence that blacks are inherently immoral and that the anti-slavery campaign to fashion them into Christians and married couples is absolutely impractical. He asserts that "the practice of polygamy, which universally prevails in Africa, is also very generally adopted among the Negroes in the West Indies; and he who conceives that a remedy may be found for this, by introducing among them the laws of marriage as established in Europe, is utterly ignorant of their manners, propensities, and superstition"(Bk 4: 147).

former connections, observable in many of the Black females"(148).<sup>48</sup>

Thus, as diseased and promiscuous, black women are not only the antithesis of the English domestic woman, they are physically undesirable. Yet, Edwards inserts Isaac Teale's "The Ode to the Sable Venus," which celebrates the charms of African women into his discussion of freed blacks on the grounds that they "differ but little from their brothers in bonds"(26) whom he has already described in negative terms. The poem, however, clearly does not reiterate the image of black women as diseased prostitutes. Rather it represents "the character of the sable and saffron beauties of the West Indies, and the folly of their paramours, are portrayed with the delicacy and dexterity of wit, and the fancy and elegance of genuine poetry"(26).<sup>49</sup> This poem seems both to elaborate the stereotype of the Afro-Caribbean woman as seductress expressed so clearly by Mrs. Carmichael and to deconstruct that stereotype, attributing desire to the white male not the black woman and exploring the social and political threat posed by inter-racial sexuality.

"Ode to the Sable Venus" and the lithograph that accompanies it depict one African woman's experience of middle passage in ways that invert history (Illustration

---

<sup>48</sup> Even in this section of his representation of black women, Edwards makes two contradictory claims. First he asserts that blacks' inherent nature makes it impossible for them to assimilate English standards of domesticity (147). His claim that blacks can never be domestic conflicts with his larger argument for the slave trade, which asserts that the trade is necessary in order to bring more women to the West Indies and thus create an equal number of men and women. This parity of the sex would work against polygamy. "Men of reflection," concludes Edwards, "apprized of the fact that such disproportion between the sexes exists among the Negroes, will draw the proper conclusions from it, and agree that an abolition of the slave trade will not afford a remedy"(149).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Young brings together Edwards' comments on "women of colour" (brown women) and the "Ode" as if the "Ode" were talking about brown mistresses. Though Edwards himself includes "saffron" women in his description of the poem's subject, logically the poem is about African women, not inter-racial women. I also take the poem's author from Young (152).

#1, Appendix). Whereas African women were transported to Jamaica in slave ships, the Sable Venus is carried to Jamaica in a sea shell chariot by Poseidon, who holds the flag of the British empire. African women arrived as slaves, not goddesses and queens. They belonged to African cultures, not classical myth and Italian painting. The narrator of the "Ode" is a white man who desires that a black woman dominate him. Though he addresses his Sable Venus with "I seek, and court thy gentle reign," in Jamaica in 1765, white men owned black women as slaves, and governed them brutally or gently, as they saw fit.

The poem also inverts the traditional English representation of black women. No longer is she either an animal or diseased prostitute, but the goddess of love, who has the devotion of all European men in Jamaica, "the prating FRANK, the SPANIARD proud// the double SCOT, HIBERNIAN loud// And sullen ENGLISH own"(capitalized as in the original).<sup>50</sup> Edward's Sable Venus is not just a Roman goddess. In describing her as the monarch of the East and West Indies, and much of the rest of the world, the narrator presents the Sable Venus as the queen of the British Empire. The "Ode" repeatedly emphasizes her position as a ruler. Not only does the narrator "court her reign" but all the above mentioned men have transferred allegiance to her "throne." She is sovereign not just over Africa or Jamaica, but over the world: her "sceptor sways" "from East to West, o'er either Ind'." Like the British Empire, hers is one on which the sun never sets, "the blazing sun that gilds the zone, Waits but the triumph of thy throne,// quite round the burning belt." The lithograph reinforces her British sovereignty by showing Poseidon bearing the British flag as he pilots the shell chariot towards Jamaica.

Thus, the poem inverts not only West Indian reality but the world political and racial

---

<sup>50</sup> I agree with Carolyn Cooper that white men's exuberant praises of black women's beauty are oppressive, objectifying, violating, and sometimes threatening (23).

order. Representing an African woman as an imperial leader of the British empire brings the colonial order of 1765 into confusion. If a queen is ruler of an Empire, then her country must be the sovereign nation of that empire. In the context of the "Ode" this means that the Sable Venus represents not the British Empire, but an African Empire, which has the same powers as the British. As leader of a large and powerful African empire, the Sable Venus poses a formidable threat to the British Empire and the racial hierarchy which upheld it.

I suggest that in figuring the Sable Venus as the Empress of an African version of the British Empire, the "Ode" expresses anxiety over the ramifications of white men's sexual relations with black women, and women of colour more generally. Edwards introduces the poem by explaining that it depicts white men's "folly." The poem may reiterate the scornful image of the white man who loses his senses and his racial status by succumbing to the charms of an Afro-Caribbean woman, but its attention to empire suggests that even in jest, inter-racial sexuality has far reaching political significance.

The Ode's praise of black women also condemns the logic of Edwards' History.

Teale follows the line of pro-slavery rhetoric and does not represent black women as chaste wives. The narrator professes his allegiance not to a single black woman, but to them all: "Try ev'ry form thou canst put on// So staunch am I, so true"(33). Yet he differs from pro-slavery rhetoric in that he locates the sexual desire in the white men, who gather from all over the island to meet Sable Venus on her arrival to Jamaica. He does not place the responsibility for sexual desire, promiscuity, or domestic disorder on black women. In placing the desire for inter-racial and non-marital sex in white men, the "Sable Venus" undercuts the backbone of the pro-slavery argument that black women (and men) are the source of domestic and sexual disorder. Since Teale portrays white men as the source of sexual and moral disorder, black women can not be held responsible for the low birthrate which Edwards argues in his earlier chapter is caused

by black promiscuity.

The poem also asserts an equivalence between black and white women – they are both Venuses. The narrator of the poem refers to the sister of the Sable Venus as Botticelli's Venus and asserts that the two sisters are identical but for color – "both just alike, except the white, No difference, no – none at night." But the illustration of the poem refuses this equivalence. By depicting the Sable Venus as immodest and almost masculine in her strength, it asserts a difference and inferiority in respect to the Medici Venus. Where the Italian model has a curved and oval shaped stomach and abdomen, the Sable Venus has a more square, flat, abdomen with strongly defined muscles. Similarly her thighs appear muscular and strong. In these muscular and square depictions of the Sable Venus' body, the lithograph differs explicitly from the poem's description of the Sable venus, which repeatedly notes her softness and emphasizes her femininity: "the pleasing softness of [her] sway" "soft was her lip as silken down," "Her reign is soothing, soft, and sweet." The lithograph also departs from Botticelli's model in depicting the Sable Venus's in an immodest pose. Botticelli's Venus attempts to cover her breasts. The Sable Venus makes no such attempts. The poem claims that she rules the world, but the lithograph engraves chains around her neck, wrists and ankles. These may be tribal bindings, but in the context of the middle passage, the bindings resemble chains. In short, the lithograph undercuts Teale's representation of the Sable Venus identical to a European woman; it refuses to portray the black woman as the white woman's equal. Instead it gives the reader an image of a more brazen woman, a woman in bonds, which concurs with the dominant English tradition of representing black women as visibly less feminine and moral than white women.

Edward Long attempts to contain the threat black women posed to white hegemony by denying their humanity. He placed Africans in the same genus as

humans but in a lower species, between man and the orangutan. He is famous for claiming that male orangutans have sex with African women: "Ludicrous as the opinion may seem," he wrote, "I do not think that an oran-outang husband would be any dishonour to an Hottentot female, for what are these Hottentots?... In many respects they are more like beasts than men..."(Vol. II 364). As further evidence of the likeness of orangutans and Africans, Long asserts that "both races agree perfectly well in lasciviousness of disposition"(370). Long's strategy is to discount black women as a threat to the racial hierarchy in the West Indies by claiming that black women are not human; as another species they can not destabilize a human racial order. Long's weakness is not the contradiction within his argument but the fact that he has no plausible support for his assertions.<sup>51</sup> Thus the need to exploit black women's labor, to control their sexuality, and to repress the threat their power poses to the social and racial hierarchy leads pro-slavery writers either into a logical impasse as Edwards or obviously untrue statements as Long. Black women remain in these texts both sites of contamination and of desire, however much that desire may be mocked as it is in the "Ode to the Sable Venus."

### The Question of Sovereignty

Underlying the concern over sexuality and domesticity in English discourse is the concern over political power. In the case of the East Indies, Stoler finds that "racialized others of mixed-blood and creole origin and the suspect *sexual moralities*, ostentatious life-styles, and cultural hybrid affiliations attributed to them were productive of a discourse on who was appropriate to rule"(119). In the case of the West Indies, English discourse sought to assert the superiority of the English

---

<sup>51</sup> Moreton is probably making a jibe at Long's Orangutan theory when he comments that he sees nothing in the claim that Afro-Caribbeans are closer to monkeys than humans.

bourgeoisie in respect to West Indian economic and political power by producing a stereotype of the white creole male as morally and intellectually incompetent.<sup>52</sup> Wylie Sypher supports this interpretation by arguing that negative caricatures of West Indians in English literature derive from the enormous increase in West Indian planters' wealth from the 1730s to the end of the 18th century, which the English middle class experienced as a threat. He comments that "the West-Indian was upsetting the social order in England, and John Bull resented the sugar-planter as strongly as he did the nabob"(504). In the early 19th century, the West Indian lobby still had significant power in parliament, much of which it lost in the 1832 Parliamentary reform (Holt 29). Thus for late 18th- century and early 19th -century middle class writers, the West Indian plantocracy was still a force to be reckoned with. Accordingly English writers tended to emasculate white creoles by depicting them as unable to control their money or themselves. White creole men's failure as imperial citizens is the counterpart of white creole women's failure as imperial wives. One explicit example of the English construction of the West Indian male as unworthy of political power -- of manhood itself, is Edgeworth's description of Mr. Vincent.<sup>53</sup> Mr. Vincent is a portrayed as a

---

<sup>52</sup> It focused on white West Indians because these were the only West Indian men who held political power in England.

<sup>53</sup> Edgeworth's Belinda portrays another creole male, Mr. Hartly in similarly unmanly terms: he elopes with a 16 year-old English woman and, under social pressure, deserts her with a child. Later in the novel his obsessive search for his daughter shows him to be insane. Charlotte Smith's The Story of Henrietta defines white West Indian males as unworthy of political power by describing its two creole male protagonists as either unreasonable tyrants or feminized and africanized men. The elder Maynard, Henrietta's father is "despot on his own estate," who "imagined he might exercise unbounded authority over every being that belonged to him"(11). His tyranny results from the institution of slavery, which taught him as a young child that he was superior to his enslaved servants; as a result he has no tolerance for equality or reason. His tyranny over his younger brother whom he treated as a slave contributes to that brother's excessive sentimentality and domesticity. The younger brother becomes feminized, devoting himself exclusively to his children's upbringing and deserting the

chivalrous though not brilliant knight. But he is guided by his feelings -- "a good heart"-- rather than reason (423). He is the inverse of the rational man, who might lose his power of reason in moments of passion. Mr. Vincent's "most virtuous resolves were always rather the effect of sudden impulse, than of steady principle. But when the tide of passion had swept away the landmarks, he had no method of ascertaining the boundaries of right and wrong"(439). His inability to know right from wrong leads him to gamble away his fortune, a flaw which saves Belinda from having to marry him and which occasions the revelation that Mr. Vincent is not "master" of himself.

When Vincent gambles away his fortune, Hervey follows him to his lodgings to prevent him from suicide by explaining that his fortune can be retrieved. Vincent, however, demands that Hervey leave. Hervey takes charge of the situation, asking Vincent to be a man: "command yourself for a moment, and hear me; use your reason, and you will soon be convinced that I am your friend." Vincent refuses on the grounds, "I am not master of myself"(432); that is because he is not "masculine" like Hervey. Since Vincent can not be master of himself, it is clear that he has no right to be master of Belinda, which is why Lady Delacourt thanks all those who helped expose Vincent's gambling and thus save Belinda from having Vincent as her "lord and master"(451). The political lesson is that mastering slaves leaves the creole man unable to master himself and that if the creole is fit neither to master himself nor his woman, he is also unfit to govern his country.

In Jane Eyre, Brontë portrays the creole Richard Mason as yet more unable to

---

public world of finance and society. He ends his life as a hermit, communing with the spirit of his dead son in Jamaica's Maroon territory, clothed in the fabric of slave's clothing and speaking the language of Maroons. The hero, Denbigh, concludes that it would be impossible to reintegrate him into society. He is too feminine and too African.

master himself than Vincent.<sup>54</sup> Mason's lack of power and command "repels" Jane; she complains, "there was no power in that smooth-skinned face... no firmness in that aquiline nose... there was no thought on the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye (167). Through his lack of "power," "firmness," and "command," Brontë constructs Mason as the negative opposite, the "antipodes" of the ideal of British, domestic masculinity represented by Rochester.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Rochester is, as Jane perennially calls him, "master." Jane desires Rochester because his features "quite *mastered* [her], — that took [her] feelings from [her] own power and fettered them in his" (my italics 153). Rochester's masculinity, his decisiveness, and power make Jane desire him as a husband, but it also makes him capable of governing. In these novels the only men qualified to be masters, husbands, and rulers are English men, who have learned the importance of domestic values without losing their power to command.

## Conclusion

By defining creole cultural practices as immoral and inferior to English ones, English discourse deployed the rhetoric of domestic ideology to lessen the threat creolization posed to the racial hierarchy which secured English imperial rule. Domestic ideology negotiated the contradiction between colonial ideology, which denied racial mixing and the colonial practice, which required it. But, in its desire to limit the threats posed by creolization, English discourse obsessively documented the creolization of Caribbean women. Domestic rhetoric depicted Afro-Creole women in such ambivalent terms that it revealed the contradictions within English discourse, often disclosing a society in

---

<sup>54</sup> Sue Thomas makes a similar argument about Brontë's portrayal of Richard Mason as effeminate ("The Tropical Extravaganza" 5).

<sup>55</sup> Jane can only explain Rochester's friendship with Mason with "the old adage that extremes meet." Rochester reinforces his superiority to Mason by explaining that he is kind to Mason because of the "dog-like attachment he once bore me"(269).

which white women were the antithesis of English ideals of womanhood. Afro-Caribbean women, especially brown women were the most desirable and the most cultured, not white women. In assimilating English culture and attaining the legal status of whites, brown women exposed the instability of whiteness, unlinking the correlation between race and class the Great House myth sought to maintain.

Though domestic ideology did not eliminate the inter-racial interaction of creole societies, it did limit the threat posed by inter-racial sex. It fashioned Christian marriage and legitimate birth as further barriers between privileged and unprivileged people, as the foundation for the West Indian hierarchies of class and color that replaced the English hierarchy of class and race. By representing West Indian men and women as unworthy partners in marriage and politics, English discourse not only legitimated English rule in the West Indies, it sought to secure English middle class political power in England during a period in which the wealth and political power of the West Indian plantocracy threatened middle class social standing and middle class political campaigns for the abolition of the slavery and for free trade.

### **Chapter 3: English Literary Masters and the Black Amazons of their Imagination: the Destabilizing Presence of Afro-Caribbean Women in late 19th-century English Travel Narratives**

“The question in every colony is, what sort of men is it rearing? If that can not be answered satisfactorily, the rest is not worth caring about.” (James Anthony Froude The English in the West Indies 221)

With the post-emancipation importation of indentured labor from Asia, the demographic composition of the West Indies changed, but the logic of English discourse remained the same in its depiction of the region and its inhabitants. English writers continued to argue that West Indians did not merit political rights because they lacked industry and morality. English writers continued to employ domestic ideology to justify not only colonial rule but the power of a tiny local white elite over the vast majority of Afro-Caribbean and Asian Caribbean peasants and laborers.

Charles Kingsley’s description of the Trinidadian capital Port of Spain illustrates the tactics late 19th-century English writing employed in constructing the West Indies as a place of domestic and sexual pathology. Kingsley had apparently desired to travel to the Caribbean for many years (Colloms 314), but on arriving in Port of Spain, he was overcome by the stench of open sewers and city life — a stench he attributed to the breaking of “laws of cleanliness and decency” and associated with the first figures he sees --

Negresses in gaudy print dresses, with stiff turbans ... all aiding to the general work of doing nothing: save where here and there a hugely fat Negress,...sells, or tries to sell, abominable sweetmeats, strange fruits, and junks of sugar-cane, to be gnawed by the dawdlers in mid-street, while they carry on their heads everything and anything, from half a barrow-load of yams to a saucer or a beer-bottle. (Kingsley 88)

Kingsley describes black women in contradictory terms. They are lazy and obese but

possess "superabundant animal vigour and ... perfect independence." The positive valence of the vigour is counteracted by its animal nature and its application in the service of prostitution. And it turns out that "perfect independence" is for Kingsley an oxymoron. Independent women can not be perfect because women ought to be wives dependent on their husbands. Kingsley is impressed with black women's "physical strength and courage," but this strength terrifies him, leading him to think of "stories of those terrible Amazonian guards of the King of Dahomey, whose boast is, that they are no longer women, but men." It leads him to conclude that "there is no doubt that, in case of a rebellion, the black women of the West Indies would be as formidable, cutlass in hand, as the men (33).

This amalgamation of conflicting characteristics becomes intelligible when we realize that Kingsley has defined black women as the inversion of middle class English femininity. Together black women's indolence, independence, prostitution, childlessness, and filth form a complete inversion of the chaste and economically dependent English wife and mother, who labors with pious industry to keep her family clean, orderly, and nurtured.

For Kingsley, black Trinidadian women are so prominent that it is only "when you have ceased looking - even staring - at the black women and their ways, [that] you become aware of the *strange variety of races* which people the city" (89 my italics). After its black female sexuality, Trinidad is defined both by the strangeness of its races and of its racial variety. After blacks, Kingsley, sees a "coolie Hindoo" – "a clever, smiling, delicate little woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes"(89). But Indian marriage practices, Kingsley tells us, are tantamount to slavery and Indian men's jealous passion results in the murder of women.

This over-early marriage among the Coolies is a very serious evil, but one which they have brought with them from their own land. The girls

are practically sold by their fathers while yet children, often to wealthy men much older than they. Love is out of the question. But what if the poor child, as she grows up, sees some one, among that overplus of men, to whom she for the first time in her life takes a fancy? Then comes a scandal: and one which is often ended swiftly enough by the cutlass. Wife-murder is but too common among these Hindoos; and they cannot be made to see that it is wrong. (223)<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Indians, like Afro-Caribbeans, transgress the English mores of marriage. English culture defined its superiority partly on the basis of its proper treatment of women – Indian patriarchy proved itself inferior by its inhumane practice of arranged marriage. Indian men's inability to control their passion signified their lack of English manliness. Kingsley imagines black women wielding cutlasses in rebellion and Indian men wielding cutlasses in jealous rage. Both images act as testimony to the gender chaos of the region and to the danger of that chaos. Finally, Kingsley describes Chinese Trinidadians, who so transgress the complementary system of gender roles that only the initiated can distinguish the men from the women: "whether old or young, men or women," he complains, "you cannot tell, till the initiated point out that the women have chignons and no hats, the men hats with their pig-tails coiled up under them. Beyond this distinction, I know none visible"(90). With exception of the white and light elite, Kingsley's West Indies is a racially, and ethnically divided society, in

---

<sup>56</sup> Froude articulates a fuller version of the stereotype of Indo-Caribbeans: "they save money, and many of them do not return home when their time is out, but stay where they are, buy land, or go into trade. They are proud, however, and will not intermarry with Africans. Few bring their families with them; and women being scanty among them, there arise inconveniences and sometimes serious crimes"(73-4). Froude stresses their passion: "The coolies have the fiercer passions of their Eastern blood."(76). The stereotype of Indians as thrifty and separate from Afro-Trinidadians is important because it lived into the 20th century and fostered division between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians.

which each group proves its political incompetence through its lack of masculinity, femininity, and Christian marriage.

Though the focus on domesticity remains constant between the pre- and post-emancipation periods, the stakes and assumptions of English discourse on the West Indies changed in significant ways. With planters' loss of power after emancipation, English discourse shifted its focus from white to black men, who, with freedom, had received the right to vote (albeit with a sizable property qualification) and had become by far the largest block of potential voters in the region. Instead of illustrating how white creole men lacked masculinity, Kingsley and his contemporaries argued that black men did not deserve the vote because they lacked English masculinity. Browns had been granted the franchise in most islands in the early 1830s, and once joined by blacks, their political power grew stronger. Holt writes that, "during the first two decades of the post abolition era, every [Jamaican] governor predicted that brown and black power was imminent"(217). Blacks and browns were a strong force in the Jamaica Assembly in the years between emancipation and the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 when direct rule was imposed on Jamaica (Holt 218-221). In Dominica, "the group of coloured families, the Mulatto Ascendancy, kept control of the legislature for two generations until they were finally defeated by the introduction of Crown colony rule" at the turn of the century (Honychurch 128 ).<sup>57</sup> Fear of the implications of black and brown political power coincided with the planning of a new political order in the British empire. By the 1850s, England wanted to make a distinction between white (and thus adult and male) colonies like Australia, and those non-white colonies it

---

<sup>57</sup> We should note that Dominica is the only country in the West Indies in which Afro-Caribbeans had such control over local political institutions during the 19th century (Honychurch 128).

treated as female and dependent, like the West Indies and India (Holt 235).<sup>58</sup> The question was no longer whether to free Afro-Caribbeans from slavery, but whether to give the West Indies and thus black men political autonomy. This concern with black men accounts in large part for the discursive focus on black women.

With the aftermath of emancipation, English public opinion shifted from an optimistic cultural racism to a determinist scientific racism. Unlike John Stuart Mill and abolitionists who had seen racial difference as a matter of culture, a difference that could be eradicated through education, racial theories of the late 19th century explained racial difference and hybridity in terms of biological degeneracy (Stepan 97). In the post-emancipation period, English discourse translated the pre-emancipation narrative of the English man's moral corruption in the tropics into scientific terms. The West Indies brought white men to the same excesses of alcohol and sex but now these resulted in a physical degeneration that was both inescapable and transmitted to future generations (Stepan 103). Theories of degeneracy held that freedom was an unnatural and detrimental state for blacks, causing them to physically and morally degenerate by contracting venereal disease and consumption and perhaps eventually dying out all together (Stepan 97-101). English discourse on the anglophone Caribbean employed gender as the index of this basic inequality and inherent difference between races. Hall explains that

emancipation, for the missionaries meant black entry into manhood, for masculinity in their world meant freedom from dependence on the will of another. To be subject meant a loss of male identity, whereas for women one form of subjectivity, that of the female slave dependent on

---

<sup>58</sup> The gendering of this division is articulated in British policy maker, James Stephens' speech, when he states, "We emancipate our grown-up sons, but keep our unmarried daughters, and our children who may chance to be ricketty [sic], in domestic bonds"(cited in Holt 235)

her master, was ideally exchanged for another, that of the freed woman on her husband. (237)

Emancipation, however, did not bring a large increase in the marriage rate. When freed people did not marry and women did not become economically dependent on men, emancipation appeared to give the same privilege of independence to West Indian women as it did to West Indian men. Emancipation granted West Indian women many of the symbolic trappings of manhood. West Indian women's manhood became the crux of English arguments against political autonomy for the region. In the logic of English discourse, women's masculinity, independence, and equality with men could only deprive West Indian men of their masculinity because English ideas of manhood were based on the principle that men were independent individuals, who exercised control over others: "The male head of household who voted, therefore spoke for and represented his dependants, whether wife, children or servants. Individuality thus implies mastery over things and people" (Hall 257). If Afro-Caribbean men could not exercise authority over their women, then, by English definitions, they were not men at all. This logic helped to justify English writers' vision of black men as inadequately masculine. Thus, black women's masculinity became the center piece of late-nineteenth century arguments for direct colonial rule of the West Indies.

Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" (1849 later retitled "The Nigger Question") is one of the first and most powerful texts to articulate this new position on the West Indies (Hall 270). It reflected and influenced English discourse though it was not a description of the anglophone Caribbean. Rather, Gikandi argues, it was a means of working through the many pressures that faced England — "the crisis of industrialism, problems of poverty... the looming threat of Chartism," the European revolutions of 1848 (60). Carlyle displaced England's

disorder onto West Indian blacks (Gikandi 62-3). In so doing, he channeled English people's resentment about conditions in England from English authorities to the Caribbean peasantry, who, as recipients of English colonial support, Carlyle saw as responsible for England's economic ills. Carlyle describes blacks as the recipients of the tropical soil's natural abundance, having neither the need to work nor the desire to acquire wealth. He describes black creoles as

Sitting yonder with their beautiful muzzles up to the ears in pumpkins, imbibing sweet pulps and juices; the grinder and incisor teeth ready for ever new work, the pumpkins cheap as grass in those rich climates; while the sugar-crops rot round them uncut, because labour cannot be hired, so cheap are the pumpkins; -- and at home we are but required to rasp from the breakfast-loaves of our own English labourers some slight "differential sugar-duties," and lend a poor half-million or a few poor millions now and then, to keep that beautiful state of matters going on. (350)

This state of affairs had to change, Carlyle argued. The West Indians had to work because work was the duty of all men. Emancipation had been a mistake. Blacks were wrought in their very biology to be servants, as whites were to be masters (Hall 270-72). Compulsion was thus necessary to make blacks work. Carlyle's argument that the fertility of Caribbean soil made work virtually unnecessary for the Afro-Caribbean peasantry derived from pro-slavery tracts published in the 1820s and early 1830s (Hall 271). Both *Marly* (1828) and Cynric Williams (1826) articulate this argument.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> The narrator of *Marly* asserts that the land can be cultivated with almost no labor and that as a result Caribbeans are lazy: "Without fear of contradiction, this is the principle cause of indolence and want of exertion, which uniformly displays itself in the character of the inhabitants of such tropical countries, there being no stimulus of adequate strength, among an uncultivated race, sufficient to excite them to farther exertion, than that of procuring a mere subsistence"(69, see also 92-3).

In 1826, Williams was already worried about the fecundity of Caribbean soil and the perceived superior nutritional value of tropical produce.

When we reflect on this, it becomes a serious matter for the whites to think of emancipating their slaves; - a few hours work daily, for only a few weeks in the year, would enable a negro to bring up a family, though blacky would rather his wife, or wives, should work for him, while he smokes his pipe.(224)

In portraying the Afro-Caribbean women as the workers and the man as a parasite, Williams connects Carlyle's emphasis on the lazy black man and the late 19th-century deployment of industrious black women as an index of black men's indolence. Born out of the economic, political, and social crises of England and melded to an image of pro-slavery propaganda, Carlyle's depiction of the West Indies bore no resemblance to the anglophone Caribbean reality of a peasantry striving to preserve their family units, fighting for access to land, and freedom from inadequate wages (Brereton "Family Strategies" 160; 180-1). But, "it is precisely in his dismissal of what we understand to be facts, and his contempt for rational argument, that his discourse becomes one of the most important cultural documents of the mid-Victorian period" (Gikandi 65). Carlyle's image of Afro-Caribbeans as lazy and immoral became the foundation for a variety of prominent travel narratives, most notably those of Anthony Trollope, Charles Kingsley, and James Anthony Froude.<sup>60</sup>

I employ these travel narratives to illustrate the role of Carlyle's rhetoric and of

---

<sup>60</sup> See Gikandi's excellent discussion of Carlyle's essay and its relation to Froude and Kingsley in Maps of Englishness chapters 2 and 3. Also, we should note that Kingsley and Froude participated in Carlyle's campaign to defend Governor Eyre in the debate over his brutal oppression of the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica. See also Catherine Hall's "Competing Masculinities: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill and the Case of Governor Eyre" (chapter 10 of White Male and Middle class.)

the image of independent black women in late 19th-century arguments for continued colonial rule in the West Indies. Anthony Trollope's The West Indies and the Spanish Main (1859) contends that the political future of the West Indies lies in the hands of its inter-racial population. His "theory ... is this: that Providence has sent white men and black men to these regions in order that from them may spring a race fitted by intellect for civilization" (75). Despite his disparagement of white planters as an aristocracy whose time has passed and whose laziness is responsible for the poor condition of the colonies (65), Trollope defines blacks in Carlylean terms, asserting that "the negro's idea of emancipation was and is emancipation not from slavery but from work"(92). Like Trollope, Kingsley views racial hybridity in positive terms. In At Last! A Christmas in the West Indies (1871), Charles Kingsley argues for the political competence and domestic propriety of the local white and inter-racial elite. His text even presents an inter-racial couple, a Scottish man and an Afro-Caribbean woman, as a model for white settlement in the island. This is significant because it suggests an equality and exchange ability of white and inter-racial womanhood anathema to pre-emancipation discourse. Kingsley was a social reformer who ostensibly sought not to find fault in the Caribbean but explore how England might learn from West Indians' health and simplicity. He was also the son of a white creole.<sup>61</sup> However, none these factors prevented him from parroting Carlyle's assumption that black Caribbeans were lazy. James Anthony Froude was an established English historian known more for style than accuracy. Having already published Oceana (1886) about England's relation to its pacific colonies, Froude was well known and resented in colonies for his imperialist stance by the time he wrote The English in the West Indies in 1888. In it,

---

<sup>61</sup> Mary Lucas, Kingsley's mother was born in the West Indies and, of course, educated in England. "Her father, Judge Nathaniel Lucas, came of a line of sugar plantation owners in Barbados, and when the West Indian sugar trade declined, the judge retired to England"(Colloms 15).

he seeks to inspire a new spirit of English imperial manhood by illustrating how England has failed in its administration of the West Indies. Although he maintains that all West Indians – white, brown, black, and Asian – are politically incompetent, he focuses his argument on proving that the black majority is essentially morally inferior and therefore will need perpetual direct colonial rule. Two books of this period, W.P. Livingstone's Black Jamaica (1899) and Sydney Olivier's White Capital and Coloured Labour (1906) had a particularly strong impact on the development of Jamaican writing and conceptions national identity. Originally sent to Jamaica as the Official Report to the Legislative Council, Livingstone was editor of Jamaica's Daily Gleaner from 1890 to 1904; afterwards he had a long career in English journalism (Dunnett). Following Froude's argument, Livingstone dismisses colonial whites and browns as morally degenerate and focuses on the inferior moral status of blacks. Like Froude, he calls for prolonged strong and direct colonial rule in Jamaica.<sup>62</sup> Olivier, a member of the Fabian Socialist society since the early 1880s, was colonial secretary of Jamaica from 1900-1904 and governor from 1907-1913 (Holt 333). He had tremendous influence over Thomas MacDermot and Herbert de Lisser, the central figures in the emergence of Jamaican national literature. His book offers a radical critique of colonialism, arguing that it was driven by economic greed and exploitation. Yet, underlying his vision was the same domestic ideology and cultural racism that was the foundation for many pre-emancipation texts. I briefly mention Winifred James's The Mulberry Tree (1913) because it expresses an early 20th-century British

---

<sup>62</sup> However, unlike Froude, who sees blacks as perpetually immoral, Livingstone sees blacks as moving towards morality and political competence. They must, however, be led to morality by a "patronizing" direct English rule in order to protect them from the corrupting influence of colonial whites and browns. Livingstone contends that blacks progress slowly each generation; his ostensibly positive view of blacks functions as a ploy to argue against constitutional reforms that would give more power to the local elite.

feminist vision of Afro-Caribbean women's sexual and economic independence.

This series of English books about the West Indies are of critical importance to the study of early anglophone Caribbean literature because they were published just prior to and during the emergence of national literatures in the anglophone Caribbean. When West Indian intellectuals began to wrest from England the power of representing "the West Indies," Kingsley, Froude, and Livingstone were the men from whom they grasped that power. When these texts were published, anglophone Caribbean newspapers were filled with debates, letters of outrage, and critiques. Intellectuals responded in public lectures. Through these debates, middle class anglophone Caribbeans negotiated and articulated national and regional identities. J.J. Thomas's book-length critique of Froude, *Froudacity* (1889) originated in essays written for a Grenada paper.

Even as Caribbean intellectuals raged against the specifics of their writing, Carlyle, Trollope, Kingsley, and Froude stood as models for anglophone Caribbean writers. Belinda Edmondson argues that Caribbean writers from the radical C.L.R. James to the conservative V.S. Naipaul emulated Victorian English culture and particularly the figure of the man of letters with his mastery over the literary tradition (40-41).

Because the figure of the "black" woman is by far the most prominent and consistent image in both English discourse of this period and emergent West Indian literatures, I make it my focus.<sup>63</sup> The first thing we should note is that "the black woman" melded class and race identity. The phrase "black woman" refers to working class and peasant Afro-Caribbean women, who were defined by their physical strength and their manual labor as coal and banana porters, market women, washer women,

---

<sup>63</sup> Late 19th-century writers pay much less attention to white and brown women. These images correlate with author's view of hybridity and of the ability of the local elite to govern.

maids, and cooks (Illustrations #2-4, Appendix). Though brown women, Indian women, and Chinese women also formed part of the working and peasant classes in the 19th century, they are not included in descriptions of strong, independent Caribbean women. Rather, Asian women are described in specific ethnic stereotypes and brown women were stereotyped during this period either as dainty objects of male desire or as entrepreneurs, typically inn keepers. Froude and Livingstone use the word black not simply to denote color but to assert Afro-Caribbeans' essential inferiority and radical difference from Europeans.

It is significant that English writers fixated on independent black women because black women's careers as market women, their economic independence, their practice of carrying heavy loads (particularly on their head) are very likely cultural practices retained from Africa and adapted to conditions in the New World.<sup>64</sup> That English discourse focused on market women suggests that English discourse honed in on the specifically African elements of West Indian culture. In this instance, English discourse seems to have focused on a site of creolization, the making of the African gender roles part of Caribbean culture. This Africanness was antithetical to Englishness. Women's economic independence challenged British culture. English writers gazing and writing through the lens of domestic ideology could only see these African practices as evidence of the primitiveness of Afro-Caribbeans.

As Kingsley's description of Port of Spain indicates, black women were the

---

<sup>64</sup> Sidney Mintz and Richard Price contend that West African kinship and gender roles did influence West Indian kinship patterns and gender roles though these were also influenced by the specific conditions in the West Indies. They see the market woman and women's economic independence as a likely inheritance from West Africa and cite Brathwaite and Herskovits as other scholars who do so. The matrifocality of West Indian families is much more difficult to trace to West Africa. They conclude that "the generation of separate and independent economic risk structures within a single family may be considered characteristically West African and Afro-Caribbean, as opposed to European or North American"(79)

first and most prominent aspect of the West Indies in English discourse of this period. On his arrival in the West Indies, at the port in St. Thomas, Trollope's first encounter is with a black woman. He recounts that

“...as I put my foot on tropical soil for the first time, a lady handed me a rose, saying, “That’s for love, dear.” I took, and said that it should be for love. She was beautifully, nay elegantly dressed. Her broad-brimmed hat was as graceful as are those of Rudy or Brighton. The well-starched skirt of her muslin dress gave to her upright figure that look of easily compressible bulk, which... has become so slightly to our eyes. Pink gloves were on her hand. “That’s for love, dear.” Yes, it shall be for love; for thee and thine, if I can find that thou deservest it. What was it to me that she was as black as my boot, or that she had come to look after the ship’s washing? (8)

By calling her a lady and praising her taste, Trollope at first hides the woman's race and class, and thus leads the reader to believe that Trollope is in fact speaking to a person an Englishman would recognize as a lady. Such concealment was necessary for Victorian England because it defined blackness and working class status as antithetical to taste and the status of lady. As soon as Trollope describes her as “black as my boot,” he has placed her outside the class of equals. Yet despite his dismissive, even insulting tone Trollope does not, in fact, fully dismiss working class black women from the class of respectable and worth people. Trollope's detailed account of the encounter, the fact that it occurs just as he arrives, that he leaves the question unanswered, all signal the fundamental importance of working class, Afro-Caribbean women to English discourse on the West Indies in second half of 19th century. Trollope and the authors who follow him, Kingsley, Froude and Livingstone attempt to negotiate an answer to his question – what difference does race, class, and cultural

difference make to womanhood? Do black women deserve the Englishman's love?

Perhaps the most humorous and yet telling example of this negotiation is Trollope's account of Sally, who worked as a chamber maid: "I shall never forget that big black chambermaid," he writes,

how she used to curtsy to me when she came into my room in the morning with a huge tub of water on her head! That such a weight should be put on her poor black skull -- a weight which I could not lift-- used to rend my heart with anguish. But that, so weighted, she should think that manner demanded a curtsy! Poor, courteous, overburdened maiden!

"Don't, Sally; don't. Don't curtsy," I would cry. "Yes, mass," she would reply, and curtsy again, oh, so painfully! The tub of water was of such vast proportions! It was big enough for me to wash in! (175)

Trollope is having great fun with this scene -- with the preposterousness of Sally being a "maiden." But underlying the laughter is the very serious recognition that Sally is much stronger than Trollope. He tells us first that he could not lift the tub himself and then that "it was big enough for [him] to wash in" which gives one the image of Sally lifting Trollope and the bath above her head, an image which makes Sally the adult and Trollope the child, Sally the man and Trollope the woman. The image inverts what ought to be the power dynamics between the English man of letters and his chambermaid. It suggests that Afro-Caribbean working women might have had the power to reverse power relations in certain respects and thus, to undermine the racial hierarchy that served as a foundation for the English Empire. Sally's attempts at genteel behavior seem incongruous because she has great physical strength and a body that defies English definitions of refinement both in its blackness and in its "bigness." But it is precisely for these reasons that working women like Sally forced English

writers to confront and renegotiate English definitions of gender and morality that were strictly coded in terms of race and class, but were presented in these travel narratives as universal standards of beauty and morality.

The English (male) writers implicitly judge black women by the English, white, middle class standard of womanhood. Gikandi's contends "what makes black women so striking to these authors is that - even as stereotypes and fetishes - they are 'naturally' posited against the Victorian doxology of women"(112). English men's texts do not unambiguously assert the superiority of white femininity. This is of critical significance since white womanhood defined the height of human civilization in imperial ideology. To reevaluate the superiority of white femininity, was to reevaluate the ideal of domestic womanhood, which stood at the heart of English colonialism.<sup>63</sup>

Livingstone most clearly articulates how late 19th-century texts deployed English concepts of femininity and morality. Claiming that "it is usual to take the nature of the sex-relation as an index of the morality of a primitive people," Livingstone announces that Jamaicans are primitive, that morality is the standard by which such people are judged. Livingstone's "Sex-relation" correlates to what we might call gender roles. Livingstone defines black Jamaicans as having an "immoral

---

<sup>63</sup> Gikandi further comments that these images bring English writers to "reflect on the condition of the imprisoned Victorian woman," and cites Kingsley as evidence: "The Negro women are, without doubt, on a more thorough footing of equality with the men than the women of any white race"(112). I agree with Gikandi that ultimately Froude, Kingsley, and Trollope bring definitions of English domestic womanhood into question. But I don't think it is as simple as his method of quotation suggests. When Kingsley writes that sentence, it is part of his argument that the equality between Afro-Caribbean women and men is a threat to English order and evidence of the "radical alterity" and absolute inferiority of "blacks." Kingsley brings his own argument into question when he expresses ambivalence towards women's independence, seeing in it both admirable strength and the promise of political chaos. Thus, the serious questioning of English standards is not usually on the surface of the text.

sex-relation" because they lack the "modern system" of gender: "virile manhood" and "womanliness." The most significant instance of their "immoral sex-relation" is the equality of women and men. Thus the test of morality was explicitly a test of the extent to which black Jamaicans assimilated the middle class English ideal of separate and complementary gender roles, roles historically constructed in racial terms by contrasting middle class English with anglophone Caribbean gender practices. In this sense, Livingstone's project is tautological, asserting that blacks are black, that the people whose behavior defined immorality during slavery in fact continued to do so.

Livingstone explicitly links the moral to the political by asserting a causal connection between gender disorder, sexual excess, and political rebellion. He sees, for instance, a causal correlation between the fact that the Parish of St. Thomas had (he asserted) the highest rate of illegitimacy and that it was the site of the Morant Bay Uprising. Morant Bay signified for Livingstone the absolute opposite of political order -- Afro-Caribbeans taking violent action against white political institutions and killing white people. Illegitimacy went hand in hand with this type of political disorder.

Froude's portrayal of Afro-Caribbean men's laziness and Afro-Caribbean women's independence and strength participate in a political logic similar to Livingstone's. Like Livingstone he finds colonial whites and browns incompetent and advocates strong English colonial rule. Borrowing from Carlyle's image of Caribbean abundance, Froude holds that blacks exist outside of culture and time in a West Indian Garden of Eden.

They live surrounded by most of the fruits which grew in Adam's paradise - oranges and plantains, bread-fruit, and cocoa-nuts, though not apples. Their yams and cassava grow without effort, for the soil is easily worked and inexhaustibly fertile. The curse is taken from nature, and like Adam again they are under the covenant of innocence. (49)

These “innocents” who do not even have the conception of sin much less of industry and political science are clearly inappropriate candidates for political autonomy. If there were democratic reforms, Froude argues, these completely unprepared, amoral people would rule the West Indies. If blacks govern, he asserts, all civilization, order, and decency will cease: “if left entirely to themselves, they would in a generation or two relapse into savages....” For Froude, there are only two options, either the English rule the British West Indies, or blacks will let it fall “into a state like that of Hayti, where they eat the babies, and no white man can own a yard of land”(56). For Livingstone, Morant Bay serves as the scare image of the evils that occur when blacks take political power; for Froude and many others of his generation, it is “Hayti.” England must put in place a colonial government along the lines of the English administration in India. If not, black people rule and English order will be abominated, mothers will eat rather than care for their children, Satan will be worshipped rather than God, and white men will have no rights (88,90-91,99).<sup>64</sup>

Froude’s system, however, is distinctly gendered. Black men’s laziness forces black women into industriousness and independence. “If black suffrage is to be the rule in Jamaica,” he concludes, “I would take it away from the men and would give it to the superior sex... They would make a tolerable nation of black amazons, and the babies would not be offered to Jumbi”(198). The statement is no feminist manifesto. Women’s suffrage could be no more than a cruel joke for Froude. Rather, it is an assertion of the absolute inappropriateness of black masculinity; it is an argument against self-government.

Because blacks’ ostensible refusal to marry correlated with the destruction of law and order, marriage had a very particular significance for Livingstone and Froude.

---

<sup>64</sup> Froude specifically mentions that Haiti “has revived the old idolatry of the Gold coast, and in the villages of the interior... they sacrifice children in the serpent’s honour after the manner of their forefather’s” (183).

It comes then as no surprise that blacks refusal to marry is formulaic in these English texts. Each text links women's refusal to marry with black men's lack of English middle class masculinity – their failure to work hard and to take responsibility for their women and children. Livingstone claims that Black women felt that, "to be married was, to a woman, to become a slave, and slavery, with its dark associations and slavery was yet but a stone's throw in the past"(46-7). Kingsley claims that "the Negro woman has no need to marry and make herself the slave of a man, in order to get a home and subsistence"(33). Froude asserts that women "prefer" the harsh manual labor of coaling ships to marriage which "they would regard as legal bondage." "If they were wives," he explains, "their husbands would take [their wages] from them and spend it in rum. The companion who is not wife can refuse and keep her earning for her little ones" (198). The English feminist, Winifred James asserts that Jamaican women refused marriage because "as long as they are not married the man works for her, and if he doesn't she is free to get rid of him and have one who does. But directly they marry it is a generally understood thing that she will have to keep him"(103). There is thus a complete consensus. But, ironically, the consensus is not that blacks ought to marry, but that they ought to avoid marriage because black men pervert marriage into slavery. Black men were incapable of being responsible patriarchs; the British West Indies was politically and morally ineducable. Kingsley concludes his discussion of black women and marriage by declaring: "Independent she is, for good and evil; and independent she takes care to remain; and no schemes for civilizing the Negro will have any deep or permanent good effect which don't take note of, and legislate for this singular fact"(Kingsley 33). In an ideological system that grants political rights only to patriarchal societies, in which men are independent and women

dependent, Kingsley's assertion constitutes a call for perpetual colonial rule.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, even as they defined Afro-Caribbeans as beyond the hope of masculinity and political power, English men's admiration for black women's strength and freedom undercut the very foundation of their argument. There is a symmetry between the social and economic independence of black women and their physical freedom from the constraints of English bourgeois clothing. Both freedoms should in Livingstone's schema connote the inferiority of black women to white women. Yet Livingstone's description is simply too positive for this to be the case.

One of the most interesting spectacles to be seen in Jamaica is the procession of black women and girls, loads on head, swinging, with upright graceful carriage, along the green lanes and highways of the interior. They wear no corsets, and buckle up their skirts to give their limbs *perfect freedom*. A robust, active, and independent class, they appear unconscious of any hardship in the arrangement (the economic responsibility for their children) which transfers to them so large a part of the burden of life. (220 *my italics*)

Here both economic and physical freedoms appear "perfect" rather than perverse.

Livingstone's admiration for the women's independence becomes more explicit as he continues the passage, claiming that freedom

gives them a certain power, apart from sex, over the men, which in the circumstances is perhaps essential. It would seem that nature has

---

<sup>65</sup> In contrast, James, who wished to reform English patriarchy, claimed that "the attitude of mind of the Jamaican negress with regard to marriage is a distinctly advanced one" (103). For James, Jamaican family patterns, which she describes as equal free love relationships, provide fodder for a feminist critique of English marriage. For the English, she concludes there were "many lessons to be learnt from the negroes in their domestic relationship" (104). Like her male counterparts, she is concerned with English culture, not with anglophone Caribbean women.

counterbalanced the weakness of their sex by supplying them with a constitution stronger even than the male. The one drawback is a tendency to neglect giving proper attention to the duties of maternity and the responsibilities of the household. Nevertheless there is a visible disposition among the men to treat them with greater courtesy and tenderness.(220-21)

On one hand Livingstone's purpose in this passage is to drive home his argument that black men are so worthless that women are better off not marrying. They are so worthless that nature has found it "essential" to take away their manhood and to give it to women, granting women not only the male role of breadwinning but men's physical strength as well. But having painted Jamaica as the very inverse of English order, Livingstone's picture ought to be ugly, dangerous, or ridiculous. But we do not see the violence of Morant Bay. Rather Livingstone shows an image of beautiful strong women. The women are beautiful and physically powerful, beautiful and black, "perfect" and yet unmarried mothers. Under Livingstone's "modern system" of gender, none of these conjunctions should be possible.

Froude's description of women in Barbados expresses a similar admiration of black women's power.

They work harder than the men and are used as beasts of burden to fetch and carry, but they carry their loads on their heads and thus from childhood have to stand upright with the neck straight and firm. They do not spoil their shapes with stays, or their walk with high-heeled shoes. They plant their feet firmly on the ground. Every movement is elastic and rounded, and the grace of body gives, or seems to give, grace also to the eyes and expression. (Froude 119)

Froude lists here only advantages of women's economic independence -- their

beautiful and strong posture, their freedom from the constraints that “spoil” middle class European women’s bodies, their inner and outer “grace.” Both Froude and Livingstone reiterate the colonial stereotypes of black women -- that they don’t marry, that they work harder than their men – but the unmaning of black males results not in a condemnation of black women or blacks as whole, but rather in a list of criticisms of the English model of domestic womanhood. By embodying their beauty and power, even as they constitute the antithesis of the ideals of white womanhood, black women successfully challenge the English model against which the men judge them – the model which made black men inferior and the colonies unworthy of political autonomy. As if in realization of the threat his admiration poses to England’s hierarchy of womanhoods, Froude ends his description by attempting unsuccessfully to rescind it, “Poor things! it cannot compensate for their colour...their prettiness, such as it is, is short-lived. They grow old early, and an old negress is always hideous” (Froude 119). (Froude borrows this last claim from Edward Long.)

Froude’s attentive admiration of Afro-Caribbean women leads him to directly attack the pro-slavery, Carlylean myth that Afro-Caribbeans are lazy and that their laziness is responsible for the planters’ economic failures. In Dominica, Froude is clearly smitten by the two maids who work in the administrator’s residence. Similar to Trollope in his awe of Sally’s strength, Froude’s admiration seems to result from the fact that they are stronger than he is and have the self-confidence to make fun of him. Froude describes that on his arrival, “two tall handsome black girls seized my bags, tossed them on their heads, and strode off with a light step in front of me, cutting jokes with their friends; I following, and my mind misgiving me that I was myself the object of their wit”(144). In contrast to pro-slavery tracts, which inevitably complain that blacks were such poor servants that an employer needed three or four to do the work of one English servant, Froude marvels that so few servants accomplish the work of the

island administrator's entire residence – "it consisted of two black girls - a cook and a parlour maid, who did everything' and 'everything,' I am bound to say, was done well enough to please the most fastidious nicety"(147). On inquiring as to their wages, he is shocked.

In no part of the globe have I ever seen household work done so well by two pairs of hands....I asked in wonder what wages were paid to these black fairies, believing that at no price at all could the match of them be found in England. I was informed that they had three shillings a week each, and 'found themselves,' i.e. found their own food and clothes. And this was above the usual rate, as government House was expected to be liberal.(148)

His shock at the paucity of their wages leads Froude to begin to critique Carlyle's and the planters' assertion that blacks' refusal to work had destroyed the sugar economy. He comments perhaps wryly that "the scale of wages may have something to do with the difficulty of obtaining labour in the West Indies. I could easily believe the truth of what I had been often told, that free labour is more economical to the employer than slave labor"(148).

Further attention to women's wages brings Froude to a harsher criticism of Carlyle and the plantocracy. Back in Jamaica, Froude is the guest of another colonial officer, a Colonel J. who reiterates the "complaint ... that the blacks would not work for wages more than three days in the week, or regularly upon those." Colonel J., however, does admit that Afro-Caribbeans refuse wage labor in preference for "cultivat[ing] their own yams and sweet potatoes... that they did work one way or another at home." Here, Froude identifies with Afro-Caribbeans, claiming that "there was not much to complain of" if Afro-Caribbeans were industrious. Comparing blacks and English, Froude asserts that "the blacks were only as we do. We, too, only work as

much a we like or as we must, and we prefer working for ourselves to working for others”(212). The “blacks” and the English become one category – the planters and Carlyle fall outside of the community of reasonable people.<sup>66</sup> When Colonel J. informs Froude that he could pay only a shilling to a woman for porting luggage almost fifty miles in a day. Froude is outraged and concludes that “with such material of labour wisely directed, whites and blacks might live and prosper together; but even the poor negro will not work when he is regarded only as a machine to bring grist to the master’s mill” (221).<sup>67</sup> Froude’s decision to side with Afro-Caribbeans against Carlyle and the planters’ myth is short-lived in his text, but it is significant. Froude has divorced political rightness from Carlyle and from whiteness even though his central thesis is that only English whites can rule. Black women then are powerful not only as workers, but as figures that destabilize English discourse. Yet even the exposure of the planters’ abusive labor policy does not effectively change Froude’s underlying political argument. Froude is, after all, arguing that West Indians, including planters, are incompetent to rule. Only a newly invigorated English colonial rule can put the colonies in order.

Thus, the figures of black women destabilize late 19th-century discourse by challenging the superiority of the white, English model of domestic womanhood. In challenging white women’s superiority, this vision of black women may question the racial hierarchy on which the English Empire was based.

Second, the economic exploitation of black women in English accounts reveals that labor policy, not black laziness, was (in part) responsible for the West

---

<sup>66</sup> A similar splitting of race and allegiance occurs when white baptists define planters as savage, an act whose re-racing of identity Hall claims was “terrifying” (Hall 212).

<sup>67</sup> Holt uses this passage to comment on Froude’s contradiction of his main argument (314).

Indian economic failure. The failure of Livingstone and Froude's attempt to reassert English dominance makes sense when we remember that the very reason that they write is that Englishness is in crisis. Afro-Caribbean women destabilized the racialization of domesticity in the late 18th century; with both English and West Indian economic systems in crisis in the second half of the 19th century, they destabilize English discourse yet more strongly.

Gikandi argues that "the black woman is a particularly revealing site for [imperial fantasies, desires, and anxieties]" because "her body is the standard conceptualization of the strangeness of the other, the doubleness of its attraction and revulsion; as the most radical figure of alterity, the black woman is the space in which theories of blackness are constituted and reformulated" (111). Rhonda Cobham argues that Livingstone and men like him were ambivalent about "black women" because they combined industry, which English Victorian culture defined as the best of values, with unmarried sexuality activity, "promiscuity," which it defined as the worst of all possible activities for women ("The Creative Writer" 195). Both these interpretations help to make sense of English men's ambivalence towards Afro-Caribbean women.

Ironically, it is not so much black women's absolute difference as their uncanny similarities that trip up writers' colonialist arguments. When considered in abstract terms, the sexual freedom and economic independence of black women resemble white male privilege except that Livingstone and Froude seem to attribute yet more independence and more sexual freedom to black women than they themselves were allowed. The principles are familiar but their embodiment in black women is disconcerting because as, Gikandi writes, black women ought to be figures of the most radical alterity. Further, black women's physical strength is a sign not of middle class masculinity but of working class masculinity. It shames not only black men but the

English writers. It is a strength Trollope, Livingstone, Froude, and Kingsley all lacked as they were not manual laborers. Afro-Caribbean women's superior physical power raises the issue that middle class masculinity lacked physical strength.<sup>68</sup>

The image of the strong black woman is so powerful that there seems to be no way to represent Afro-Caribbean women without destabilizing the concept of English womanhood. I mention this because the most explicitly radical text in English discourse on the West Indies of this series, Olivier's White Capital and Coloured Labour, fails to question the racialized nature of morality and womanhood, I suspect, because it does not describe Afro-Caribbean women at all. As a result it inserts an unquestioned Victorian belief in the superiority of white femininity into a class critique of colonialism. Olivier writes in order to debunk the idea of colonialism as "White Man's burden" and argues that Europeans colonize for economic gain, not to improve the lives of others. He proposes that inter-racial colonies be integrated and racial prejudice and division be eliminated in order to avoid rebellion and to improve society. Olivier believed that inter-racial people possessed the best of each race, that all races were equal, but each had its specific talents. In the development of an inter-racial foetus, for instance, the black cells would accomplish what they do best while the white cells would accomplish their strengths. The resulting human being would be the best of both. Yet, this argument against racial division existed within a hierarchy of races. Olivier held that Christianity and many aspects of European culture were by definition more advanced than African religion and aspects of African culture. In order to fully participate in a parliamentary government, blacks needed to "advance" in

---

<sup>68</sup> This point might well be complicated and elaborated by comparing English men's fascination with working black women with the sexual significance of blackness and working class womanhood for middle class English men. See Anne McClintock's analysis of the relationship between Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick (chapters 2 & 3 of Imperial Leather).

their knowledge of European government, education, and technology.

Women of color play no role at all in Olivier's argument, but white women are key because Olivier believes that white women's highly developed sensitivity constitutes human's greatest advance in cultural development; Olivier writes, "the white races are now, in fact, by far the further advanced in effectual human development"(37); by "effectual human development" Olivier refers to the heightened emotional sensitivity of the English ideal of domestic womanhood; white women are a high point of cultural achievement from which any racial deviation constitutes a step "backwards." (Oddly this step "backwards" recalls Moreton's description of the uneducated white creole woman's fall backwards into cultural blackness that I mentioned in the previous chapter.) As a result of their elevated position in social evolution, white women ought not to mate with non-whites despite Olivier's general approbation for inter-racial sex. He argues, "it would be expedient on this account alone that [white women's] maternity should be economized to the utmost. A woman may be the mother of a limited number of children, and our notion of the number advisable is contracting: it is bad natural economy, and instinct very potently opposes it, to breed backwards from her" (37-8). Olivier's scientific racism – his belief in the essential superiority of "Western" culture – undercuts his own challenge to colonialist doctrine, which claims that the basis of European colonialism is economic not moral and political superiority. His idealization of white womanhood most explicitly exposes the limits of Olivier's challenge to racial hierarchy. Domesticity remains a central justification for classifying non-whites as inferior to whites; white women remain the last bar between "the races." The contrast with Froude's and Livingstone's ambivalent texts raise the question: Would Olivier have been able to maintain such a clear hierarchy of womanhood had he examined anglophone Caribbean women in this 1906 text?

In these first two chapters, I have outlined 18th and 19th century English images of creole women in this detail because they had enormous influence on the first generations of anglophone Caribbean writers. The sadistic white woman and the seductive brown woman of the pre-emancipation period appear almost unchanged in historical novels like de Lisser's The White Witch of Rose Hall; the sexually aberrant and violent white woman also surfaces in C.L.R. James's Minty Alley, but more clearly in Trinidadian fiction about the degeneracy of the white upper class. The seductive mistress of the pre-emancipation period becomes transformed into a the sexy brown woman of yard fiction, like Alfred Mendes's Black Fauns. The strong black woman is, however, by far the most prominent figure in anglophone Caribbean fiction of the pre-1950 period.

What did it mean for emergent national literatures in the anglophone Caribbean to embrace so ambiguous a figure, one so fully complicit in colonialist arguments against nationalism and at the same time so subversive of those arguments and of the foundational principles of English superiority? What roles could strong black women, seductive brown women, and sadistic white women play in new literary visions of the nation? These questions structure following chapters.

#### **Chapter 4: “Black Matriarch and White Witch: Herbert de Lisser’s ‘Nationalism’ and the Politics of Race and Class in Jamaica.”**

Caught in the transitional space between colonial discourse and nationalist rhetoric, Herbert de Lisser was one of the first West Indians to wrest the power of representing the West Indies from English writers. An Afro-Caribbean critical of English colonial government, de Lisser was, nevertheless, chosen by the English elite for this task. The English editor of The Daily Gleaner, W.P. Livingstone, apparently recommended that de Lisser take his place in 1904 (Roberts 109). In an effort to foster Jamaican culture, Sydney Olivier, then governor, encouraged de Lisser to write his first novel, Jane (1913), which is dedicated to Olivier. De Lisser did not, however, simply reiterate either the theories of Livingstone or Olivier. Indeed, he thoroughly attacked Livingstone’s Black Jamaica in a series of editorials, and although he employed some of Olivier’s Fabian socialist rhetoric, he never accepted his underlying critique of colonialism as a form capitalist exploitation. In both his journalism and novels, he went on to appropriate and transform different threads of English discourse, playing them against each other and applying them to local history and legend in order to construct an image of Jamaica in which the local elite held economic and political power. The central figures of his roughly twenty novels are re-visions of the female protagonists’ of English discourse on the West Indies: the sadistic white woman, the seductive brown woman, and the strong black woman. The most common plot of his novels reworks the colonial romance, the rivalry of white and Afro-Caribbean women for white men’s love and money.

As editor of Jamaica’s most widely read newspaper, The Daily Gleaner, prolific novelist, member of the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica, and the person who first successfully marketed Jamaican literature in Jamaica, de Lisser was one of the most influential figures in the development of Jamaican print culture

between 1900 and 1938.<sup>69</sup> He also wielded significant political power as editor of The Gleaner and as secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association (JIA). Because The Gleaner held a virtual monopoly in the daily news market, de Lisser held a virtual monopoly in manufacturing opinion among Jamaica's literate population (Roberts 110).<sup>70</sup> As secretary of the JIA, he served as a type of "trade ambassador" to England, negotiating with the English government on behalf of Jamaican merchants and planters (Roberts 113).<sup>71</sup> A self-taught, light Afro-Caribbean man of little means, he used his novels as well as his position as editor and "trade ambassador" to shape a new "white" ruling class and to make himself one of its most powerful members.

From "the Story of the Maroons" published in 1899 to the last of his novels published in the early 1940s, de Lisser's writing participated in this consolidation and redefinition of the local elite by appropriating and deploying domestic discourse to limit

---

<sup>69</sup> De Lisser was editor of The Gleaner from 1904-44. Between 1910 and 1937, served on the Board of Institute of Jamaica for twenty-two years of which he was chairman for seventeen, roughly from 1922 to 1937 (Roberts 111). He was largely responsible for raising the funds for the library of the West India Reference Library, now the National Library of Jamaica and for the science museum, now known as the Institute of Jamaica.

<sup>70</sup> The Gleaner was the only daily in continuous circulation between 1918-38. Other dailies, The Telegraph, The Mail, The Chronicle, and The Standard were in operation only for several years at a time (Carnegie 162). De Lisser held an extreme amount of power over opinion making even though The Gleaner did publish some columnists who opposed de Lisser in the 1930s (Carnegie 175).

<sup>71</sup> Top planters and merchants led by Arthur Farquharson formed the JIA in 1917. De Lisser served as its secretary from its establishment until his death in 1944. The purpose of the JIA was to support the West India Committee, to build up Jamaica's image in England, and to secure trade and subsidies for Jamaica - mostly in sugar, bananas, and rum (Roberts 112-3).

and shape the process of creolization in Jamaica.<sup>72</sup> By appropriating colonialist arguments that “blacks” were essentially incapable of domestic virtue and Christian marriage, de Lisser’s texts justified the exclusion of dark Jamaicans from positions of political, economic, and social power and legitimated their continued exploitation by local and foreign capitalists. In this way, de Lisser deployed domesticity to check the political and economic process of creolization in relation to Afro-Caribbeans. In contrast, he represented the local elite as united through their assimilation of English domesticity and, thus, his domestic rhetoric fostered the process of creolization within the white and near-white middle and upper class, consolidating it as a distinctly Jamaican elite class united against labor.

At the beginning of his career de Lisser identified himself with a brown elite, which he argued was the most important, the most domestically virtuous class in the colony. Refuting Livingstone’s attack on the morality of the brown elite, de Lisser

---

<sup>72</sup> In claiming a continuity in de Lisser’s work I am going against the tradition of dividing de Lisser’s work into two types: (1) his first two novels, *Jane* (1913) and *Susan Proudleigh* (1915), social dramas about black protagonists, which have been in the West Indian literary canon and (2) his historical romances about whites and browns, which have been excluded as derivative and racist. Rhonda Cobham is the only critic I’ve read who resists this division and Ramchand’s chronological explanation of it. She points to de Lisser’s anti-black stance in 1900, long before the publication of *Jane* in 1913 and his return to black characters in its 1941 sequel *Myrtle and Money*. Cobham argues that critics have been deluded in reading de Lisser’s satire of class and color consciousness as a critique of the system. She holds that his satire ridicules without critiquing, that he has respect only for those of his characters who have the canniness to rise in the system, who have his values and abilities. In short, that self-interest was the major motivating factor in shaping de Lisser’s fiction (“The Creative Writer” 225). In claiming a continuity between his early and later works, I follow Cobham’s lead, but I modify it in that I see that although de Lisser always opposed black political rights, he did shift to the right as he became more associated with a white rather than a brown elite. As he shifted right, Olivier’s work had less and less influence in de Lisser’s fiction.

wrote

The colored class who range in position from small peasant proprietors to large wealthy landowners, from small shopkeepers to being merchants, form a third section of the West Indian community. Taken as a whole they are the most powerful of the three classes of people in the West Indies. (Jamaica Times 22 September 1900:9)

However, by the time he starts editing and writing Planters' Punch in 1920, de Lisser has ceased to identify himself with a "coloured" elite, and has dedicated his political and literary work to the interests of a white and near-white elite. This "white" elite consisted of a diverse group -- the long-established Jewish merchants and industrialists, old white creole planter families, newly immigrated middle Eastern retail store owners, office workers, expatriate government officials, and the managerial class of the United Fruit Company. In so doing de Lisser expands an English definition of whiteness to include Jews and Middle Eastern immigrants.<sup>73</sup> De Lisser never explicitly states the extent to which this class included Afro-Caribbeans, but the fact that de Lisser himself was Afro-Caribbean and that his novel Haunted represents the Jamaican plantocracy as admirable leaders, who are inter-racial, though not visibly so, indicates that de Lisser's ruling class must have embraced light Afro-Caribbeans who met his standards in class, culture, and politics. Including Afro-Caribbeans had great political significance because it shifted the political position of the white elite which had

---

<sup>73</sup> The term, Middle Eastern immigrants may appear peculiar or awkward. It refers to a group of people, who mostly now identify themselves as Lebanese and whom early literature consistently refer to as "Syrians." This confusion has arisen from the fact that at the turn of the century when the majority of families emigrated to the British West Indies, the geographic territory now divided into the nation states of Lebanon and Syria had not yet been thus divided. It would therefore be incorrect to refer to the Shoucair or Mahfood families as Lebanese in 1920s.

historically attempted to draw very strict lines between itself and the brown elite.<sup>74</sup> He thus fostered a political alliance between whites and browns against blacks which helped to construct a larger, more powerful alliance of employers against the working class. Significantly it articulated that class opposition in terms of race.<sup>75</sup> In de Lisser's project, domestic discourse defined white Jamaicans as moral and non-white Jamaicans as immoral. In so doing, it coded class positions in moral and racial terms and thus functioned in de Lisser's work much as it had in English discourse on the West Indies.

To shape the national identity of Jamaica in the image of this small, diverse, and changing elite de Lisser constructs a number of negative others — peasants, workers, English bureaucrats. He draws his arguments and figures from conflicting threads of colonial discourse, most notably Froude and Olivier. Because the position of this class so unstable, the negative others he constitutes are unstable -- thus the peasant is sometimes lazy and sometimes an exploited worker. While this instability and contradiction is most evident in his early journalism, de Lisser's later novels continue to contain conflicting ideologies.<sup>76</sup> Rather than see a consistency of genre and

---

<sup>74</sup> Bryan describes the whites as a caste that feared and excluded browns; he writes, "it is difficult to escape the conclusion that white society conducted itself as something of a caste. This can be explained by their existence in a predominantly coloured society and the consequent need for 'mutual protection' against 'combustible' coloured people" (119).

<sup>75</sup> I suggest this despite de Lisser's scorn for brown politicians in many of his novels as well as in Jamaican politics. De Lisser opposed politicians who opposed his elite. Near-whites who sided with the black majority or who lobbied for a more democratic form of government could not be included in his fold.

<sup>76</sup> His novels' obsession with monstrous figures may reflect the troubling and troubled nature of this class. It suggests that the local elite is a monstrous hybrid that needs to define hybrids yet more monstrous than itself to claim legitimacy. There are few monsters surpass de Lisser's supernatural figures — the white witch of Rose Hall, who is a murderess and voodoo priestess, the Martinican sisters who worship the devil and transform into 14

sentiment in de Lisser's work as Cobham does or a definite shift from a Fabian socialist position in Jane's Career to a near white, near nationalist position in his later work, as Ramchand does, I suggest that there is both consistency and a political shift to the "right" or "white." As de Lisser's elite becomes less and less explicitly Afro-Caribbean, the elements of Fabian socialism fade and the Froudian logic becomes more prominent.

My project in this chapter is to illustrate de Lisser's appropriation of two figures from English domestic discourse on the West Indies and their deployment in his representation of Jamaica as a nation dominated by a virtuous and modern elite. First I explicate de Lisser's deployment of domestic ideology and his transformation of the figure of the strong black woman in his early journalism and his first novel, Jane (1913), later published as Jane's Career (1914) (Illustration 5, Appendix). In de Lisser's first novel, he presents an image of Jamaica's future as a modern, middle class nation by transforming the strong black woman of Froude and Livingstone into a canny black woman, who is willing to give up economic and sexual independence for social upward mobility. Her path is, of course, through marriage. The second half of the chapter examines how de Lisser deploys the English stereotype of the sadistic and Africanized white woman slave owner to liberate the planter class from its association with the brutality of slavery and to obfuscate the political agency of Afro-Caribbeans in the largest Jamaican slave revolt, the Baptist War 1831.

### Strong Black women in de Lisser's Early Journalism :

As an elite Jamaican who supported colonialism administered by a local elite and the total disenfranchisement of black Jamaicans, de Lisser was caught between the strong imperialist rhetoric of Froude and Livingstone and the Fabian socialism of

---

foot, upright crocodiles, and the countless obeah women wielding ghosts and supernatural cats.

Olivier. He could embrace neither fully. He contested Froude's and Livingstone's dismissal of the local elite as politically incompetent, but often espoused Froude's definition of blacks as innately inferior in order to justify further oppression of the working class. He embraced Olivier's theory of the superiority of racial hybrids yet rejected Olivier's principle that all colonized people had the ability to govern if educated. De Lisser at times also propounded Olivier's more socialist critique of colonialism as a form of capitalist exploitation, partly as a means of refuting Livingstone's arguments against creole whites and browns and partly because he revered Olivier. The result is a deeply contradictory discourse — a discourse centered, as colonial discourse was, on the question of morality, sexuality, and the figure of the independent black woman.

In a 1899 Jamaica Times article, "How Kingston Lives and Moves and has its Being," de Lisser espouses Froude's assertion that black women are hardworking and black men are lazy in order to take an even harder line against the working and peasant classes. Yet at the same time, he parodies Froude, showing that contrary to Froude's assertions, English expatriates are not the best leaders of the country. De Lisser literally retraces Froude's steps in a scene from The English in the West Indies in which Froude falls in with a group of women walking to market in Kingston. Froude becomes incensed because he sees that women are walking with heavy baskets of produce on their heads, while men ride donkeys, carrying nothing. He describes, "women plodding along with their baskets on their heads, a single male on a donkey to each detachment of them, carrying nothing, like an officer with a company of soldiers. Foolish indignation rose in me..."(263). He becomes so engrossed in argument with his carriage driver over the men's failure to better assist their women that both men lose their way and spend hours trying to find Froude's host in Cherry Gardens. The rigors of this detour bring Froude to question his dedication to imposing domesticity on black

women. "Vainly," he laments, "I repented of my unnecessary philanthropy which had been the cause of the mischief; what had I to do with black women, or white either for that matter?" (265?)

In "How Kingston Lives," de Lisser describes a similar scene of market women, "each of whom carrie[d] a large basket filled to over-flowing with the produce of their land" (Jamaica Times 19 August 1899: 5) Unlike Froude, de Lisser does not lose his way, nor he does repent his strategy of undercutting black men's power. Rather he outdoes Froude not only in navigation, but in the extent to which he emasculates black Jamaican men. Like Froude, de Lisser contrasts the market women's industry with the indolence of black males, but the males in de Lisser's account are "young boys" each of whom carries only a piece of sugar cane. De Lisser is outraged, claiming that "compared with the women's, their burden is unconscionably light, one is at a loss to account for their presence; even the canes do not justify it." De Lisser questions their very need to exist in the marketing process: "They cannot be said, either, to serve as protectors to the others of the gentler sex, for the ladies look well able to protect themselves. In fact, for the present, at least, their presence is inexplicable." While he good-humoredly gives money to the women, he considers the prospect of giving the young men money ridiculous. Froude attacks grown black men for being lazy, but fairly consistently describes young men or boys as exceptionally capable, ingenuous, and brave.<sup>77</sup> That is, Froude allows young Caribbean men to be men. De Lisser does not. This may reflect the fact that the local elite needed to deny the power of the working class yet more than England did as they profited directly from its labor.

The intensity of de Lisser's attack on black masculinity, however, may be a

---

<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the two most notable instances in The English in the West Indies are the Trinidadian youth, who alone knows how to catch a crawfish and the young Dominican, who survives an intense storm, all alone on a boat at sea (84 and 158).

function of his mimicry. In stepping into Froude's footsteps on the way to market, in employing strong black women to emasculate black men, de Lisser mimics Froude's masculinity and his discourse. His exaggeration is a function of his mimicry. Froude is constructing English masculinity as strong by contrasting it to black Jamaican masculinity. De Lisser is asserting the strength of his light Afro-Caribbean masculinity by contrasting it with black Jamaican peasant masculinity. Because he is relatively closer to black peasants than Froude in the hierarchy of race, he must be relatively more harsh in his criticism of black men.

At the same time, he contrasts his skill in navigating local geography to Froude's, and, by extension his superior skills in local leadership. To show himself superior to Froude, de Lisser deploys the figure of the independent black woman from Froude's own discourse. By portraying the market women as begging money from him de Lisser significantly alters Froude's depiction of the black women. For Froude, Kingsley, and Livingstone, black women are "Amazons"; their independence and freedom are "perfect." For de Lisser black women are stronger than black men, but their begging places him in a position of domination and indicates that they are not as independent as he.

Published in 1900, within a year of "How Kingston Lives," de Lisser's six-month series of editorials on "Marriage" argues that extreme low wages cause low productivity, not blacks' laziness. As a result, he contradicts his earlier representation of black Jamaican men as lazy and superfluous. The text is, however, absolutely contradictory. In it, he asserts the essential inability of black Jamaicans to assimilate English domestic culture. At the same time, he espouses Olivier's proposal that Jamaica needed economic, not exclusively moral reforms. This conflict suggests that de Lisser's dismissal of black Jamaican equality dates from as early as 1900 and that does not result from his alliance with the white elite starting in the late 1910's.

De Lisser's contradictions result in large part from his effort to refute Livingstone's Black Jamaica, in particular his dismissal of the local elite as morally corrupt and politically incompetent and his assertion that the political future of Jamaica belongs to black Jamaicans. Livingstone argued that the local elite had been so immoral and so politically ignorant that it had corrupted the black population. Only England could bring blacks into moral practices and political competence. Livingstone's talk of black progress towards morality was really only a way of justifying continued direct English rule, a means of countering calls for increased representation in government. Livingstone's book used the divide and conquer principle of colonialism effectively. Instead, of throwing out his argument as ridiculous and defending all Jamaicans, de Lisser attacked blacks in order to assert his own propriety and political competence and that of the local elite. The result was perfect for Livingstone who wanted to perpetuate direct colonial rule and had no intention of England granting universal suffrage for possibly hundreds of years. That he uses domesticity to divide and conquer is another example of how domesticity worked in English discourse to thwart an egalitarian form of creolization.

Countering Livingstone's accusation that the local elite had morally corrupted black Jamaicans, de Lisser holds that Africans brought an essential immorality with them on slave ships from Africa, where, he asserted, people are so immoral that they have perverted marriage itself into a form of slavery.<sup>78</sup> Echoing Froude, De Lisser

---

<sup>78</sup> De Lisser achieves an odd shifting of terms: slavery did not make Africans immoral; Africa made marriage into slavery. Their wives are merely commodities -- who can be bought, lent, prostituted. De Lisser's motivation for portraying blacks as essentially immoral is to defend the local elite against Livingstone's attack on their rights to political power and position. De Lisser thus asserts, "It is a mischievous lie to declare... that they were taught to be immoral in these islands during slavery. If this were true, then it would follow that the people of West Africa must be a moral people since they have not, like their more unfortunate brothers, been brought to the West Indies and been

writes: "I simply contend that in the majority of cases the people, break no moral law for they know of none" (7 July 1900:9).<sup>79</sup> From de Lisser's perspective, black Jamaicans could never evolve to the moral state of whites and browns, but they could learn, if properly taught, to imitate marriage and domestic virtue. A black man, he holds, could be "an admirable imitator when well taught," but could not become moral simply by going through the ritual of a wedding: "in the present state of their mental and moral culture the mere marrying of the people of the West Indies would have no permanent effect" (25 August 1900:9). The best Jamaica could do was to bring black Jamaica into a semblance or mimicry of domestic virtue.

Therefore de Lisser claims Livingstone's "belief in marriage as a universal panacea" is ludicrous. He asks: "Get the people to marry and the problems that perplex us will work themselves out, but will they? The idea is to me an absurdity" (7 July 1900:9). Borrowing a program of reform from a recent public lecture by Olivier, de Lisser espouses a materialist critique of domesticity as colonial policy in the West Indies. He inverts Livingstone's assertion that marriage will bring social and economic development to Jamaica, by arguing that economic and social opportunity will bring marriage -- "morality comes with progress" (7 July 1900:9). What black Jamaicans need, de Lisser argues, is higher wages, more access to land, a strong peasant proprietor class, compulsory basic and agricultural education, good roads, *and* the "social influence" of the local elites and Europeans. Thus, ironically, de Lisser's essays entitled "Marriage" more frequently discuss social and economic reforms than marriage. Wages, property rights, education literally take the place of "Marriage" and domesticity in de Lisser's vision of Jamaica's future.

---

taught to be immoral" (30 June 1900:9).

<sup>79</sup> Compare to Froude's assertion that black West Indians "cannot be said to sin because they have no knowledge of a law, and therefore they can commit no breach of the law" (49).

Whereas Froude holds that black Caribbeans are essentially lazy because the soil miraculously provides their food, de Lisser now asserts, “it is not true either that the Negro cares for nothing save his ease, and is content to live upon next to nothing. It is my conviction that the love of wealth is pretty strongly developed in the Negro, and my opinion is that he will work pretty well to secure it”(25 August 1900:9). The answer to Jamaican’s “laziness,” de Lisser argues, is to give people access to land and a wage that will allow them to accumulate wealth. “It is evident,” he writes, “... that no sound industrial system can exist in the West Indies on a plan which places the vast majority of the labouring classes in the position of mere labourers.” Workers aren’t lazy, they are underpaid and not always paid at all. He concludes, “I hold that the Negro would make a better labourer on the estate if he were better paid, and so the charge of being hopelessly lazy should not obtain against him” (8 September 1900:9).

There is no way to see unity in de Lisser’s text. In order to counter Livingstone’s attack on the local elite, de Lisser unites (or cobbles together) arguments from radically contradictory threads of English discourse. The Froudian and the Fabian arguments collide. In de Lisser’s text, blacks are both an essentially immoral race, incapable of manhood and an exploited class of workers, whose racist employers deprive them of manhood by depriving them of a living wage and blaming low productivity on racial stereotype rather than exploitative labor practices.

As a result, de Lisser’s stance on Marriage remains ambiguous at the end of his six months’ series. On one hand, he seems to accept the notion that English domestic practices constitute the pinnacle of civilization and ought to be its standard – this is after all a tenet of Froude, Livingstone, and Olivier. But at the same time, de Lisser ridicules the importance of marriage and domesticity in the quest to improve Jamaica, particularly its majority, black population. How then do we read the fact that de Lisser places marriage in the center of all of his novels. Is each novel another proof that

ordinary Jamaicans can never achieve “real” marriages? Is this why so many of his heroines rely not on love and domestic sentiment but on obeah, voodoo, and money to catch their men? This is the case in The White Witch of Rose Hall, Poltergeist?, Haunted, The Crocodiles, The Rivals, The Sins of the Children. Is de Lisser’s focus on women and marriage -- which he has defined as outside the reach of black Jamaica - - just a great joke about Jamaica’s inability to marry and to evolve?

### Jane

De Lisser’s first novel, Jane (1913), brings the strong, but primitive black woman of Froude and Livingstone’s narratives into the process of building Jamaica as a modern nation.<sup>80</sup> To advance Jamaica, de Lisser appears to propound exactly the policy he ridiculed in 1900 -- the marriage plan. De Lisser’s black peasant woman exchanges her sexual and economic independence in order to gain material and social status as a wife and mother. If the working class chooses marriage over trade unions, de Lisser suggests, Jamaica will become a modern nation through the assimilation of English middle class values: domesticity, industry, and capital accumulation.<sup>81</sup> Despite their economic dependence on men in marriage, black women in de Lisser’s novel function as they had in the work of Kingsley, Livingstone, and Froude -- to highlight black men’s lack of masculinity.

To briefly summarize -- Jane Burrell is born into a peasant family and sent to Kingston at fifteen to become a domestic servant. She quickly runs away to become a

---

<sup>80</sup> Jane appeared in serial form in The Gleaner and as a single volume in Jamaica. It was revised for publication in England and titled Jane’s Career in 1914.

<sup>81</sup> In her analysis of Jane’s Career, Natasha Barnes argues that de Lisser represents urbanization as a gendered experience, in which modernity for women consists of marriage and becoming a consumer (100).

worker in a labeling factory. Jane's parents and village elder send her off with the command that she abstain from sex until marriage. Yet Kingston teaches Jane that marriage is beyond the reach of young, working women who are dependent on male lovers to supplement their wages — lovers, who have no interest in marriage. Jane, however, succeeds in marrying. Trapped by her poverty into becoming the mistress of her supervisor at the factory, Jane manipulates the one skilled worker in the yard, Vincent Broglie, into becoming her man and later her husband. To do so, Jane must persuade Vincent to abandon the labor union in exchange for a domestic union with her.

The novel opens by illustrating the importance of chastity and marriage to Jane's parents and the village elder, Daddy Buckram. Daddy Buckram instructs Jane in the importance of chastity as part of the ritual of her migration from the village to the city. "Kingston," he says, "is a very big an' wicked city, an' a young girl like you, who de Lord has blessed wid a good figure an' a face, must be careful not to keep bad company"(14). Her mother then backs up the injunction against pre-marital sex by telling Buckram, "We bring her up decent an' respectable; she know dat her fader an' me married long before she born; so dat if she go to Kingston an' disgrace herself now, she will has to lie down on de bed she meck for herself"(15).<sup>82</sup> Finally, her father reiterates the point, "Keep you'self up when y'u is in Kingston, an' dont' allow any of those Kingston buoy to fool you up"(15).

De Lisser immediately reveals that these instructions have little connection to reality by illustrating that non-marital sex is the norm for young country women. For de Lisser, the Jamaican countryside is economically and domestically backward,

---

<sup>82</sup> Here de Lisser indicates and probably ridicules the peasant morality. That the claims to have been married before Jane's birth indicates that she and her husband had set up house and probably had other children before marrying, then (and still) a standard practice among Jamaican peasantry.

populated by women who have no interest in marriage and men who want only sex. It is a culture that Jamaica must overcome in order to be a modern nation.<sup>83</sup> In the village, he writes “no one over twelve years of age could pretend innocence, and no one did” (21). Describing how Jane sleeps in one room with all her siblings and her parents, de Lisser reproduces the English stereotypical representation of the one-room peasant house as a site of immorality.<sup>84</sup>

But it is the village women who most stridently oppose morality; they laugh at Jane’s determination to marry and counsel her to find a “friend” to supplement her wages. In fact, at each stage of Jane’s “career” women give the same advice; the domestic servant at her first job with Mrs. Mason, the women in the yard where she lives, and the factory workers -- all advocate taking a lover. This is largely because

---

<sup>83</sup> De Lisser’s constructs this image using both Olivier’s socialist vision of colonialism as a form of capitalist exploitation and Froude’s conception of the West Indies as an Eden of immorality. De Lisser first tells us that most working men have emigrated from the countryside to go to Central America and Cuba for higher wages or to the banana parishes within Jamaica. Global capital has thus dislocated families and gender relations. But the emigration of men enables de Lisser to portray Jamaican peasant villages as populated by Froude’s strong women and indolent men. He explains that Jane’s village “of about a hundred souls there were not more than thirty men and boys; many of these were of the Don Juan type, and not a few held firmly to the principle of a plurality of temporary wives. The women did most of the work in the fields” (20). The picture reminiscent of Froude’s depiction of Jamaica rapidly becomes an even closer imitation of Froude as we see in a passage just three pages later, “Everything, man and beast alike, moved slowly in the village. The intense heat, the vast stillness of dreaming mountains and distant sky, the warm heavy-scented breeze, the little effort that was required to support life, all tended to make indolence seductive and activity a curse”(23-4). Thus, de Lisser both explains the economic circumstances -- low wages, migration, for which people can not be held responsible, but then fits these particular historical circumstances into Froude’s timeless vision of tropical and primitive black life.

<sup>84</sup> This trope was perhaps most memorably employed by Governor Eyre who told protesters just prior to the Morant Bay Rebellion that they needed houses with separate sleeping areas, not land, wages, protection by the law, and infrastructure (Holt 273).

wages are low and job security non-existent so women can not be economically independent. Men are necessary as an economic “back force” according to factory workers or to free one from the slavery of work, as some peasant and servant women explain.<sup>85</sup>

De Lisser contrasts the modern factory women who want to work in order to improve their social status with peasants and domestic servants who see work as slavery and want to escape it entirely. The factory women use men as a “back up,” not as a means out of labor altogether, whereas Sarah, the servant in Mrs. Mason’s house, and the village women desire a man’s support to free them from having to work at all. De Lisser clearly looks down on these women because he represents them as referring to work as “slavery” – not as an opportunity to accumulate wealth. He is arguing that economic security brings morality to a working class with middle class aspirations, but that economic security without those inspirations, brings sexual license. In the village, Celestina can be sexually free and need not even hide it because her mother owns land, which she will inherit. Her security allows her sexual freedom without social censure.

We could read the role of sex in these women’s lives as an illustration of de Lisser’s Fabian-inspired claim in “Marriage” that the economic conditions of the working class must improve before marriage can play a meaningful role in black Jamaicans’ lives. Jamaican working women and men will treat sexual relations as economic transactions until they have a living wage. Sathyra, Jane’s short-time roommate in the yard exemplifies the pragmatism women have about sex and men. She tells Jane in no uncertain terms that the purpose of sexual relations is to extract as

---

<sup>85</sup> Independence can also bring women to immorality in the upper classes -- that is, in the retrograde planter class, not in the contemporary upper strata. In The White Witch of Rose Hall, Annie Palmer can openly have a lover because she owns several estates. See my discussion of Annie Palmer later in this chapter.

much money from the man as possible: “Who getten married now? De best t’ing a gurl can do, when a young man want to be friendly with her, is to ‘eat him out’ as much as she can?” (144).

Jane escapes both the immorality of the peasant life and of the yard because she has the attributes of the English domestic ideal: sexual purity, industry, honesty, the ambition to rise in social and economic terms, a desire for marriage, and a love of children. Unlike most other peasant girls, she is “decent” by which de Lisser means she doesn’t engage in sexual activity. De Lisser suggests that Jane’s superior morality derives from her European ancestry by juxtaposing Jane’s vigorous assertion of her morality with the comment: “Jane was darker, strongly built and robust, but her features, the nose especially, hinted at some white ancestor” (27). De Lisser seems no less attached to physiognomy than Livingstone, who claimed that the features of black Jamaicans had become increasingly like those of Europeans because black Jamaicans had become increasingly moral (223).<sup>86</sup> In his fiction, de Lisser consistently presents people’s facial features as accurately defining their inner character. Though white ancestry does not make all de Lisser’s characters moral, it is quite likely that de Lisser sees that one white ancestor as a grounds for Jane’s moral and intellectual superiority.

Her whiteness may contribute to her industry and domestic sensibility. Even her exploitative first employer, Mrs. Mason must admit that Jane is an honest and hard working servant (127). In addition Jane has a particular devotion to children; she earns loyalty and respect in the yard by caring for other women’s children when they are at work. However, her middle class aspirations in respect to her own children make her not only unique, but a laughing stock among her peers, as the following scene between Jane and an unmarried mother in the yard reveals:

---

<sup>86</sup> He was not referring to inter-racial people but to black people whose features he felt had improved in direct correlation with their improved moral practices.

“Ef I had any children,” said [Jane], “you know what I would like? I would like to have a nice little house, wid about two room, quite new and pretty; an’ I would like about four children. I doan’t t’ink I care for any more, for y’u see, if you have plenty, them will give y’u a lot of boderation, but if you have just t’ree or four, you can look after them well. Then I would like me house to have some nice furniture, like what Miss Mason, de lady I was workin’ wid when I first came to Kingston, did have. I would wash de children two times every day, in de morning an’ in de evening, an’ when them grow big I would tie them hair wid blue ribban an’ teck dem to school every day, an’ every Sunday I would send them to Sunday school. When people see them, them would ask, ‘Who children is that?’ an’ somebody might say: ‘Dem is Miss Burrell children.’ By this time, now, I am one side earin’ de whole thing; an you can guess how I feel please an’ proud! I would dress whenever I go out, an’ I woun’t allow one of my pickney to go out into de street witout boots. When them get big, I would teach them to learn de piano --”

She was interrupted by the laughter of her listener.

“You fly high,” said the latter, “you’ head really big! Y’u want piano too!”

“Why not?” Asked Jane half apologetically, but swiftly coming back to earth a gain. ‘Why can’t we black people have piano too?...’ (168)

Jane can not fully conceive of marriage as evidenced by the fact that even in her fantasy she calls herself “Miss Burrell” when a mother. Her fantasy nonetheless demonstrates that Jane has the desire for the middle class ideal of maternal love and for the material wealth which accompanied it in domestic discourse: a larger house, nice furniture, proper clothing, the piano. De Lisser suggests a link between domesticity and the

modern market economy by describing Jane's enthusiasm for the market. When Jane first arrives in Kingston, she is miserable because her employer abuses her, but the market -- all the goods, higglers, trolley cars -- "filled her with unspeakable delight" (56); she views the ability of women to aggressively participate in that market as a sign of superiority. Jane's desire to succeed in this market, which we can read as the modern, market economy, is inseparable from her desire for marriage. Both reflect her desire for upward social mobility; both are signs of assimilation of English middle class values.

De Lisser suggests that Jane is not alone but part of a "new generation of Jamaica peasants" whose desire to rise had the potential to transform the colony into a modern nation: "they had learnt to read and write; they were fond of dressing on Sundays; and, if they still worked in the fields, they did not like it. They were all for 'going to town' or 'going foreign,' as the men were doing, but did not know how to set about it"(24-5). In explaining this new generation's desires as reactions to men's mobility, de Lisser indicates that the "new generation" of peasants is female. Black men are thus left out of his vision of black Jamaicans' progress toward respectability and modernity.

Despite their great ambition, Jane and her cohort can not marry. Young working class Jamaicans simply did not have the money to marry, to pay for the wedding, the house, and to subsist on a single income. Confronted by the practical impossibility of marriage and the financial hardship and loneliness of living on her own, Jane gives up her commitment to marriage but not her desire for middle class status and children. She thus seeks and finds a man, who can give her children and her material desires though he does not, at first, marry her. De Lisser describes Jane's relationship with Vincent as a success because it brings her both motherhood and social upward mobility. At the celebration of her son's first birthday, de Lisser describes Jane as

“transformed.”

In her white muslin dress, with her hair done up with ribbons, wearing high-heeled shoes and looking as though she had been born to entertaining guests, Jane is not very like the little girl we have seen sitting mute and frightened as she drove into Kingston with Mrs. Mason. She is not much like girl we saw sharing apartments with Sathyra. She looks very much to-night as if she has ‘kept herself up’ ... She has the lover she cares for, and in the other room lies “the kid” ... (243).

Does de Lisser present this as an illustration of black Jamaicans’ ability to appear moral without actually being moral? That he places her morality in a present contrary-to-fact condition -- she “looks very much ... as if she has ‘kept herself up’” -- suggests that she appears rather than is moral. On the other hand, her success in domestic love and possessions suggests that marriage is superfluous, as she herself claims, when she points out to one guest at her the child’s first birthday, “I not lookin’ for that title.” (244). Is de Lisser suggesting that all this fuss over the marriage sacrament is unnecessary?

De Lisser’s representation of Jane’s wedding is farcical, showing that domestic sentiment has no bearing on working class and lower middle class marriage. Jane marries not out of Christian love and devotion, which she already has, but as a result of Vincent’s drunken whim and the “desire to do something new and daring, something that should make him a marked man among his acquaintances for quite a long time” (245). Jane desires to marry for the social status it will give her and because it will allow her to put all those who humiliated her in their place, primarily her former employer, Mrs. Mason. In fact, she has her banns announced in Mrs. Mason’s church just so Mrs. Mason will know. She times her arrival at her wedding to maximize

people's admiration, and the novel ends when Mrs. Mason's nieces congratulate Jane and "her cup was full of joy."

Vincent feels that his wedding is his chance to become a real man, a gentleman. De Lisser has already satirized Vincent as the woman of the household, by showing that Jane in no uncertain terms is the decision-maker in the house. Now he makes Vincent's lack of manhood and that of his peers yet clearer. Vincent's friends decide that in order to appear a man at his wedding Vincent must smoke a cigar — "He was no smoker, yet that mattered nothing to his friends." De Lisser frames Vincent's performance of manhood in political terms by describing his friends' decision in favor of the cigar as a "vote": "the majority of these [Vincent's friends] had decided, putting it to the vote as it were, that it would never do for him to go to be married as though he were a boy and not a man, and this way of considering the matter had eventually determined him to sacrifice personal comfort to the exigencies of a manly appearance" (253). Here, de Lisser suggests that the working class and the lower middle class are not real men, but that they employ marriage and domestic virtue as a way of performing or mimicking real masculinity. They are, however, not men. If given the right to vote, they would vote on inconsequential matters, measures that give them appearance of manhood rather than manhood itself. This correlates with de Lisser's opposition to universal suffrage and his support of franchise only for the upper middle and upper classes, which was the law in Jamaica in 1913.

Thus, Jane's domestic partnership with Vincent on one hand does illustrate the potential of the peasant class to assimilate middle class values and to ascend in the race, class hierarchy. But the marriage itself illustrates the limitations of that ascendance; these are the limitations of imitation. Jane and Vincent remain flawed performances of femininity and masculinity, but these performances, as de Lisser suggests in "Marriage" constitute improvement for Jamaica and the best he expects from the lower and lower

middle classes.

De Lisser's model for upward mobility, however, has serious implications for labor. He essentially appropriates Froude's strategy of portraying Jamaican black women as strong in order to show that their men are weak and employs it to discredit organized labor (Cobham-Sander "The Creative Writer" 208). In de Lisser's Jamaica, the domestic union takes the place of the labor union. When Jane meets Vincent, he is deeply involved in organizing a strike among composers. Meanwhile Jane is being pressured by her supervisor, Mr. Curden, to become his kept mistress and fears that he will fire her if she refuses. She sets out to "court" Vincent as a means of escaping Mr. Curden. She succeeds by convincing Vincent that the strike will fail -- de Lisser has portrayed the union as a fiasco, organized by a foreign speculator and fueled by unemployed members, who are too lazy to work. Seduced by what appears to be Jane's disinterested affection, Vincent resolves to keep his job in order to be able to support Jane, so that she can put Curden in his place. Later, Vincent makes this exchange of the trade union for the domestic union explicit, "I was so disgusted with that low fellow Curden that I thought I would teach him a thing or two, and the only way to do that was not to give up me job for when a man out of job in this country, it better him dead!" (242). Thus, de Lisser's modern Jamaica and the social upward mobility which characterizes it is founded on a rejection of organized labor and the emasculation of working class and peasant men, who are represented either as absent or weaker than women.

Despite her economic dependence as wife, Jane retains her power over men. Despite her integration into marriage and the middle class, Jane emasculates Afro-Caribbean men. Vincent rather pointedly does not gain manhood through marriage and the mastery of his wife, as he ought according to English discourse. Unlike Vincent, who bends to Jane's opinion, Jane is unequivocally strong; she gets herself from

peasant poverty, through domestic service, out of sexual exploitation in the factory, and into a middle class marriage. Once married, she directs her husband's career. Jane's domination over her boss and husband functions much as the strength and independence of the woman coal porters function in Froude's narrative, to testify to Afro-Caribbean men's unworthiness of political rights. Yet, unlike Froude's women, whose physical labor and primitive innocence argue for the inferiority of Jamaica vis-a-vis England, Jane's career of upward mobility is evidence of Jamaica's modernity. Himself a propagandist for Jamaica abroad, de Lisser presents Kingston not as a site of sexual corruption, but as a place that transforms the peasant into a modern, middle class woman.

But Jane is clearly not the amazon of Froude's and Kingsley's imaginations. De Lisser contains Jane's power and that of Afro-Caribbean women in significant ways. First, he makes them economically dependent on men, either as lovers or as wives. Second, he denies her conscious agency. He keeps Jane unable to articulate and understand her own emotions and to plan. When Mrs. Mason, Jane's first employer, convinces Jane's mother that her daughter deserves Mrs. Mason's punishing hand, de Lisser comments that Jane and "her mother had, in a way, become strangers. This she felt more than thought; for such a proposition she never would have been able to formulate clearly in her mind"(77). Jane remains similarly unaware of her own successful strategies in negotiating with her boss about being his mistress.<sup>87</sup> She only distrusts the trade union movement because she is too ignorant to understand the

---

<sup>87</sup> Glyne Griffith also remarks that de Lisser refuses Jane the "possibility of formulating the proposition to use the term in Foucault's sense, in her own voice and out of the workings of her own mind"(28). He writes that, "metaphorically, the narrative functions like the imperialist, fixing the peasant character in a static twilight of 'otherness.'" (28). The only difference in my argument is that I am saying that de Lisser isn't passive in his re-iteration of the imperialist othering of Jane, but rather he deploys in the interest of the colored elite.

leader's speeches not because she is insightful. Jane's Career undercuts the political potential of the working class by rendering Jane un-self-conscious and the trade union movement corrupt, while he legitimates the classes of employers and carves out a role for the intellectual male as the spokesperson for the female gendered nation.

In Jane's Career, de Lisser represents social upward mobility as a concomitant rise in class and color. Jane marries a lighter-skinned man, who succeeds in his business. In the novel's 1941 sequel, Myrtle and Money, Jane's daughter marries a yet lighter man and inherits a large banana business from her uncle. Yet these women can rise only by internalizing middle class values about marriage, color, and social hierarchy. Jane opposes labor rights, dominates her servants, and remains oblivious to the 1938 uprising, which is significant because nationalism grew out of trade unionism in the anglophone Caribbean. Thus, rather than reading Jane as a novel which celebrates black Jamaican women's power, I read it as about the cooptation of the working classes into Jamaica's racial and class hierarchy.

Yet de Lisser's model has serious implications for the ruling class and for definitions of race; for de Lisser, the upper strata must always be inter-racial, always tied to the black peasantry. Myrtle enters the upper strata not by virtue of her social ambition and chastity alone. Though she marries a very light man, she inherits her capital from her mother's brother who was born into the same peasant poverty Jane escaped. He went to Panama and returned to become a very successful planter. It is his "black" and "uneducated" money which provides the capital for Myrtle's rise in class. In order for this money to become part of the "Society," however, it needs to become educated, lighter, and legitimate. Thus, the uncle does not leave his fortune to his illegitimate black son, but to his legitimate, lighter, polished niece. This is another contradiction in de Lisser's ideology. On one hand, he represents blacks as essentially immoral due to their "race." On the other hand, he shows that Jamaica's elite is

directly related to that black peasant class. The only way I see to align these two positions is through Olivier's discussion of racial integration. Olivier argued for racial integration in colonial societies and for inter-racial sexual partnerships on the grounds that inter-racial people received the best attributes of each race. If de Lisser were following Olivier's model, the inter-racial mixing that enables Jane and Myrtle's ascent in the social hierarchy would constitute a combined biological and ethical improvement. Such a view would legitimate the rule of de Lisser's local elite.

Yet de Lisser also ridicules Mr. Burrell for giving his money to Myrtle rather than to his illegitimate son. This suggests that de Lisser also has scorn for the system he has established, for the class and color consciousness that allowed the elite to retain power. He brings Jane to the success of marriage, only to make fun of her for succeeding in the terms he has set out. Black Jamaicans can only be poor imitations of white women, de Lisser suggests, which meshes with his assertion in 1900 that black Jamaicans can at best imitate English domestic culture.

In the period leading up to emancipation, 1780-1838, English discourse deployed domesticity to limit the danger of inter-racial sexuality by limiting the rights of illegitimate children, the children of white men and Afro-Caribbean women. De Lisser deploys domesticity in a similar way, to limit the dangers posed to the elite by the working classes. In de Lisser's model for Jamaica's future, the working class assimilates middle class values of domesticity and upward mobility. In choosing domesticity, the working class attempts to imitate the elite rather than challenge its power. In de Lisser's Jamaica, domesticity translates the English racial hierarchy into a social hierarchy based on color and class distinctions.

Although de Lisser articulates the domestication of working and peasant classes in such a way that emasculates brown and black men, the social change he recommends has serious implications for women's economic status. The 1939 Royal Commission

investigating the labor uprisings in the British West Indies proposed a solution similar to the model de Lisser proposes in Jane. They suggested fostering morality – marriage and nuclear families – as a means of relieving the intense poverty resulting from the Great Depression. It meant removing women from the paid work force and giving the jobs to men. This resulted in the increased feminization of poverty and an increase in women’s economic dependence on men.<sup>88</sup> It did not increase the rate of marriage. Like the Royal Commission Report, de Lisser’s model for Jamaica’s future is fundamentally patriarchal and disempowering to women. It sets the stage for the patriarchal rhetoric of nationalism.

### The White Witch

In order to illustrate how de Lisser deployed domestic ideology to foster creolization among the middle and upper classes, I would like to turn to de Lisser’s most popular romance, The White Witch of Rose Hall and its role in Planters’ Punch. The White Witch appeared in the 1929 issue of Planters’ Punch – the annual Christmas magazine, in which de Lisser published one of his novels almost every year from 1920 to 1944. De Lisser used the magazine as a showcase for representing and consolidating an ethnically diverse ruling class.

In Planters’ Punch, this upper strata constituted all of Jamaica. Planters’ Punch erased the reality that in 1929 Jamaica was roughly 98% black and brown, that 70% percent of the population was illiterate, that Kingston was glutted with unemployed and underemployed people as a result of extreme urbanization and world depression, that

---

<sup>88</sup> The effects Royal Commission’s report on women is the main topic of Joan French’s “Colonial Policy Towards Women After the 1938 Uprising: the Case of Jamaica” and of several chapters in French and Honor Ford Smith’s Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900-1944: “Housewifisation after 1938: Factors and Precedents”(288-316) and “The 1943 Census: The Statistical Ejection of Women from the Labour Force” (317-327).

these masses of people lived in one-room houses.<sup>89</sup> The era of Planters' Punch was the era when Trench Town and the Dungle developed with their intensely impoverished and potentially violent yard life, when workers and unemployed people rose up in the protests of 1938. De Lisser's white and wealthy Jamaica was such an extreme distortion of reality for the vast number of Jamaicans that we might see it as a turning upside down or an inversion of Jamaican social history.

To create this image, de Lisser presents the Jamaican upper and middle classes as a type of local royalty, equivalent to the British ruling class. Planters' Punch divides Jamaica into apparently discrete race groups organized into a hierarchy with the multinational, light merchant and planter class at the top. The grouping unites the historically divided merchant and planter classes; the unification reflects the historical trend in the early 20th century in which merchants were becoming increasingly invested in plantation agriculture, particularly bananas (Bryan The Jamaican People 71). The magazine embodies and represents this hierarchy in its illustrated articles on women from different racial and ethnic and class groups. However, de Lisser includes articles and photographs only of upper strata white men. Black Jamaican men appear only in historical articles, as if they belonged only to the past. Chinese men make no appearance. Rural laborers and thus neither urban nor wealthy, Jamaicans of Indian descent are completely absent.

De Lisser places white women and domesticity -- marriage and hostessing -- at the center of Planters' Punch partly as a reflection of the significance of marriage and

---

<sup>89</sup> In 1911, white "had declined as a percentage of total population, from 2.29 percent in 1891 to 1.88 per cent 1911. On the other hand, the coloured (brown) population had increased by 33.8 per cent and the black population by 28.9 per cent between 1891 and 1911" (Bryan 117). This trend continued.

domesticity to Jamaica's white caste.<sup>90</sup> It was through marriage and the discrimination against illegitimate children and non-marital sexual partnerships that the whites retained their identity and power; they employed marriage and legitimacy to exclude browns. White women's domesticity, chastity and monogamy secured the legitimacy and whiteness of the caste. Patrick Bryan explains that the white "caste" used marriage to define itself and maintain its boundaries and that only white women maintained the marriage and domesticity; white upper class men had multiple families (The Jamaican People 122). It is in this context that I read the prominence of white, upper class women in the journal of the upper class.

The center piece of de Lisser's strategy is the British figure of the woman as "empire builder," the imperial yet domestic English woman, who brings English domesticity -- Christian marriage, home hygiene -- to the colonies. Each cover page of Planters' Punch features one such English woman, perhaps best illustrated by the 1930-1 issue, entitled "A Woman as Empire Builder" which featured the portrait of the Viscountess Marie Willingdon (Illustration 6, Appendix). Photo essays on Jamaica's elite women filled the first pages of each issue.

In the 1929 issue, a portrait of the Duchess Atholl, secretary of Education under Baldwin, appears on the front page followed by "Some Jamaica Mothers," "Miss Jamaica," and "The Mayfair Promenaders" (Illustrations 7-10, Appendix). Lady Atholl exhorts "Jamaica ladies" to "build the empire" by bringing morality and public health to "native women of Jamaica." For Atholl, Jamaica's women are divided into two camps: "Jamaica Ladies" British women temporarily located in

---

<sup>90</sup> In "The Myrtle Bank Hotel and Jamaica's Upper Class 1914-1945," Elizabeth Pigou-Dennis documents the centrality of white women to the definition and daily practice of Jamaican upper class life. For a further discussion, see also her dissertation, "The Social History of the Upper and Middle Classes in Jamaica between 1914 and 1945." PhD diss. University of the West Indies, Mona, 1996.

Jamaica and “Native Jamaican women,” who are clearly not white, not wealthy, but are the objects of the Jamaica Ladies’ charitable attentions. Thus, she overlooks the possibility that there are ladies who are native to Jamaica. In so doing, she appears to deny the very existence of the Jamaican upper class de Lisser represents. Yet, he uses her oversight as a means of eliding the difference between the emergent Jamaican upper classes and the English upper class. His project appears to be to make Jamaica’s “best” women on a par with England’s “best” women as a means of placing Jamaica’s upper class men on a par with England’s. To place “white” Jamaican “ladies” on a par with English ladies, de Lisser must strongly distinguish them from all other Jamaican women, which he does in the English tradition by racializing respectable womanhood; wives, mothers, charity workers are white. “Some Jamaican Mothers,” for instance eliminates the majority of Jamaica’s mothers – brown, black, and Asian women; “Miss Jamaica” considers only upper class white women.

After the stories on “white” women, de Lisser introduces an article on Afro-Caribbean women, entitled “The Dancing Girl of Old -- And of To-day,” in which he confines and defines black and brown women in the category of “dancing girls” - not respectable mothers and wives. He illustrates the “Dancing Girl of Old” with Bellisario’s 1837 lithograph of set girls, enslaved women who competed during the Christmas holidays for the title of most beautiful and best dressed, and he illustrates “the Dancing Girl of Today” with a 1920’s photograph of the Butterfly Troupe at the Palace theatre (Illustrations 11 & 12, Appendix). In the article, De Lisser posits a continuity between the two groups of women based on color, asserting that what connects the dancing girls of past and present is a “matter of complexion” – not a matter of position as working women. Again, seeing class differences as inherent racial distinctions is a strategy borrowed from English domestic ideology

and colonialism.

In the 1929-30 issue, De Lisser writes a story specifically on Chinese women, which signals his inclusion of assimilated Chinese at the margins of his Jamaica (Illustrations 13 & 14, Appendix). He accompanies these photographs of Chinese women doctors, musicians, and clerks with a strong argument for the potential inclusion of assimilated and wealthy Chinese Jamaicans into the respectable classes based on the professional and cultural gains made by Chinese women. That the Chinese have yet to fully arrive is clear from the fact that no Chinese men are featured in the magazine and by the fact that the “Jamaica’s Chinese Ladies” are presented separately from the “Jamaica Ladies” of Duchess Atholl’s address. An increasing number of advertisements for Chinese businesses appear in Planters’ Punch, which probably indicates that Chinese Jamaicans participate in Planters’ Punch both as advertisers and as readers. Their presence in the magazine reflects the growing economic success of Jamaican Chinese and a sense that they have the potential to be integrated into the elite.

The 1930-1 issue includes a parallel article entitled “Ladies in the Working World” which ostensibly celebrates the entrance of women into careers traditionally held by men (25). Increasing numbers of middle class women were working as stenographers and clerks in Jamaica, but these were traditional jobs for women as are de Lisser’s examples – hairdressing, nursing, teaching. However, the article functions to include middle class light and white women in Planters’ Punch society, but at a distance from the real “ladies” who occupy the first pages. Many ads -- especially for Issa’s clothing store -- targeted women office workers. Ironically, in highlighting the increasing numbers of working class women in the labor force, the article hides the large-scale removal of working class women from the labor force which seems to have

begun even before the 1939 Royal Commission report.<sup>91</sup>

De Lisser completes his portrait of the white elite by inserting small portraits and articles about elite men interspersed in the fiction and other essays. Typical cameos praise the diligence, culture, and capital of Jamaica's "leading men": for instance, the Myers, of Myers rum; the Lindos, who are major planters as well as the owners of the prominent rum company Wray and Nephew; the Crum-Ewings, who owned Caymanas estate; the Kerr-Jarretts, also very large planters; and Walter Durie, owner of the Jamaica Times and the Times store. De Lisser praises the power of men with capital and "vision" such as Cecil Lindo (Illustration 15, Appendix). He names Lindo "Jamaica's chief captain of industry" because he invested capital into irrigation in the Vere sugar district. De Lisser describes him as bringing water to a dry region much in the same way God determined there would be light. De Lisser, however, has much praise for the work ethic, for men who rise by through hard work and intelligence.

It is through these cameo stories that de Lisser signals the inclusion of Middle Eastern merchants into his elite. Though as late as 1913 in Jane, de Lisser had referred to them as "Syrian packmen," Planters' Punch stresses the Britishness and Jamaicanness of Middle Eastern merchants to argue for their inclusion in Jamaican society. Of Said Shoucair, de Lisser writes, "Mr. Said Shoucair loves Jamaica and regards it as his home. He has a sentimental attachment to Syria, which is proper and right (Illustration 16, Appendix). But, as he puts it to his Jamaica friends and acquaintances, when a man has lived for a generation in a country, speaks its language easily, and has succeeded there, and especially when his children are born in that country and are therefore natives and members of it, that man cannot but regard his

---

<sup>91</sup> This is a little difficult to gage because historians use the census data to determine the percentage of women in the work force and there was no census taken between 1921 and 1943. See again French and Smith (317-327). The same pattern occurred in Trinidad and Tobago, see chapter 4.

adopted home as his true and substantive home"(90). His article on Richard Mahfood entitled "Our New Nationals" elaborates this argument by stressing Middle Eastern merchants' cultural assimilation and loyalty to Jamaica (Illustration 17, Appendix).

It is through these cameos of merchants and planters, the portraits of their wives and daughters, and the absolute absence of darker Jamaicans from their numbers, that de Lisser most clearly redefines the Jamaican racial and class categories. Here he expanded "whiteness" from an anglo-saxon-celtic definition to include Portuguese Jews, Middle Eastern immigrants, as well as assimilated Chinese, and implicitly, light Afro-Caribbeans like himself. De Lisser's novel, Haunted (1939-40), makes it quite clear that the planter class is inter-racial, though it may deny that heritage. In the novel, the wealthy planter -- youngest scion of a Jamaican aristocratic family -- is the illegitimate son of an inter-racial mother. This heritage neither impedes his virtue and strength nor his position, though the novel presents him as an innovation, as a new and yet very old Jamaican aristocrat. Written in response to the labor uprising of 1938, the novel represents de Lisser's vision of the new Jamaica -- one which legitimates an inter-racial aristocracy while denying the political agency of Afro-Caribbean workers.

De Lisser's "Whites" or "aristocracy" were defined largely by their wealth, their political power, and their assimilation of English language and culture, not by phenotype and biology although his historical accounts define and confine Black Jamaicans within a racialized and negative conception of color. In fact, de Lisser does not use the term "white," although the format of Planters' Punch makes such explicitness unnecessary. His refusal to name the race of his elite class suggests that the elite is inter-racial but not comfortably so. De Lisser ridicules brown politicians then not because of their race but because their racial position leads them to strive for political goals that conflict with those of the elite he represents.

It is important to realize the insularity of Planters' Punch. The daughters and wives of the upper class -- of the Myers, the Lindos, the Crum-Ewings, the Kerr-Jarrets, and Farquharsons -- are the beauties and hostesses celebrated in the first pages; their husbands and fathers have their pictures and articles on the inner pages, usually in separate issues. The advertisements which support the magazine are often from these same companies/families -- the Myers, the Issas, the Shoucairs, the DeCordovas. Many of the men are involved in multiple concerns or move from one major company to the next. In "Worthiness in Business: the Firm of Lascelles de Mercado and Co.," we learn that this one firm's directors, De Mercado and D'Costa also are involved in planting in the district of Vere (Planters' Punch 1924-5 22-5).<sup>92</sup> Further, de Mercado is director of The Gleaner, Kingston Ice making Company and Jamaica Marine Insurance; D'Costa is director of Jamaica Mutual Life. In addition, both are part owners and directors of Jamaica Biscuit Company -- another big advertiser in Planters' Punch. Other featured families have multiple interests in business, print media, and politics. This suggests that Planters' Punch is the organ of a corporate local oligarchy; Cobham names it the official paper of the Jamaica Imperial Association (Cobham "The Literary Side of H.G. de Lisser (1878-1944)" 6). Most of the men were members of the board of directors of the Gleaner, the old, established Jewish families: Ashenheims, Levys, DaCostas, deMercados, Milhollands, Delgados, but the oligarchy did include

---

<sup>92</sup> Another example, Mr. E.A. de Pass is treasurer of the West India Committee, "interested in the Vere Estates Company," and "connected with the firm of Lascelles and de Mercado" (Planters' Punch 1931-32 7). Mr. V.C. McCormack moves from the Royal Canadian Bank, to Mr. Henriques, to Lascelles and DeMercado, and then to Mr. Edwin Charley, a rum company (Planters' Punch 1929-30 48). McCormack's presence indicates that de Lisser includes both the class of owners and a class of their employees. Bryan discusses this interlocking aspect of the merchant and planter class and lists many of de Lisser's elite as members of the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (The Jamaican People 71-72).

Kennedy of Grace and Kennedy, Arthur Farquarson, and the Issas (Carnegie 168).<sup>93</sup> This oligarchy co-existed with the English colonial government and with the U.S. - international United Fruit Company – both of whose representatives were regularly featured in Planters' Punch.

The result is that Planters' Punch blurs the boundary between advertisements, articles, and fiction. De Lisser's articles on the history of Myers Rum and its accomplishments differ little from the ads Myers places in Planters' Punch. Is Miss Myers picture in the "Miss Jamaica" article not both an advertisement of the success of her father's business and a fiction of Englishness? The boundary between de Lisser's novels and the advertisements is similarly blurred. The first publication of Jane explicitly mentioned in the text of the novel, Myers Rum and Machado cigars; Myers Rum held the local copyright for Triumphant Squalitone (de Lisser "Author's Note"). The 1928 article, "Jamaica Entertains Royalty," documents the English royal family's visits to Jamaica, illustrated with a large photograph of the Myers, husband and wife, escorting Prince William, on his 1924 visit to Jamaica. As the hosts of the Prince, they are his equals, the local version of him, as they walk across King Street between Government Buildings. The Myers stand in a similar position vis-à-vis Jamaican literature. As financial backers of Planters' Punch and owners of at least one copyright of de Lisser novels, the Meyers's patronage of de Lisser's Jamaican literature parallels the historical role European monarchs played as art patrons, but the Myers were capitalists and the national image they sponsor was that of the capitalist class.

When de Lisser began to publish literature he presented corporate sponsorship as a means of making literature available to a broad spectrum of people. Of

---

<sup>93</sup> Victor Chang views de Lisser as pandering to this elite audience; he refers to the men featured in Planters' Punch as a *Who's Who* in Jamaica. This pandering, Chang argues, stunted de Lisser's growth as a writer, limiting him to the topics this elite found appealing (15-17).

Triumphant Squalitone, de Lisser tells the reader “it should be stated that this book is sold at fully fifty per cent below its cost of production” (Triumphant Squalitone “Author’s Note”; Boxhill 32). Scholars have also interpreted de Lisser’s commitment to selling fiction at low cost as an effort to make local literature available to Jamaicans. To this end, Mervyn Morris points out, Planters’ Punch sold at the then reasonable price of one shilling from 1920 to 1944 with exception of one year when it was one shilling six pence (18). What appeared to be de Lisser’s original project of using advertisers to support a local literature for the people transformed into the publication of a national literature, which equated the nation with a ruling class of advertisers, a national literature that functioned to advertise the advertisers at the expense of the “people.” Thus, in de Lisser’s fiction, the commodification of Jamaican culture coincides with the legitimation of local, Jamaican capitalist exploitation of the working and peasant classes.

Planters’ Punch portrayed not just contemporary Jamaica but also its history in terms complimentary and compatible to this multinational and multi-ethnic class. This becomes important to Jamaican literary history because of the enormity and the comprehensive scope of de Lisser’s historical and literary project. Each of his historical novels focused on one significant event or movement in Jamaican history, refashioning it in such a way as to legitimate this small local elite. The most notable of these are Anacanoa (1936-7) later published as the Arawak Girl, which represents the Spanish conquest; The White Maroon (1938-39) which retells the English conquest of the Spanish in 1655; Morgan’s Daughter (1930-1931), which recounts the 1760 slave uprising, known as Tacky’s rebellion; The Cup and the Lip (1931-2), which tells of Indian indentureship; Jamaica Nobility (1925-26) which reduces the UNIA and the Garvey movement to petty neighborhood rivalries and adultery; and finally, Haunted

(1939-40), which addresses the labor uprising of 1938.<sup>94</sup>

In each of these novels, de Lisser employs English images of creole women to obscure the political history of the event he novelizes.<sup>95</sup> The colonial romance – creole women’s struggle for the white man – inevitably replaces the Afro-Caribbeans’ struggle for freedom or equality. Tacky’s rebellion is recast as Henry Morgan’s daughter’s love for the white deserter posing as Jamaica’s notorious criminal, three-fingered Jack; the 1938 Rebellion occurs in the background of a brown woman’s losing battle for the affections of a white English visitor; the Morant Bay rebellion is the background for a Paul Bogle’s daughter’s unrequited love for a white planter; and in the White Witch, the Baptist War is the background for the deadly rivalry between a brown and a white woman for yet another visiting English gentleman.

The White Witch of Rose Hall plays a key role in de Lisser’s overall project because it refashions slavery by reshaping and merging Jamaica’s legend about slavery, that of Rose Hall, and its most powerful slave rebellion, the Baptist War of 1831. Laura Lomas makes the very important argument that the legend undoubtedly derives from the oral culture of slaves, and that de Lisser and others who have written versions of it erased and distorted the narratives slaves told.<sup>96</sup> Because it is Jamaica’s one legend

---

<sup>94</sup> De Lisser’s project began before the first issue of Planters’ Punch appeared in 1920. His novel on the 1865 Morant Bay uprising, Revenge, appeared in 1919. This novel also transforms the Afro-Caribbean political struggle into the colonial romance.

<sup>95</sup> In the case of black Jamaican women, he works with the idea that black women and marriage are anathema to one another – we see this in Jamaica Nobility, in which one couple marries as an indirect result of Garvey giving the title of Knight of the African Republic to the man. Marrying has the effect of encouraging Mathilda to leave her husband for a man who takes the Garveyites’ contributions and absconds to Cuba.

<sup>96</sup> This is the main thesis of Laura Lomas’s “Mystifying Mystery: Inscriptions of the oral the Legend of Rose Hall,” (Journal of West Indian Literature 6:2 (1994): 70-87); she argues effectively that the story originated in

about slavery; what is at stake in its refashioning is the power to represent slavery. Because early 20th-century Jamaicans defined themselves in relation to the racial hierarchy of slavery, the power to redefine race relations during slavery brought with it the power to redefine contemporary race relations. For de Lisser, it had the potential of freeing the plantocracy from its history of brutal exploitation, a history which conflicted with its claim to be Jamaica's noble aristocracy.

Probably as a result of its representation of slavery, the legend was a source of debate, most intensely in the late 1890's. The distortions and debates serve as a record of the negotiation process through which enslaved peoples' account of slavery became a centerpiece in the discourse of the planters and middle classes; that is, a centerpiece in the discourse of the descendants of slave owners and the new class of banana agrobusiness men, who occupied the position of planter. In the first written account, Castello's 1868 pamphlet, Mrs. Rosa Palmer is a sexually debauched woman, who tortures her slaves, kills her husbands, breaks the rank of class to take a carpenter as a lover, and is finally murdered by her "companions" — slaves (Castello 9). It claims as guarantee of its veracity the marble monument to Mrs. Rosa Palmer, wife of John Palmer, custos of St. James Parish located in the Parish Church in Montego Bay. Castello holds that the neck of the statue shows the marks of strangulation and the base blood. (In the late 1990s, one can see only a faint and natural pattern in the marble.) The legend thus figures the white woman as the slave owner, and slavery as sexual and gender transgressiveness combined with murder.

However, the newspaper readership did not accept this image of slavery; many

---

oral culture by tracing references to oral accounts in the 19th-century debate over the legend. Workers on plantations — during and after slavery -- told ghost stories about the Great House and its inhabitants, I suspect because of their power and right to treat people cruelly. This type of story is part and parcel of the institution of slavery.

questioned whether the respected wife of a leading official could have committed such crimes. The tension probably derives from the legend's assertion that a white upper class woman was a sadist and a "whore." Whereas this image fits with the English stereotype of white creole women as an Africanized sadist from the pre-emancipation period, it conflicts sharply with the image of wealthy white women in Jamaica at the turn of the century. In the 1890's, the local elite not only defined itself through moral standards for female etiquette and morality more stringent than those of English middle and upper classes; they had a strong voice in the press. That Lady Blake, the Governor's wife, who served Jamaica as the embodiment of English domestic womanhood, instigated the debate over the veracity of the legend suggests the legend of Mrs. Palmer particularly troubled white women of the upper class (Alleyne 465).<sup>97</sup>

The debate did not succeed in eliminating the image of the tyrannical slave mistress, but it did change her identity.<sup>98</sup> After many letters and much disagreement, the public settled on a version of the legend which held that the true villain was not the honorable Rosa Palmer, but an Annie Palmer, wife of the heir to John Palmer, a John Rose Palmer. This version is recorded in Joseph Shore's 1911, In Old St. James, probably the most lurid and most widely read account until de Lisser's 1929 novel, for which it serves as a foundation. In it, Shore borrows -- plagiarizes actually -- from

---

<sup>97</sup> The desire to clear Mrs. Palmer's name has continued. In the 1960s, Glory Robertson and Geoffrey Yates did painstaking research to show that the legend was completely unfounded. Neither Annie nor Rosa Palmer were ever murderers or murdered -- at least so far as the court records can attest.

<sup>98</sup> The tenacity of this image -- slavery encapsulated in the figure of a sadistic white woman -- maybe partially explained by the fact that it supports a male fear and opposition to women holding power traditionally reserved for men. For a further discussion of a feminist reading of The White Witch of Rose Hall, see Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert's The White Witch of Rosehall and the Legitimacy of Female Power in the Caribbean in The Journal of West Indian Literature 4:2 (1990): 25-45.

Castello to create a narrative in which the evil Annie Palmer is described as spending her nights in “drunken orgies, scenes too disgusting to describe, while her days were spent in inflicting the most tyrannical cruelties and dreadful tortures upon her slaves, who were alternatively the companies of her evening orgies and the victims of her morning remorse”(Castello 9; Shore 49-50). Palmer flamboyantly transgresses racial, gender, and class boundaries: she sleeps with slaves and white servants, wears men’s clothes, and uses obeah against her slaves.<sup>99</sup>

How does de Lisser incorporate this legend of upper class debauchery and brutality into his vision of Jamaica as led by a cultured elite? De Lisser addressed the legend at least twice. His first article appeared in the Jamaican Daily Telegraph, 17 February 1912. In it, de Lisser attempts to diminish the legend’s negative implications for the plantocracy by making light of it and by countering the claim that planters were cruel in the 1820s, which is the Annie version of the Rose Hall legend was to have taken place. He writes:

How few legends have we in Jamaica!... One legend, however, Jamaica has always passionately clung to. It is our only one of any importance. It is the legend of Rose Hall, the story of a woman murderer of whom we are all consummately proud ... We would like to say that Mrs. Palmer killed ten husbands instead of five, for crime has its greatness as well as virtue. Recent researches, however, have proved that Mrs. Rose Palmer was an exemplary woman; but, fortunately recent researches have not altogether deprived us our cherished legend.

De Lisser holds that the legend inaccurate because it portrays slave owners unchecked by the 1823 legislation to ameliorate the condition of slaves: “How these things were

---

<sup>99</sup> In Shore’s account, Palmer is killed in 1833 by her last lover, who is not a slave.

done without Mrs. Palmer being reported to the magistracy it is rather difficult to understand; for a Slave Code limiting the right of slave owners to punish their people was in force at that time, and it was by no means a dead letter.” But in case the reader still believes that Mrs. Palmer mistreated her slaves, de Lisser insists that the slave owning planters were different and inferior to the planters of the 20th century whom he represents. We see this in his admission, if playful, that Mrs. Palmer used obeah.

They (Shore and Stewart) hint, however, that her lovers were not all white men, and they even suggest that she was by way of being a bit of an obeah woman.

Well, probably she was, knowing that obeah was more potent than the whip in those days; besides, she might actually have believed in it, as so many persons in superior positions did in those days.

Finally, he concludes by denying the story the status of legend, calling Jamaica, “a young country... with no legends.” De Lisser writes that Jamaica is “not so young that it has no ruins which tell us of a prosperity that has long since passed.” Rather than see slavery as inhumane institution of sexualized brutality as Castello’s and Shore’s accounts suggest, de Lisser paints the slave plantation as the source of Jamaica’s grand and prosperous history.

The second time de Lisser addresses the legend, far from denying its existence, de Lisser appropriates the Shore’s version of the legend, its approximate dates in the 1820s and 30s, the murders, the sex, the men’s clothing, and the obeah, and transforms it into The White Witch of Rose Hall. In 1912 de Lisser expresses his general support of the plantocracy by lightly dismissing the truth of the legend. In 1929, he carefully crafts the legend to complement his representation of the elite centered on the image of the white woman.

In de Lisser’s version, the English gentleman hero, Robert Rutherford, travels incognito to Jamaica to work as a bookkeeper, as a way of learning the business

without being coddled, so that he can later take charge of his father's estates. He works on the Rose Hall Estate, owned by Annie Palmer. Palmer, we learn, is the daughter of an Irish merchant and an English woman, born in England, but raised in Haiti where she was trained by a baroness in the court of Henri Christophe to be a voodoo priestess. She rules her estates with brutality and patrols at night in a trim, black, men's suit. She successfully seduces Rutherford who never considers marriage because her sexual freedom marks her as inappropriate. Meanwhile, he also begins a romantic liaison with Millicent, a free colored woman, who acts as his servant. Annie Palmer becomes jealous of Millicent and the two enter into a rivalry which results in Annie's murder of Millicent through techniques of voodoo. This love triangle is complicated by the overseer, Ashman, who was Annie's previous lover, and tries to eliminate Rutherford out of jealousy. In revenge for Millicent's death, Takoo, her grandfather, an African obeahman, murders Annie Palmer. This murder becomes the first act of the Baptist War in 1831, the largest slave uprising in Jamaican history. Disgusted with Jamaica, Robert leaves for England never to return.

The White Witch was printed in its entirety in the 1929 issue of Planters' Punch, but not on consecutive pages. It begins on page two, following the portrait of Duchess Atholl, and runs for two pages until "The Jamaica Mothers" on page four and then continues interspersed with propagandistic articles about the ruling class. How could the legend of Annie Palmer as upper class, white murderess be compatible with de Lisser's construction of white Jamaican women as paragons of domesticity and how did the image of slavery as brutal fit into de Lisser's vision of planters' as enlightened, industrious businessmen? De Lisser transforms the legend in two significant ways: first, he denationalizes Annie Palmer. As a result he preserves his image of Jamaica's first ladies. Second, by imposing the legend onto the Baptist war, de Lisser is able to discount the legitimacy of slaves' reasons to rebel as well as the political threat posed

by that revolt.

Annie Palmer's sexual promiscuity and sadism nestle safely between the Duchess Atholl and "Some Jamaican Mothers" because de Lisser has simply changed the legend, and transformed Palmer from a white Jamaican woman who practices obeah to the daughter of an Irish man and English woman, raised in Haiti and tutored in Voodoo.<sup>100</sup> In Annie Palmer, de Lisser intensifies the negative characteristics English convention attributed to white creole women. Annie Palmer is yet more sadistic, more Africanized, and more masculine than 19th-century images of the white creole. She does not only flog her slaves, she is addicted to the sensual pleasure she derives from flogging them, and she does not only flog slaves, she murders white husbands. For her, cultural assimilation of African practices isn't a matter of speaking with a drawl or eating pepperpot but of working in voodoo. She takes on the male position of plantation owner, authority over slaves and employees, and she wears men's clothing.<sup>101</sup> De Lisser portrays Annie as physically masculine: her "nose was slightly aquiline, suggesting strength of character, a disposition and a

---

<sup>100</sup> Here I am indebted to the Jamaican poet, Pam Mordecai, who said to me, "but Annie Palmer isn't one of us; she wasn't Jamaican."

<sup>101</sup> Annie's masculinity, in fact, also races her as Afro-Caribbean. Annie's independence is parallel to that of Afro-Caribbean peasant women's independence that stymied Froude and Livingstone, and which de Lisser also represents in the character, Celestine in *Jane*. It is the independent peasant woman who can choose when and if to marry as opposed to the landless and therefore dependent peasant or working woman who must have male lovers to support her. Annie asserts that she can act as she pleases, have lovers as she pleases, because she is the owner of large estates. Taken in by this logic, Rutherford remarks on her "splendid independence" in a tone not dissimilar from Livingstone's admiration of Jamaican peasant women, Kingsley's ambivalence about black women's "perfect Independence," or de Lisser's account of peasant women who can do as they please because they have property. The fact that her independence can both shift her racial and gender identity indicates the extent to which constructions of gender and race were imbricated.

will and an ability to command..."(PP 1929 17). De Lisser's Annie Palmer may be the ultimate embodiment of the degenerate white creole woman but, for Jamaica, she is a foreign creole.<sup>102</sup> Denationalizing Annie Palmer brought the existing national legend into line with his own vision of Jamaica.

De Lisser's foreign Annie Palmer bolsters his ruling class by liberating it from the plantocracy's brutality during slavery. De Lisser consistently links the cruelty of slavery specifically to Annie Palmer – Rutherford repeatedly comments that her estate alone continues brutal practices. As Laura Lomas has commented, it is as if the cruel planter class dies when Annie dies, leaving the plantocracy of the 1920's innocent of past labor abuses (77). Thus, not only, de Lisser suggests, were the atrocities of slavery anachronistic in 1831, they were caused by an aberrant and foreign element. The novel paints the 1831 uprising as a result of a love triangle and thus denies the complex and powerful political organization of the rebellion. During the Baptist War, slaves took over plantations with the intention of running them themselves and forcing planters off the island. Roughly 20% of the slaves in Jamaica participated in the revolt, involving 226 estates and 750 square miles of plantation (Holt 14).

Finally, the novel represents England and Englishmen as superfluous to Jamaican society – the local elite can rule best. At key moments in the narrative – when Robert gives into sensual temptation or Annie Palmer exhibits her sexuality or her supernatural powers, de Lisser interrupts the novel and interposes illustrated articles praising individual Jamaican planters and business men. This juxtaposition expresses de Lisser's argument that the new plantocracy is noble and efficient while colonial rule, constituted by foreign-born officials serving temporary posts is a weak form of government. When the candle blows out and leaves Robert and Annie alone

---

<sup>102</sup> She was also Catholic in contrast to the Jamaican elite which was Protestant and skeptical at best of Catholics.

together in the dark on their first “date,” de Lisser inserts the story “Durie the Optimist” an account of Walter Durie’s rise to success through hard work as editor of the Jamaica Times, politician, and owner of the Times dry goods store. When Robert succumbs to sexual desire for Millicent and asks her to stay longer in his room at night, Planters’ Punch cuts to the portrait of O.K. Henriques, whom de Lisser praises for proving that “poor little Jamaican men” are as capable as English men. Page sixty-nine is divided, the top half dedicated to “The Newer Kingston” a newly erected modern business building. Below it, Robert confronts Annie Palmer for her revenge on Millicent, but is seduced. This “Newer Kingston” with its modern merchants and planters is a model of industry and patriotism in comparison both to the old plantocracy represented by Annie Palmer and English colonial officials represented by Rutherford.<sup>103</sup>

Though the novel incorporates both English and Afro-Caribbean cultural models, it serves to disempower Afro-Caribbeans and to undermine English authority in order to legitimate the Jamaican ruling class. De Lisser’s critique of the English gentlemen Rutherford in conjunction with his celebration of Jamaican business men expresses a nationalist sentiment. He achieves this by turning 18th- and 19th-century English narrative conventions designed as parts of arguments justifying colonial rule against themselves. In de Lisser’s text, they argue not for the superiority of the English man, but for his exclusion from Jamaica. Most specifically de Lisser fashions The White Witch of Rose Hall by appropriating and reshaping the plot of the proslavery novel, Marly (1828). In Marly, George Marly, an upper class Scotsman travels to Jamaica incognito to work as bookkeeper in order to learn the business of planting in

---

<sup>103</sup> “Newer Kingston” refers to the new businesses built up after the 1907 earthquake. I suggest that the “New Kingston” functions as a figure for the modern capitalist class and its culture that de Lisser wishes to see dominate Jamaica.

preparation for inheriting property of his own in the West Indies. Rutherford arrives in Jamaica in much the same situation. Where George Marly remains the exemplary gentleman, refusing all the overtures of black and brown families to install their daughters as his housekeeper, Rutherford succumbs in each instance to women's advances. Like all the English men Lady Nugent and Mrs. Carmichael describe as becoming debauched in the West Indies, Rutherford begins to have sex with the wrong women and to drink. De Lisser explicitly plays on the English stereotype of the West Indies as a place of corruption. The morning after his first night with Annie at the Great House, when he not only slept with Annie Palmer but kissed her within eyesight of servants, Robert blames the West Indian environment : "he was secretly startled that he had so quickly succumbed to what he had heard at home were the manners and customs of this country, with a disregard of all concealments, a careless acceptance of any conditions and circumstances that might appeal at the moment, however flagrantly might be violated every principle of circumspect conduct"(PP 1929 31). Rutherford's debauchery functions not to condemn Jamaica and the institution of slavery as does that of the bookkeepers in English texts but to show us that Rutherford -- the English man -- is not strong enough to withstand temptation.

Marly is humiliated and exhausted by the menial labor and responsibilities of a bookkeeper, but he performs them -- counting chickens, staying up all night in boiler houses. In contrast, as Annie's lover, Rutherford is relieved of these tedious responsibilities. Palmer hires an additional bookkeeper, so that Rutherford's labor becomes fully unnecessary on the Estate. Rather than rise through hard labor or reform the labor and agricultural practices as Marly does, Rutherford ceases to produce at all -- he becomes the lazy, redundant male, reminiscent in this respect of the abjected black male in de Lisser's and Froude's paradigm of Jamaica. Where Marly defines masculinity through his incorruptibility, his bravery, his honesty, his action, Rutherford

is defined by his failure to act the man in Jamaica. Where Marly dedicates himself to Jamaica, settling there, devoting himself to improving agricultural and labor practices, Rutherford leaves Jamaica at the first moment he can. Whereas Marly's transplantation to Jamaica results in an improvement of Jamaican society and labor and agricultural practices, Rutherford's sojourn to Jamaica illustrates that English men become corrupt in the West Indies, lose their masculinity, and need to leave in order to survive. De Lisser's is a model in which Jamaica, is for Jamaicans, elite Jamaicans, and English rulers had better stay home or realize that the local elite are stronger, abler, more virtuous men.

De Lisser's novel is also a play on the marriage plot of English novels like Charlotte Smith's The Wanderings of Warwick and Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, in which the English man is at first attracted to the creole woman but then rejects her as an appropriate mate for marriage because she lacks femininity evidenced in her cruelty and cultural inferiority. This is the plot of The White Witch of Rose Hall; Rutherford becomes infatuated with Annie Palmer, but does not at first consider marriage because of her sexual freedom. Later his decision is reconfirmed by her cruelty and her African practice of voodoo. The plot of English domestic fiction functions to alert the reader to the danger creoles pose to English domesticity and to define them as inferior to English women. Annie Palmer proves to be deficient by English standards but not before she has proven that Rutherford is deficient by English and Jamaican standards of masculinity. The failure of Rutherford and Palmer to marry casts no negative judgement on Jamaica per se, because Annie Palmer, is not Jamaican; rather it shows us Rutherford's weakness. De Lisser's aims, it appears, to evacuate the English from the ideal of Englishness and to replace them with a local elite. De Lisser is agreeing with Froude's assertion that the English have grown weak in their colonial territories, but instead of making those English stronger, de Lisser suggests replacing them with the

imitative, local elite. This reflects de Lisser's political stance that Jamaicans should be receive powerful positions within the colonial government – positions from which they had historically been barred (Carnegie 174).

De Lisser takes the focus Froude and Livingstone place on strong West Indian women as part of their arguments for direct colonial rule and employs it to argue against English administration. In de Lisser's text, strong women make not Jamaican men but English men weak. Annie Palmer and Millicent play the role of men in their relationships with Rutherford and thus render him effeminate. Robert is the object of Annie's desire, the object of her gaze. When she first meets Robert, she compliments his beauty in a way that objectifies him. She tells him "I thought when I saw you a little while ago, that a man of your appearance was hardly cut out to be a book-keeper: you are very handsome Robert" (Planters' Punch 1929 22). She invites him to dinner, to spend the night, to move in with her.<sup>104</sup> In asking Rutherford, who is her employee, to live as her lover in the Great House, Annie places Rutherford in a position similar to that the brown mistress occupied as paid sexual partner in the master's home in the colonial romance. The most extreme instance of Rutherford's emasculation occurs when he prostitutes himself by agreeing to remain Annie Palmer's lover in exchange for Annie's pledge to save Millicent from the voodoo she has set against her (Planters' Punch 1929 72-3).

Millicent also emasculates Robert by treating him as an object of desire. Like the figure of the stereotypical brown woman from Mrs. Carmichael and Edward Long,

---

<sup>104</sup> A further example: when the overseer, Annie's ex-lover, Ashman interrupts with news of a slave conspiracy, Annie refuses to let Rutherford speak for himself. In fact, Ashman and Palmer have a whole quarrel about whether Rutherford will stay or go. Rutherford, the English gentleman, and as such, the person with greatest prestige says nothing while Ashman asserts that Rutherford ought to leave and Annie insists that he must stay, with "a metallic imperiousness in her voice which neither man could fail to recognize" (Planters' Punch 1929 30).

Millicent sets out to seduce him. She is so invested in attaining Robert's affection that she risks her life in a rivalry with Annie Palmer. As she puts it, "the young squire must be rescued by any means" (PP 1929 34). Like the masculine Annie Palmer, Millicent is the actor; de Lisser emphasizes Millicent's agency in entitling chapter four, "Millicent Acts."

Rather than the struggle for freedom, the women's rivalry becomes the central event of the novel and the cause of the Baptist War. It is essentially Annie's struggle to keep her white womanhood superior to and clearly distinct from Millicent's brown womanhood. Annie asserts that her fury results not from Robert's infidelity but from the fact that he was unfaithful with a brown woman -- that Robert has placed her, Annie Palmer, mistress of the Rose Hall Estate, on the same level as a "nigger girl." Robert in fact does place both women in the same place. Not only are they both his lovers; he literally sits both of them on his lap, in parallel scenes of seduction. In fact, we are led to believe through the thoughts of Robert and his fellow bookkeeper, that Robert has greater affection for Millicent than for Annie. In visiting the ailing Millicent, Robert

felt he was performing an act of duty; anything like passion, like affection, he did not conceive to be a motive at all. Burbridge took a different view. Burbridge's own opinion, mentioned to no living human being, was that Millicent had won Robert from Annie Palmer, that Annie had realised it, and that these two women, different in colour, in position, in power in almost everything save a bold and defiant disposition were embarked on a deadly struggle. ..."(de Lisser The White Witch 142).

In the women's struggle, Robert Rutherford becomes expendable, inconsequential. Though the plan go awry, Annie orders Rutherford's murder to

prevent him from uniting with Millicent.

Annie loses in the battle to preserve her distinct, superior whiteness and de Lisser seems intent on portraying the Annie and Millicent as comparable. In attempting to assert her difference from Millicent, Annie destroys her position as a white woman. First, she puts herself, as Rutherford cautions her, on the same level as Millicent by engaging in a screaming match with her which almost escalates into a fist fight. Second, in order to kill Millicent, Annie uses Voodoo, which links her to Haitians, people English discourse defined as the antithesis of civilized, white Europeans. Froude, for instance, associates Haiti and Voodoo with Satan worship and the absolute inversion of civilization. The rivalry between Annie and Millicent repeats the colonial romance from English discourse of the pre-emancipation period. In the romance, Annie Palmer is the white woman made violent by her jealousy of the brown woman, who captures the affections of the white man and renders the white woman violent and vindictive. Just as the white women in English texts like Stewart's Account of Jamaica and its Inhabitants and Smith's The Wanderings of Warwick, Annie loses not only her man, but her white femininity by becoming violent and sadistic.

In English literature, the colonial romance functions to define both creole women and the creole family as sexually immoral; it thus participates in the argument against the domestic virtue and political worthiness of the region. By presenting the rivalry as the cause of the Baptist War, de Lisser deploys the English trope to obfuscate the Afro-Caribbean political resistance to slavery. In refusing to depict the political organization of slaves and in portraying their revolt as apolitical rage at Millicent's murder, de Lisser denies the political agency of black Jamaicans. His use of the colonial romance thus parallels its use in English discourse. Yet, the romance expresses de Lisser's specific Jamaican political goals of giving the local elite a stronger role in government and denying the political rights of the working class. The rivalry

removes key dramatic figures in Jamaican history: the white planter woman, the Englishman, the free colored woman, and the African Obeahman. Who takes the places of Robert, Millicent, and Annie? Presumably Jamaican society women and business men featured in the glossy photos of Planters' Punch.

De Lisser actively presents both women as equal and thus breaks down the distinction between brown and white womanhood Annie fights for. For instance, he entitles the chapter in which Rutherford becomes involved with Annie and Millicent: "Two Women" – giving both women the same designation. Even his sentences place the women in equivalent positions: Millicent "had seen and loved him, just as Annie Palmer had done" (Planters' Punch 1929 30). In contrast, Planters' Punch carefully segregates its women, white ladies never mix with Chinese or Afro-Caribbean women in the same article. It could never entitle an article about one white woman and one visibly Afro-Caribbean woman "Two Women." In comparing Annie to Millicent, de Lisser removes Annie from the category of "real" white women of Planters' Punch.

De Lisser incorporates Afro-Caribbean folk culture with much the effect that he incorporates Afro-Caribbean legend of Annie Palmer-- to undercut Afro-Caribbean rights. In particular, he fashions Annie Palmer by conflating of two figures from Afro-creole folk culture, the Old Hige and the *diabliesse* (*djablès*). The Old Hige (in the Eastern Caribbean, the *soukouyan*) is an old woman who sucks the life blood from living people, usually children. Annie Palmer sucks the life from Millicent in a chapter de Lisser entitles the "Old Hige." Millicent explicitly tells Rutherford that Annie is an Old Hige and that she has sucked Millicent's life away, leaving a bite mark on her chest. However, as the beautiful but murderous temptress of men, Annie Palmer also embodies the figure of the *djablès*, which Richard Allsopp describes as "a legendary evil creature, appearing...at first in the form of a very pretty young woman, finely dressed, in order to lure a man... before revealing herself as an old crone with cloven

hooves”(194). She either kills the man or drives him crazy. Annie is a finely dressed, young-looking pretty woman who lures men and then kills them. Her cloven hoof manifests itself in yet another figure from Afro-Caribbean folk lore, the supernatural figure of the Rolling Calf which Palmer engenders to terrify her slaves into submission and to demonstrate her power to her ex-lover, Ashman. De Lisser’s inclusion of these elements of Afro-Caribbean culture, however, does not function to legitimate that culture or Afro-Caribbeans, rather they participate in de Lisser’s larger historical project of undermining Afro-Caribbeans’ history of organized political struggle and competence.

De Lisser had a coordinated cultural, political, and economic project. Through his fiction and journalism, he fashioned an image of Jamaica. Through his position as editor of The Gleaner and secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association, he blocked legislation, lobbied against governors, and negotiated subsidies for planters.<sup>105</sup> His political leverage approximated a self-rule. His was, however, a self rule that opposed self rule, a cultural nationalism which opposed the establishment of a nation. De Lisser’s imperialism was strategic. He supported the Empire because it kept his elite in power: colonial rule blocked democratic reforms that would inevitably bring darker Jamaicans social and political power; it also supplied a model for cultural and class superiority. That de Lisser’s allegiance to the Empire is strategic is indicated by the fact that he advocated Jamaica’s becoming a colony of the United States in the first decade of the century when the U.S. was Jamaica’s largest trade partner and reverted

---

<sup>105</sup> For instance, de Lisser arranged that Jamaica’s war contribution to England be directly reinvested in the sugar industry as subsidies for two years during WWI – a direct investment that by-passed the Jamaican Legislative Council and therefore any local opposition (Roberts 113). De Lisser is seen as quite powerful in the incessant attacks against Governor Robyn which almost made him resign (Carnegie 46-7). Carnegie notes that two local, radical politicians left politics because the JAI was so strong in its control (104).

to supporting the Empire after WWI when England was again Jamaica's large trade partner.<sup>106</sup>

In Annie Palmer, de Lisser successfully appropriates and coopts both English and Afro-Caribbean models of womanhood in the cause of reshaping Jamaica in the image of his light elite. Annie Palmer does not subvert his race class schema just as white creole women did not subvert the opposition between virtuous English womanhood and corrupted creole womanhood in 18th- and 19th-century English discourse on the West Indies. But just as Afro-Caribbean women disrupted English discourse on the West Indies, they disrupt de Lisser's race and class hierarchy. In both English texts and in de Lisser's Planters' Punch, Afro-Caribbean women give the lie to the argument against Afro-Caribbeans as political subjects. De Lisser's representation of Afro-Caribbean women in Planters' Punch blurs the distinctions between racial groups on which he bases his social hierarchy and the supremacy of his elite class. He relies on domestic ideology to color and class code Jamaicans: white women are wealthy, moral, and married; brown and black women have less money, are immoral, and don't marry. But the reality that de Lisser faces and records in the 1929 issue of Planters' Punch defies these distinctions. The article "The Dancing Girl" appears to include exclusively women of color; all the illustrations which accompany the text depict Afro-Caribbean women. Further, de Lisser asserts that "complexion" unites historical dancing girls with contemporary dancing girls. However, de Lisser integrates white women in the article and implicates them in the not-quite-decent,

---

<sup>106</sup> Roberts writes, that "it is worth noting that when sixty-five per cent. of the Island's trade was with America (in 1912), he believed that 'the wish of Jamaica to become absorbed by the United States will grow'; but when the trend changed after World War I and commerce with the United Kingdom became paramount, H.G.D. proclaimed the absolute devotion of his country to Britain. In business he did not allow romance to cloud his practical judgment" (118).

not-white activity of dancing. The article runs on pages eleven and twelve, with the illustrations of set girls and the Butterfly troupe. Page thirteen is an article-like advertizement on the benefits of life, house, and car insurance; page fourteen contains the photographs of the Mayfair Promenaders -- upper class, white amateur dancing girls. These white dancing girls are a distanced appendage to "The Dancing Girl" article and to the Afro-Caribbean dancing girls. In the 18th-and 19th-centuries white women slave owners, de Lisser explains, enthusiastically participated in the preparation of the set girl costumes, providing money, lending jewelry, and cheering their slaves on in the competition. In the 20th century, white women play a parallel role in relation to modern Afro-Caribbean dancers. De Lisser claims that Jamaican society could not accept the European practice of dancing without tights until respectable, upper class white amateurs like the Mayfair Promenaders took to the stage tightless. Then the Afro-Caribbean Butterfly Troupe perform bare-legged without risking their respectability.

De Lisser's logic is strained, his argument improbable because he is trying to explain a reality which fundamentally challenges the morally coded and racially divided hierarchy he has set up. Jamaica has white dancing girls -- the Mayfair Promenaders -- and they appear more sexualized and less clothed than the brown and black dancing girls. In fact, there is a direct comparison between the Afro-Caribbean slave women dancing as set girls and the white women dancing as slave girls. Let us compare the Bellisario 1837 illustration of the set girls meant to define black women as dancing girls with the photograph of white society women of "the Mayfair Promenaders" performing "slave girls" in "the Dance of the Seven Veil"(Illustrations 18 & 19, Appendix). The set girls are fully clothed, in European dress. In contrast, the Mayfair Promenaders appear white, which signals sexual virtue, but, influenced by the development of modern dance in Europe, they expose

their legs and arms. Further, they are clothed in Western visions of the orient, costumes designed to reveal the female body, to suggest sexuality. Even the more contemporary Afro-Caribbean dancing troupe is not so revealing or so sexualized as the white slave girls. Rather the Butterfly troupe wears shorts and sleeveless jackets, revealing no cleavage or belly.<sup>107</sup> In their sexualized slave-girl costumes, the white women exchange racial positions and moral status with the Afro-Caribbean enslaved women, dressed in European clothing.

Aware of the “problem” the white women’s near nudity poses to his racial hierarchy, de Lisser develops an argument to explain it. He asserts that the white women’s sexy costumes reflect an assimilation of sophisticated European dance techniques and upper class dress habits. Middle class women were, he asserted, too afraid to wear dresses so low-cut as the aristocracy. Basing his argument on a whimsical attack on middle class imitativeness, de Lisser fails to address the “dancing girls” at all, who were by definition working class. De Lisser’s definition of white women as ladies and dark women as dancing girls completely falls apart when de Lisser admits that the “Butterfly Troupe” has disbanded and we realize that although de Lisser defined darker Jamaican women as “dancing girls” in order to contrast them to respectable white Jamaican women, the only active troupe of dancing girls and the only active set of “slave girls” in Jamaica at the time 1929 Planters’ Punch was published are the white women amateurs of the Mayfair Promenade. His deployment of English colonial definitions of race becomes destabilized for much the same reason that English colonial ideology did; the slippage or blurring between the representation of women of different races reflects the social and racial blurring and slippage between race and class categories, which

---

<sup>107</sup> One could argue that the cigarette-smoking Butterfly troupe represents a different, tougher, perhaps stereotypically blacker image of sexuality than the orientalized white dancers.

de Lisser's own autobiography illustrates as he was born Afro-creole and relatively poor but became white and wealthy. De Lisser became white and wealthy in large part by appropriating and manipulating domestic ideology and its ideas of race. His whiteness and class status was thus a product of his imitative deployment of English ideology

"The Dancing Girl of Old – And of Today" suggests the vulnerability of de Lisser's imitation. De Lisser's strategy of presenting Jamaican high society as aristocrats mirrors the slaves' practice of electing queens and kings during celebrations at Christmas. In "Dancing Girls," de Lisser pokes fun at this slave practice in the following passage:

Each band had a Queen, and she was the most wonderfully attired of them all. I don't know whether she was intended to represent the Queen of Beauty and Grace, or Miss Jamaica, or what, but she and the rival Queen were certainly the most conspicuous females...each had her attendant court. Her followers were dukes and duchesses, earls and countesses, lords and ladies! There was hardly a commoner among them. (12)

But de Lisser himself nominates elite Jamaicans to the position of Miss Jamaica. How different are his nominations from those of darker, poorer Jamaicans? The difference, is not so great, yet de Lisser consistently attacks Afro-Caribbeans for imitating English positions. His novel on Garvey and the UNIA in Jamaica Nobility (1926) is an extended joke about the Association's practice of designating certain members with royal titles. The novel outlines the ludicrous consequences that occur when the UNIA appoints two working class Jamaicans to titled positions, Nicholas Brimstone as

“Conspicuous Potentate” and Mortimer SlimSlam as “Knight.”<sup>108</sup> In insisting on their proper titles the men lose their jobs. As a result, both men relinquish their claims to their titles.

In the first few pages of this heavy-handed satire, de Lisser inserts one of his customary articles on local business men. However, this cameo mirrors the UNIA practice de Lisser’s novel ridicules by explicitly naming the planter, Humphrey Crum-Ewing, an “aristocrat.”

Someone recently alluded to Mr. Humphrey Crum-Ewing as “an aristocrat.” He is that, of course, but usually you take that fact for granted, not as a matter to be specially referred to. A man of very old family, a Scotch English and West Indian landed proprietor, an Eton Public School boy and a graduate of Cambridge University, he is what the Spanish would call an hidalgo, which means the “son of someone,” which means also that such a one is somebody in his own right and person. That is the kind of man we call an aristocrat in English, for manners and personality he can hardly ever lack. But you have also heard Mr. Crum-Ewing alluded to as a “democrat,” and that is as true of him as in the other designation. The best aristocrat is in these days of genuine democratic manner. (10)

The name of de Lisser’s aristocrat, “Crum-Ewing,” sounds almost as silly as the purposely ridiculous names de Lisser invents for Garvey’s nobility, “Brimstone” or “SlimSlam.” De Lisser’s strategy of representing the local elite as royalty too closely resembles the practice he attributes to the UNIA for the similarity not to reverberate, especially when the texts are interwoven as they are in the format of Planters’ Punch.

---

<sup>108</sup> Here de Lisser is lashing back at the Jamaican street singers, Slim and Sam, whose songs were critical of the poverty, unemployment, and the greed of the upper classes (Sherlock 354-5).

De Lisser may be asserting that the light elite has a right to claim royal status that the UNIA does not have; what is fitting for Crum-Ewing is ridiculous for an ordinary black man.

Yet, the blurring of distinction between Afro-Caribbean and white women, between strategies for self-legitimation of the light elites and of the darker working class point to the instability inherent in de Lisser's construction of Jamaica. It is de Lisser's practice of mimicry that highlights the connections between de Lisser's elite and the black Jamaican majority from whom he so tries to distinguish them. The black peasantry and slaves turn the English world upside down when they nominate themselves kings and queens at carnival. In nominating the local elite kings and queens de Lisser imitates both England and the black peasantry, imitating England. His royal elite figure on both England and the black peasantry. Presenting Miss Myers as Miss Jamaica or as an aristocrat mimics both English womanhood and Afro-Caribbean womanhood. If we reconsider Jane's efforts at upward mobility through domestic aspirations, we find yet another uncomfortable parallel. In mimicking the womanhood of the English aristocracy, de Lisser's elite engages in a domestic imitation similar to Jane's, yet more ambitious.

In his novels, particularly after 1920 when he began to publish them as part of Planters' Punch, de Lisser's project was to appropriate the divisive strategies of English domesticity for the benefit of the local elite. He strives to "creolize" English domesticity in the sense that he strives to make it indigenous, to render domestic virtue a sign of Jamaican national identity. This is clear from his 1913 Jane in which he defined black Jamaicans as modern if they had middle class aspirations. Yet creole society and the process of creolization resist the racial hierarchy of English domesticity. In its bringing together of peoples of different racial and ethnic identity, creolization creates an environment in which racial identity is more easily re-constructed and in

which the instability of race is yet more visible than in the metropole. As a result, the difference between white, brown, and black womanhoods will simply not remain stable. Further, imitating domesticity meant imitating patriarchy, and Jamaican society was profoundly ambivalent about patriarchy as is evidenced by the consistent refusal of the working and peasant classes to conform to nuclear families and male-headed households. Mimicry of English domesticity exposes the constructedness of de Lisser's racial differences even as it reinforces those differences. Creolization resists domesticity even as domesticity limits and shapes creolization.

Yet these inconsistencies and blurrings do not seem to disturb de Lisser's grasp on political and cultural power, which does not weaken until the labor uprisings of 1938 when Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley become the dominant political figures in Jamaica.

## Chapter 5: Wombs of Uncertainty and Pleasure without Paternity: the Gender and Degeneracy of Trinidad's White Ruling Class

...we have only to be acquainted with contemporary literature to find ourselves to face with the fact that the *Zeit Geist* is one of revolt.... Since the War, this revolt has been directed not so much against the Puritanism of the 16th century as against a *degenerate* form of it popularly known as Victorianism. This Victorianism... insisted that maidens should be prim and proper, that the contours of and lines of objects should be concealed by laces and embroideries....

In consequence of all this, men and women have failed to see that an act is sinful only because of the relative position it occupies on the bench of traditional antiquated morality....the idealization of the fair face of the Coin of Life indubitably tends to encourage the smug complacency of the idle rich; the unjust persecution of the prostitute who is after all only a necessary factor in the scheme of our social organization; the legal measures against the thief, who is a thief simply because an infinitesimal minority is allowed to control the world's wealth. (Alfred Mendes "Commentary" 21 - 23 my italics)

Responding to the public accusation that his fiction was obscene, Alfred Mendes reverses the charges. His short stories about working class women's sexual practices are not obscene, he held; rather Victorian morality was "degenerate." In calling Victorian ideals of sexuality degenerate, he inverts the moral logic of domestic ideology and European theories of degeneracy. This was the strategy oppositional Trinidadian writers chose for attacking the colonial bourgeoisie in the late twenties and early thirties. They appropriated English discourse's obsession with sexuality, race, and gender. But rather than targeting non-whites, they depicted a Trinidad in which all racial, ethnic, and class groups transgressed English standards of domestic virtue. The Afro-Caribbean working class formed sexual partnerships without marrying; the bourgeoisie married but committed adultery and incest; indo-Trinidadians had arranged marriages, and Chinese men kept mistresses and dealt opium. Of these, however, Trinidad writers defined only the bourgeoisie with its incest, adultery, and pederasty as degenerate. Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, whom Victorian bourgeois ideology defined as degenerate, Trinidadian writers portrayed as humorous and natural—not degenerate. Yet these middle class writers did not render the working and

peasant classes as political agents, leaders of a future nation. Born out of the contradictions and ambivalence of colonial discourse, written by marginalized middle class intellectuals caught between the ruling class they attacked and the masses towards whom they felt deep ambivalence, formulated in a multi-ethnic and ethnically divided colony during the twilight years of empire, early Trinidadian literature produced multiple and contradictory images of the emergent nation; writers rearticulated the logic of English colonialism even as they strove to supplant it.

To explore the political significance of domestic ideology, what Mendes calls “Victorianism,” in the development of Trinidadian literature, this chapter examines two politicized literary journals – Trinidad (1929-30) and The Beacon (1931-33). C.L.R. James and Alfred Mendes published a literary journal Trinidad, which only had two issues, Christmas 1929 and Easter 1930. A year later, Albert Gomes continued the Trinidad’s project with the publication of a literary and political journal, The Beacon (1931-33). These are often seen as “the moment of the integration of the political struggle to achieve independence and the creation of a national literature in Trinidad”(Carby 41). The Beacon “shook and shocked the island into an awareness of values which had been taboo to its people.” Most importantly it forced Trinidad to debate issues of race openly. As a result, Mendes writes that “the magazine went into every nook and cranny of the island and was read and shared by all classes, races, and church people. Its impact was so rousing that its monthly appearance was eagerly looked forward to” (Mendes “Writing – Trinidad” 92-3). Strongly influenced by Soviet Communism, The Beacon reprinted a number of articles from the communist press, banned in Trinidad, including essays by Stalin and Gorky. Yet like de Lisser’s nationalist project in Planters’ Punch, The Beacon was dedicated to defining Trinidad national identity through historical essays about important political figures and events as well as through editorials and debates about current political issues.

This early national literature emerged and flourished just as the world depression hit Trinidad, 1929-32. The depression brought a steep fall in the price of the island's major export crops -- cocoa and sugar -- and intensified the chronic unemployment, low wages, malnutrition, disease, urbanization, inadequate and unhealthy housing and homelessness. The journals constituted a reaction to the economic crisis but were shaped by the fact that writers expressed their criticism of the local ruling class through a flamboyant rejection of domesticity. In its critique of domesticity, The Beacon and Trinidad produced two genres of what I call anti-domestic fiction. The first, yard fiction, which has become part of the Anglophone Caribbean literary canon, focused on impoverished Afro-Trinidadian urban women. It illustrated that the alliance of the colonial government and local elite economically exploited the working classes to such an extent that it made the middle class ideals of chastity and marriage virtually impossible. The second, which I call, "fiction of white degeneracy," has largely been forgotten in literary history; it depicted an upper class made degenerate by its own colonial and racist ideologies, particularly by the taboo on inter-racial sex and the exoticization of the racial other. This chapter analyses the critique of colonialism and the Trinidadian bourgeoisie in the "fiction of white degeneracy"; the following chapter addresses the politics of race and class in yard fiction, focusing on the question of hybridity. Both chapters examine the ways in which the anti-domestic critique both enabled and limited Trinidad writers' criticism of colonialism and vision of Trinidad as a nation.

The Beacon's focus on women and sexuality enabled a critique of colonialism on several levels: (1) a refutation of colonial discourse's definition of Caribbeans as unworthy due to their transgression of domestic standards of sexual and gender behavior; (2) an attack on the local ruling class's claim to superiority based on a critique of race; and (3) an exposure of capitalism's international exploitation of the

working classes in Europe and the colonies. However, this focus on women and sex also limited the efficacy of The Beacon's critique. Its flaunting of transgressive sexual practices alienated much of the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian middle classes, particularly women, whose social standing depended on respectability. The focus on transgressive sexual practices thus inhibited multi-ethnic participation in the anti-colonial campaign. Secondly, it prevented the literature from challenging the division between the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian working classes.

### Trinidad and The Beacon: The Social Context

In the diversity of its writers and its material, The Beacon embodied the particular process of "creolization" that defined Trinidadian national identity. The white-black process of creolization was significantly altered by the introduction of Indian indentured laborers between 1845 and 1917. For nearly three quarters of a century, Indians served as a semi-enslaved labor force, displacing Afro-Caribbeans from the land and forcing down wages. In the early 1930s, Indo-Trinidadians were roughly one-third of the population. In 1946, Indo-Trinidadian were 35% of the population, Afro-Trinidadians 47%, whites 2.7%, Chinese 1%, and "Syrians" .2% (Singh "Conflict" 229). But the white minority controlled the political and economic power and continued to do so by manipulating the strong divisions between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. In the first decades of the 20th century, this white minority was a newly united ruling class composed of French, British, and Spanish whites. French creoles had controlled wealth and sugar in Trinidad in the late 18th century. During the 19th century, the English government had usurped French control of sugar and imposed English language and other cultural practices (Brereton 34-6; 46-9; Singh Race and Class 1-2 ). Portuguese were rapidly assimilating into the classification of whiteness. They were, however, not considered legally white until 1946. Segal

employs the Portuguese to illustrate that Trinidadian groups were largely defined by their social role when they entered the colony. Though they appeared white, Portuguese were defined as “off-white” and associated with Afro-Caribbeans because they had come to Trinidad as laborers and become small shopkeepers, stereotypically as Mendes describes in Pitch Lake, for Afro-and Indo-Trinidadians (Segal 83-84). They were then subject to similar derogatory statements about moral and cultural inferiority as were Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians. Thus, both French and Portuguese creoles had histories of marginalization, but distinctly different histories.

Both magazines grew out of a multi-racial group of intellectuals, originally centered around C.L.R. James, Alfred Mendes, and Mendes’s extensive and shared library. The Beacon group was comprised of members of the middle class of almost all ethnic and national groups, but the majority of its writers and its editor were white creoles and expatriates. It is, however, significant that many writers came from marginalized groups within the white classes. Although it did regularly include the writing of British expatriates like Beatrice Greig and Alistair Scott, the editor and financier, Albert Gomes, as well as its most prolific fiction writer, Alfred Mendes, were both Portuguese creoles; Ralph and Jean de Boissiere were both staunch critics of colonialism and French creoles. The most frequently published expatriate writer was Beatrice Greig, who was herself oppositional – a feminist, who campaigned for women’s right to work outside of the home. The journal may thus be seen as a coalition of intellectuals from a variety of marginalized groups, who were distanced from each other and yet fairly united in their opposition to both the bourgeoisie and the working classes.

The central role Portuguese creoles played in the journal may in part explain the journal’s anti-domestic strategy of critique. Portuguese creoles were discriminated against for their moral and cultural inferiority. When Mendes and Gomes rage against

the constraints of Victorian culture, they may be protesting both the principles of domestic ideology and the fact that that ideology was used to marginalize Portuguese creoles. Yet Portuguese creoles were not barred from educational and economic opportunities as were Afro-Caribbean Trinidadians. Mendes' father was a large-scale, successful merchant on personal terms with the governor. Gomes's family was also successful in business and funded The Beacon. That Portuguese creoles more frequently protest the cultural snobbery of the upper class than its economic exploitation may reflect the fact that they were primarily discriminated against in a cultural rather than an economic arena.

Though The Beacon defined itself as radical because it brought together of segregated groups, its very transgression of race and class boundaries suggested how effectively Trinidad society made those divisions.<sup>109</sup> Beacon-related functions were one of the few, if not the only occasions on which members could meet as equals (Sander 29). The social divisions represented the disparate economic and intellectual opportunities available to different groups. These differences in opportunity apparently caused a certain amount of resentment among Afro-Caribbean intellectuals. Years later James's tone sounds almost bitter in noting, "We *had* to go, whereas Mendes could go to the United States and learn to practice his writing, because he was white and had money. But we had to make our money" (James 75). Afro-Trinidadians had to emigrate because intellectual career opportunities for blacks were virtually non-existent whereas the white members could find lucrative employment in Trinidad. Black writers could not and those who did like Ralph Mentor who became a prominent union organizer and C.A. Thomasos a politician were the first generation to do so (Sander 19). Afro-Trinidadian male writers, thus, had a different personal reason to protest the

---

<sup>109</sup> Gomes wrote, for instance, that "'Beacon-ism signified a distaste for the divisive humbug which was the worst feature of the outer society'" ("The Beacon" Kraus Bibliographical Bulletin 21 (August, 1977), 158-159. cited in Sander 28).

bourgeoisie than white writers, who did not suffer such racial discrimination in education and careers. These divisions were complicated by the journal's contradictory position on class. The Beacon presented the working class as the class which embodied the nation, and, at the same time, it did not support universal suffrage. As Mendes explained, The Beacon was a contradiction, a multi-ethnic middle class endeavor for working class rights that inevitably expressed its own middle class bias: "We were contradictions in terms. Our background was too deeply embedded in us to overcome the growth of our intellect from adolescence onwards, so that we still unconsciously hankered after what was behind us..." ("The Turbulent Thirties in Trinidad" 73).

The Beacon is a fusion of literature, political and social commentaries, written by Trinidadians, English, Soviet, Indian, and U.S. citizens. It embodies the process of creolization in its form as it did in its writers' ethnic diversity. Individual issues composed of conflicting opinion and disparate genres. The Beacon fostered opposition. Gomes explains,

The policy of the magazine was really the absence of one, for although the editorial notes reflected more or less my own views, in all other sections contributors of most riotously conflicting views coexisted. If we wrote something attacking some aspect of church policy and a defender appeared who was prepared to state his views in writing, these views were published. The same privilege was granted to any other person, from whatever section of vested interest in the community, who wished to do likewise. Thus controversies, always the best boost to circulation were frequent. When they did not occur spontaneously we deliberately engineered them. (cited in Sander 31; Maze of Colour 22).

The conscious multiplicity and ambivalence of the image of Trinidad produced by the

journal at times enabled a sharper and more comprehensive criticism of colonialism. At other times, it exposed the limitations of the journal's critique by revealing writers' opposition to working class rights and their ambivalence about the cultures of the African diaspora.

### The Fiction of White Degeneracy

Over twenty of the roughly sixty stories in the Beacon portray the white upper and middle classes. In them, planter's wives have sex with their Indian servants, upper class whites commit incest, characters graphically describe contraceptives, gay men seduce upper class youths or redirect their readers' gaze in homoerotic and socially disruptive ways. It is fiction meant to outrage an upper class that defined itself through a hyperbolic mimicry of Victorian sexual mores, an upper class with a strong Roman Catholic component with its own codes for sexual behavior. By representing it as adulterous, incestuous, diseased, and homosexual, The Beacon's critique shows the elite transgressing every aspect of the domestic ideal of womanhood and manhood — insisting that the elite committed all the moral sins of which it accused the working classes and that no moral barrier separated rich from poor, white from black.

To attack the colonial bourgeoisie, The Beacon marries a late 18th-century English narrative about white creole immorality to a late 19th-century European discourse of white degeneracy in the tropics. Essentially rendering the early narrative of moral corruption -- sex, rum, and indolence — in scientific terms, English theories of degeneration held that tropical climates caused white races to degenerate. William Ripley's The Races of Europe 1899 argued that the white man turned to drink and sex as the physiological result of tropical climate (Stepan 103). "With alcoholism," Stepan writes, "went sexual excess and 'vicious habits' caused a subtle 'surexcitation of the sexual organs' from the heat. In the presence of a servile and morally underdeveloped

native population, the result was sexual immorality on the part of whites. The appetites in general were over stimulated and over indulged, which caused indolence”(103). In addition to excessive sexuality and alcoholism, prostitution, criminality, homosexuality, and incest were signs of degeneracy.

The Beacon's critique of English discourse on the West Indies lies first in its application to Trinidadian local politics. Beacon writers deployed English discourse to depict the local elite as degenerate when the local elite had traditionally employed English discourse to justify its supremacy in the colony. English discourse defined the less powerful, distant colonial “other” elite as degenerate. The Beacon depicts the most powerful group, the ruling class as having all the characteristics of degeneration that European discourse attributes to the colonized: sexual promiscuity, adultery, incest, pederasty, inter-racial desire. Second, they translate the discourse of race science to one of class and social critique. They portray the Trinidadian ruling class as rendering itself degenerate by imposing unnatural sexual prohibitions and racial segregation on society. The journal thus refigured English discourse in order to critique both it and the local elite.

Alistair Scott's “Brotherly Love” epitomizes this redeployment of the European discourse on degeneracy by illustrating that the upper class drives itself to incest through its extreme control and denial of white female sexuality. In Scott's story, Philip, a 23-year-old white creole, increasingly views his sister as an object of sexual desire. Scott presents Philip's incest as a reaction to rum and black women -- two classic elements in theories of white degeneracy. Of the two, the more powerful is the sight of two black women “looking at him inquiringly” on the street. He found them “horrible,” but their appearance and, implicitly their sexuality, lead him to think of his sister “smoking a cigarette lazily and reading a book when he got home.” He defends against this instinctual connection between his sister and sexualized black women by

asserting her almost absolute difference from them: "He marveled that these ugly, wandering creatures that had passed him should be women just like she was a woman. He thought of her trim little figure, her delicate complexion, and wondered if she could have similar feeling to these others"(10). But Philip's effort fails; his association of black women and his sister turns out to be correct. Both black and white women have been out at night, and both are sexual. When Philip returns home his sister, like the black women, is out on the town. She returns in a sexy evening dress and drunk. He says to her, "It isn't right for you to...to go about like this..."(11). He means it isn't socially and morally acceptable for her to go out on the street because it makes her equivalent to the black women and, thus, sexually available. In spite or perhaps because of her behavior, he is drawn to her physically and the story ends with them going hand and hand to bed.

For a colonial bourgeoisie that stereotypes black women as oversexed and white women as chaste, it is difficult to grant the white woman sexuality without attributing to her the illicit sexuality associated with black women. Underlying the racist ideology are pragmatic questions of maintaining racial hierarchy. Control over white women's sexuality guaranteed the whiteness that legitimated the elite's elevated position in colonial society. White women's sexual purity was key to the legitimacy both of the local elite and of the Empire. As Anne McClintock writes, "controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of the empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic, so that, by the turn of the century, sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic and political power"(47)

By keeping white female sexuality within the family, Philip reveals the consequences of this concern over racial purity. The incest in the story is both literal and figurative. The story illustrates that colonial ideology and sexual practice can result

in incest. The only way to keep the race pure is to confine the white woman to the family. Philip tells his sister that "It isn't right for you....to go about like this" but when she asks why, he can only respond, "I don't know"(II/4:11-12). The family and the house are metaphors for the white class itself. The incest of the white ruling class derives from its refusal of racial mixing, its refusal of creole society. Scott's image of the white ruling class is an image of degenerate incest caused by racist colonial ideology and practices.

Although "Brotherly Love" employs white women to criticize the ruling class, the story also critiques the construction and constriction of white womanhood — insisting on the reality of white women's sexuality and the need to accept it while hinting at the high cost of constructing black women as the sexual and therefore immoral women in society.

Like "Brotherly Love," Mendes's "Boodhoo" suggests that the elite's incestuousness and promiscuity result from the racialized sexual constraints of colonial ideology and elite practice. It indicates that white insistence on class and ethnic stratification articulated through insistence on white-white marriages corrupts the very things that justified the ruling class hegemony: whiteness, legitimacy, and marriage.

In Mendes's story, a white planter, Henry Lawrence pensions off his Indo-Trinidadian lover of roughly twenty years, in order to marry a white English woman. At nineteen, his bride, Minnie Lawrence, is roughly half her husband's age, but the same age as Boodhoo, her husband's son by his mistress. This "Indian woman" plays a pivotal role but remains unnamed. Lawrence works long hours, leaving his wife home. Lonely and often afraid of the environment, which she experiences as sinister, she is grateful for the protection of Boodhoo, who is a servant in the house. They begin a violent, sexual relationship. Minnie becomes pregnant. Boodhoo's mother informs

Minnie of Boodhoo's parentage and of her relationship with Henry. After attempting suicide, Minnie dies in childbirth, presumably from the stress of not knowing whose child she is bearing. The story ends with Henry holding a blue-eyed, blond child in his arms.<sup>110</sup>

"Boodhoo" illustrates that marriage in the planter class is fundamentally unstable and false. The husband spends his marriage preventing his wife from finding out that he has had a mistress and a son, (and perhaps that he is continuing that relationship). The wife spends her time trying to hide her adulterous relationship. The husband doesn't suspect his wife because he's too busy trying to hide his sexual past from her; the wife doesn't suspect her husband's past because she's too busy trying to hide her adultery.

By sleeping with her husband's inter-racial son, Minnie Lawrence conveys the message that the white woman can not be counted on to guarantee either the legitimacy or the whiteness of the children of the ruling class; hers is, the story reveals, a "womb of uncertainty." We do not know if her child is white or inter-racial, legitimate or illegitimate, child or grandchild. Minnie dies because she has failed to perform the only task colonial society set out for her: to guarantee the racial purity and legitimacy of the heirs to the ruling class and to maintain the social distinctions between races and classes. In other words, the white woman -- when defined by her role as guarantor of the purity and legitimacy of the ruling class -- is a false and unnecessary element of colonial society.

The story offers a more complex critique of gender and ethnicity in colonial

---

<sup>110</sup> Michele Levy reads the fairness of the child as an assurance that it is the legitimate son of Henry (7). Minnie does have sex with her husband before she sleeps with Boodhoo. Yet, since eye color is a recessive gene and genetics sufficiently complex, the child's paternity is still uncertain. The most important factor is the doubt of paternity; that is, the issue is less whether this particular child is Henry Lawrence's than the possibility that it might not be.

Trinidad if we read it as a re-configuration of the gender and race roles of colonialist narratives. At first, Minnie's infidelity and inter-racial desires seem a simple repetition of the 18th and 19th century assertion that the West Indies corrupted English womanhood -- which we see in Charlotte Smith's The Wanderings of Warwick or in theories of white degeneracy in the tropics. But it inverts the gender relations and shifts the ethnicity of the standard narrative of corruption -- that of the newly arrived white male employee, who takes an Afro-Caribbean mistress shortly after his arrival in the West Indies. Here, the white woman on the plantation takes a non-white lover shortly after she arrives. And the lover is not an Afro-Caribbean but an Indo-Trinidadian.

The shift in gender is important for at least two reasons. First, with it, Mendes makes clear that English women shared the ambivalent colonial impulse that characterized the English male observer -- an ambivalence expressed in English male's simultaneous repulsion and admiration of Afro-Caribbean women. For Minnie Lawrence, as for James Anthony Froude and Charles Kingsley, the desire to participate in colonialism is largely constituted by a sexualized and ambivalent desire, both a deep rejection and sexual contempt of the colonized/non-white other and a deep "colonial desire" for that other. Minnie is hurt and nauseated by the very idea of white men's sexual relations with women of colour; she thinks it "unimaginable ... that white men, men of her blood, should be so filthy as to take to themselves these Indian women. And to have children by them! The thought nauseated her" (The Beacon I/11:19).

At the same time, inter-racial sexuality has drawn her to Trinidad. Minnie marries Henry Lawrence not only because she needs the money and wants to escape England, but because Trinidad offers, what Mendes's craftily calls a "cosmopolitan" appeal: cultural diversity and racial hybridity. "How fascinating," Minnie thought, "to be in the midst of Chinese and Indians and Negroes, and crosses between them

all!"(The Beacon I/11:20). Minnie's reaction to Boodhoo illustrates this ambivalence. On one hand she finds him "strange": "although he wore long trousers, she thought him young."<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, "when she first saw him she was struck by his beauty"(The Beacon I/11:19). From her arrival on the plantation, Minnie pesters her husband with questions about Boodhoo, focusing on his parentage and European blood. Her fascination with inter-racial people, "half-castes" as she calls them, stems from her childhood spent in various colonies, accompanying her father on his spendthrift colonial adventure. Her interest in Boodhoo increases when she learns that he is inter-racial. The narrator comments that "... since Henry had told her there was European blood in his veins her interest in him had increased." Boodhoo's presence in her life gives her the sense that she is living out her father's colonial romance. The narrator tells us that "she had heard her father talk of such half-castes when she was a child. Little did she think then that she would one day be living in close proximity to one of them" (The Beacon I/11:21).

Minnie's desire for hybridity is fulfilled when she sexually merges with Boodhoo, a union Mendes describes in symbolic terms: "a patch of darkness moved, took shape, advanced towards her and merged with her body"(The Beacon I/12:26). Minnie's conflicted desire for Boodhoo is a prime example of Robert Young's conception of colonialism as a "desiring machine" that produces ambivalent desire: "the races and their intermixture circulate around an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion: a structure of attraction, where people and cultures intermix and emerge, transforming themselves as a result, and a structure of repulsion, where the different elements remain

---

<sup>111</sup> He is a man and yet also a boy; in Pitch Lake, Joe sees Stella as a fragile girl, and is shocked that others are sexually attracted to her. The mixed Indian is thus a liminal figure not only racially, but also in terms of adulthood. If the colonized are by definition children of the Empire and the empire builders' children, the half-white, half-Indian must also be half-adult and half-child.

distinct and are set against each other dialogically”(19). As in Young’s model, Minnie’s desire is a product of colonialism itself, in particular, colonial adventure novels. Her relationship illustrates how colonial discourse “produced its own darkest fantasy the unlimited and ungovernable fertility of “unnatural unions.” Both incestuous and adulterous, her inter-racial sexual relationship doubly embodies one central principle of degeneracy theory: that hybridity itself was degenerate (Young 18). Mendes’s performance of colonial discourse attacks the upper class by shattering its pride in the chastity of its women and the security of its whiteness. Yet in its portrayal of Boodhoo as sex object, it rearticulates the colonialist objectification of colonized non-whites. The story wields colonial discourse as a type of double-edged sword, disempowering both the ruling class in Minnie and the working class in Boodhoo.

Though the short story can be read as merely reiterating English colonialist stereotypes of white creole women’s sexual degeneracy and their racism, Mendes is careful to portray Minnie’s sexual desire for Boodhoo as a natural consequence of the isolation of her marriage. He makes upper class women’s sexuality a natural and necessary part of their characters in strong contradistinction to the repression extolled by Trinidadian white, bourgeois society. Trinidad upper and middle class society of the early twentieth century had even stricter conventions for its women than did parallel classes in England. In “The Progress of Women in the Island” (1927), Beatrice Greig comments, “it is safe to say that even thirty years ago women’s participation in public life was restricted to many and various kinds of church work, teaching in the schools, and serving in the stores, and that such things as a woman clerk in a government or other office, was unheard of.” When a white woman, Miss Mary Woodlock took the position of librarian in Port of Spain in 1886, she was ostracized from society. Although women had begun to enter office and teaching jobs by the 1920s, white women were most likely to participate in social work and charitable organizations. In

her memoir Child of the Tropics, Yseult Bridges describes the process by which young creole women were sent to England at fourteen to receive cultural refinement. On their return they were presented at a ball and there presumably met a husband (157-165).

This routine left little space for the vicissitudes of emotional and sexual desire – in fact, white women were defined by their ostensible lack of such vicissitudes just as black and brown women were defined as embodying sexual passion. In contrast, white men's promiscuity, adultery, and 'outside' families were an accepted part of Trinidadian upper class society. Adultery, Mendes suggests, is the natural outcome of the failure of the upper class to accommodate women's sexual desire. Mendes's work repeatedly illustrates that all human beings are alike in having a strong sexual drive – regardless of sex, class, or ethnicity.<sup>112</sup>

In "Boodhoo," Mendes shows that it is society that twists sexuality into perversion. In particular, the structure of upper class marriage produces adultery because the husband was significantly older and stood in relation to his wife more as father than as partner. From the beginning of the narrative, Mendes blurs the distinction between the husband, Henry and his son, Boodhoo. In so doing, Mendes portrays Boodhoo as Minnie's natural, perhaps inevitable choice. At the beginning of the story, Minnie mistakes the sound of Boodhoo's approach with that of her husband, but later we learn that this mistake is natural because Boodhoo replaces Henry in key roles of the husband. When Henry is working, Boodhoo takes his place by performing the husband's tasks of protecting and comforting his wife. One day, when a storm hits, Minnie can bear her loneliness and fear no longer, and calls out to Boodhoo, who

---

<sup>112</sup> Levy argues that Mendes's great enthusiasm for D.H. Lawrence's ideas about sexuality are articulated in "Boodhoo": "It seems likely that Mendes has Lawrence in mind when he writes of sex as "wholesome, clean, beautiful" in contrast to murky Victorian attitudes, and it is possible to see this same clash of values in the encumbered relationships of "Boodhoo" (9).

saves her from a scorpion and reassures her when thunder and lightning terrify her, asserting that “thunder and lightning will do you nothing.” When Minnie asks for yet more reassurance, he asserts that “I know so... and I am here.” Here, he takes the position of husband by claiming that his very presence will protect her. She accepts him in this position when she responds, “It is good of you to say that”(The Beacon I/11:23). Once they have both accepted his role as husband, he takes the role of sexual partner by embracing; she accepts his embrace.

Boodhoo can take Henry’s role as Minnie’s sexual partner because Henry hasn’t fulfilled his wife’s sexual needs. He is an affectionate and concerned husband. The narrator describes Henry as “a man in love”: he gently kisses her when he comes home, sometimes even running up the steps to do so; he puts his arm around his wife when she has a head ache. Yet very rarely does he make love to her. Minnie feels she doesn’t love or understand Henry partly because he “always arrived home in the evenings dead tired. He would fall asleep as soon as he rested his head on the pillow.” She feels that he is “spiritually as well as physically...aloof from her”(The Beacon I/11:21). Henry’s gentle but usually asexual treatment of his wife derives in part from the fact that he thinks of her as his “little girl.” Mendes’s story suggests a criticism of upper class marriage practices, in which women are defined as children rather than partners

However, Minnie’s and Boodhoo’s mutual desire becomes exaggerated or “perverted” in the story. Minnie doesn’t just desire Boodhoo; her sexual desire consumes her. She can not sleep or read. She forgets her attachment to her mother. She waits to make love to Boodhoo “as a would-be mother awaits the birth of her baby”(The Beacon I/12:25). Her desire for Boodhoo replaces her maternal desires, which ought to be the primary emotions of the domestic woman. In the end, this passion destroys her -- she dies in childbirth due to emotional, not physical difficulties.

Mendes's descriptions of Boodhoo's sexual treatment of Minnie are crude caricatures of a "primitive" sexuality. When Boodhoo first embraces Minnie, "he bent down, fiercely put his arms around her and kissed her on the mouth." After briefly lying passively in his arms, "she clung to him wildly" (*The Beacon* I/11:23). When Henry asks Boodhoo to leave the plantation as a means of removing his mother from the compound, Minnie asks Boodhoo why he is leaving even if he does not wish to. He answers with a "fierce" and "rude" physicality: "For answer he put his arms about her fiercely, rudely." Mendes explicitly describes the embrace as both "primitive" and "harsh": "There was no tenderness in his touch, only a primitive harshness, and her nature responded" (*The Beacon* I/12:24). When they finally consummate their relationship, the scene seems closer to a rape than an act of love. Boodhoo arrives one night after Henry has left, and forces Minnie to have sex with him on a bed of rotting leaves in a small grove of trees. This is the place in which his father first had sex with his mother. There "with never a word passing between them, they lay and lingered, his hands coarsely crudely groping about her body" (*The Beacon* II/1:9). The lack of verbal communication combined with the "primitive harshness" of their physical relations places them outside not only the "civilized" upper classes but on the edges of human interaction.

But why must Minnie choose between an affectionate but nearly asexual husband and a harsh and primitive lover? Why can't Henry be both a lover and a comfort to his wife? Why can't Boodhoo be both sexual, tender, and verbal with his lover?

These divisions and reduplications result from the gender roles the upper class insisted on, particularly the denial of white women's sexuality and the projection of sexual passion on to Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians. Thus, rather than saying that Mendes resorts to clichés about Indian primitiveness, I suggest that, in "Boodhoo,"

Mendes explicates and performs the process through which colonial discourse on race and sexuality produce sexualized and primitive stereotypes of non-whites and inter-racial sexuality. Boodhoo's silence and rudeness are counterparts of Henry's affectionate but rarely sexual relationship with his wife. Like "Brotherly Love," "Boodhoo" illustrates that this denial of white women's sexuality combined with a strict but hypocritical division of ethnic and class groups has serious consequences for the ruling class. Minnie has no outlet for sexuality within the white planter world and turns to Boodhoo, whom she can not see simply as a human being but as a forbidden embodiment of passion. If Henry hadn't denied Boodhoo's identity, Minnie might very well not have conceived a passion for him.<sup>113</sup> He can't fulfill the husband's role successfully because he's been conditioned to think of her as a white proper woman and as a child. Boodhoo's inability to unite tenderness and passion also results from the imbricated rules of marriage and ethnic difference. On one level he accepts these rules. He is willing to yell at his mother and physically throw her out of Henry's property in order to preserve the image of the upper class by preventing Minnie from learning his parentage. Yet he fights against his father and white rule by seducing his father's wife and basically raping her in the place in which his father took Boodhoo's mother. The ethnic hierarchy and marriage system forced Boodhoo outside of propriety, into the position of "primitive" other. It placed him in a position, in which, if he followed his father's model and courted a white woman, he would commit a social crime. His father's violation and exploitation of his mother become reproduced in his treatment of Minnie.

Both "Boodhoo" and "Brotherly Love" thus warn of the dangerous

---

<sup>113</sup> Here I agree with Levy who writes, "Had Henry been frank about his paternity, the tragic outcome could have been avoided"(21).

consequences of Trinidad's racialized construction of womanhood.<sup>114</sup> They show that incest is a product not of hot weather or essential biological difference but of English social mores imposed on creole society. They indicate that "Victorianism"'s domestic morality transforms the cultural and sexual processes of creolization into perverse, violent and degenerate practices. The stories thus criticize both English domestic discourse and the colonial bourgeoisie who defined itself through that discourse.

Just as black women's strength signals black men's weakness in English discourse, the failure of white upper class women to live up to standards of white femininity in Trinidadian discourse reflects the failure of white creole masculinity. The Beacon expresses this failure of creole manhood in a series of stories which depict white creole men as physically and morally weak heterosexuals or effeminate homosexuals. R.A.C. de Boissiere's "The Woman on the Pavement" describes how the race and class hierarchy emasculates the white bourgeois male. De Boissiere's white male protagonist is humane. When a young Afro-Trinidadian boy inadvertently hits him with his bicycle, Edgehill, though injured, tells the police that he is responsible for not being more aware and lets the boy go. He is thankful for the help of the bystanders at the accident. When a peasant woman falls to the ground in an epileptic seizure, he desperately wishes to assist her. However, he is paralyzed by the taboo against upper class men touching peasant black women. The general taboo against contact is intensified by the fact that the epileptic fit exposes the woman's body and renders her body dirty, sexual, and animal-like in its lack of control. Her "whole body shuddered

---

<sup>114</sup> The Beacon's publication of white women's writing challenges Mendes' and Scott's portrayal of sexual transgression as the defining characteristic of white creole womanhood. Kathleen Archibald's "Beyond the Horizon" (The Beacon I/3:29-31) and Eleanor Waby's series of biographical essays, "Trinidad Then and Now" (The Beacon II/2:21-23; II/4:21-23; II/5:21-24; II/6:20-23) illustrate that white women saw themselves as sexually repressed by excessive childbirths and socially repressed by patriarchal expectations of respectability and class divisions within white society.

and jumped like some animal that has just been beheaded, her naked thighs slapping loudly on the pavement. Her dress had got rolled up, exposing her one filthy undergarment" (4). Edgehill wishes to react to her as a woman in need, but her overt sexuality and animalness, her dirtiness render her the opposite of the ideal white woman. Stuck between viewing her as animal and woman, Edgehill is paralyzed: "the longer he stood there, and saw others look on, the more did he become as if paralyzed..."(78). When finally, Afro-Trinidadian men and women help the woman to walk away, Edgehill feels ashamed because "he was not man enough to go up to the woman in the open street and put silver in her hand"(79). De Boissiere's phrase, "he was not man enough," points to Edgehill's weakness as a failure of masculinity.

Sheldon Christian's "Such Stuff as Dreams are Made of" makes clear that the refined and feminine tone of white upper class society posed a serious threat to white masculinity, particularly in the urban culture of Port of Spain. As the story opens, Christian's protagonist, a boxer, confronts and almost loses to an opponent. He is proud of his "physique," "his trim legs," "the lines of his muscle-ribbed trunk" (24). Then we learn that Michael is dreaming --his masculine physique is the "such stuff as dreams are made of." Rather than fighting against a tough and unscrupulous opponent in the male space of the boxing ring, Michael is a weak twenty-three year-old, who lives in a woman's world. Looking in the mirror, he confronts an "underdeveloped figure with a narrow chest, flimsy arms and skinny legs"(26). He finds masculinity not in the boxing ring, but in his mother's gift of a fine bathrobe, that "gave him a certain feeling of virility"(26). His mother wakes him up from his afternoon nap by pulling the covers from his bed; she tells him how hot to make the water for his shower. Then she tells him when he must meet and assist Cordelia, who, it is clear, will direct his evening with the same infantilizing thoroughness with which his mother has controlled his afternoon. Michael's containment and isolation within this feminized and whitened

upper class society renders him unmanly. Yet this feminized culture that restricts women to housewifery and bars them from work outside the home is necessary to distinguish white women from lower and lower middle class women who worked by necessity. White masculinity appears to be one cost of preserving an artificially leisured white womanhood.<sup>115</sup>

In these stories, The Beacon appears to express a crisis in white creole masculinity that parallels a crisis of middle class masculinity experienced in U.S. cities in the early 20th century.<sup>116</sup> Chauncey asserts that clerical and professional jobs took middle class men from the manual labour that made their bodies unquestionably masculine; they worked in offices which were also the terrain of women workers and therefore feminized (111). Women were increasingly powerful in the workforce and as political agents. The middle class man clung to heterosexuality and took up weight lifting as a means of defining himself as unquestionably masculine. He also distanced

---

<sup>115</sup> In addition, colonial strictures on the upper class compromise the masculinity of other white men in The Beacon's fiction. Though "Boodhoo"'s Henry Lawrence is a physically strong man, the upper class decorum demands that he deny his manhood by disclaiming his inter-racial son, Boodhoo. This denial undercuts his power as patriarch and the patriarchal family line. As a consequence of denying his paternity, he is cuckolded by the son and the paternity of his son is uncertain. When we do find a strong white male, the narrative seems more a fantasy of wish-fulfillment than realistic. In Percival Maynard's "Peace," Mr. Jackson, an upper class white man affirms his masculinity by uniting a poor black woman with her estranged and delinquent son. It is a fantasy of redemption, in which the obeah woman turns out only to be a "poor, harmless, lonely old creature," the delinquent son renounces his criminal life, and the white man becomes "richer in experience of human nature" by leaving the upper class white society in order to reunite black mother and son. Crossing race and class boundaries, to bring the family together, the white man embodies power and fulfills the role of father. He is the healer rather than exploiter of the working class. "Peace" stands in the same relation to "The Woman on the Pavement" as Michael's dream of physical strength does to the reality of his "scrawny" body. If Edgehill had a dream of masculinity, it would be Jackson's act.

<sup>116</sup> I am greatly indebted to David Agruss for suggesting readings on this topic and for helping me to develop my analysis of bourgeois masculinity in this chapter.

himself from the effeminate homosexual because gender distinctions between man and woman had begun to blur.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the colonial bourgeoisie of Port of Spain may have experienced a similar crisis in masculinity. Trinidadian middle and upper class men were employed in offices and were entertained in the feminine and decorous spaces of parlors and dining rooms. This almost exclusively white society had the burden of proving that the bourgeois man was more masculine, more deserving of political power than all other men on the island in order to justify the fact that only men of wealth had the franchise. Their masculinity was defined through a combination of domesticity and wealth. Only wealthy patriarchs could afford to support a leisured class of women. Yet, in creating a society of leisure which women largely controlled, the white bourgeois male inserted himself into a culture that both deprived him of a muscular body and placed him under the control of women.

By defining effeminate gay man as the most successful and powerful man in the ruling class, Mendes's "Snapshots" is the ultimate attack on bourgeois masculinity. In it, Mendes suggests that the entire ruling class and its livelihood — merchants' economic exchange — are influenced by an economy of homoerotic desire. The femininity of the upper class women's world becomes the apex of the men's world of business in the figure of the "effeminate" Marshall Rose.

Rose is a white or an apparently white man, from Barbados; his family background is unknown, but his lack of a money suggests that he does not come from a "good" family. These facts ought to have barred him from the upper crust of Trinidad society, which placed much importance on family and wealth. However, Rose rises to the heights of Trinidad's white society through his social and sexual seductiveness. His seductiveness operates through an economy of looking and appearance. The first thing we learn of Rose is that he is an attractive, "small fair man, with sharp features...always

dandily dressed” and that he draws people to look at him — “he wasn’t a man you could look at once.” Rose uses a flirtatious challenge to apply for a job, sending as application simply the assertion: “that I am the very man that you are *looking for*” (The Beacon II/7:11 my italics). Based merely on this and his coincident need for a department head, the merchant Levitt responds in kind as his wire, “Come,” is a double entendre —the OED lists the first use of “to come” as a sexual term in 1650.

This exchange and the interview that follows constitute a seduction structured around traditionally gendered roles of male and female. Rose accepts the position, saying “I would very much like to sir,’... looking straight into Mr. Levitt’s eyes.” Levitt returns the stare. With the exchange of stares, the men’s relationship is cemented. Levitt has asserted his desire for Rose; Rose has accepted the position of desired object. The repartee with which Levitt follows the gaze, further suggests that the relationship between the men is based on a visual eroticism. Playfully referring to Rose’s letter of application, Levitt comments that “Well then, Mr. Rose. I too think you’re just the man we are looking for.” Rose continues the flirtation, responding, “I thought you’d think so too” and then preens himself, “gracefully sweeping his arm, he passed his hand three times, with the tender touch of a woman, over his well combed hair” (The Beacon II/7:12). Rose’s gesture is one of self-display, suggesting the pleasure Mr. Levitt might take in caressing object of desire he has just acquired. Rose is the embodiment of the salesman, for he is selling himself and will deploy his bodily attractions to sell for Mr. Levitt.

As Laura Mulvey’s study of Hollywood film illustrates, women, not men, have traditionally been sexualized and objectified by being represented as physical spectacle; the practice is so entrenched, she argues, that the display of the body as spectacle is a feminine or feminized position: “Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, .... she holds the look, plays to and

signifies male desire”(Mulvey 589). In “Snap-Shots,” Rose makes himself a spectacle and in so doing transforms himself into an object of sexual desire among both men and women. By virtue of his sexual desirability, he becomes Trinidad’s best salesman, rises to the island’s highest social circles, and achieves his own sexual desires. The feminized position becomes in Rose a position of agency and power.

Lest there was any doubt in our minds that Rose’s charm is homosexual, Mendes encodes his description of Rose with homosexual figures and slang of New York in the twenties — with which Mendes was no doubt familiar through his large library and his fascination with sexuality. Rose, for instance, fits the description of the “fairy” — the term common in New York in the 1920’s for feminine gay men. Levitt tells his wife that Rose “has queer little effeminate ways. In fact, I always have to pull myself together in his presence and consciously think of him as a man before I am sure that he is a man”(12). “Fairies” typically conformed to certain conventions of dress, for instance, having bleached hair and wearing red ties (Chauncey 3;54). Rose’s blond hair, his fancy clothing, his effeminate mannerisms all suggest that Mendes has modeled him after the figure of the “fairy.” Oddly, however, in describing Rose as “queer” Mendes mixes terms. “Queer” was a common term in the gay community of the twenties but it referred to a homosexual man, who was not effeminate, at times used to distinguish him from a fairy (Chauncey 16). (This mixing of terms may be a sign that Mendes is not entirely familiar with the gay culture that he represents.) During the interview Levitt is attracted to Rose’s English accent. Rose asserts that he acquired his accent through his English education. Since Rose is not a man of means, Rose’s accent is as likely to be an affectation as a product of English public school. An English accent and enthusiasm for things English was a characteristic of the New York “queer” identity. Transferred to Trinidad, queer anglophilia takes on a colonial significance, suggesting a queerness to the colonial bourgeoisie’s anglophilia.

In the explicitly effeminate and homosexual figure of Rose, Mendes suggests that the ostensibly male world of business and capital is influenced by erotic desire for the feminine or, perhaps more accurately, a feminine masculinity. Rose's seductiveness renders him irresistible to customers; he is "the best salesman on two legs": "The buyers in all the stores in Frederick Street found it impossible to refuse him, so that Mr. Levitt was able to boast in less than two years after Rose's arrival that his (Rose's) Department was doing one hundred and fifty per cent. more business than ever"(13-14). Rose's success in sales and seduction enhance Levitt's ego much as a woman's beauty and achievements bring laurels to her husband. The more Rose is praised, the more Levitt takes credit for his achieves, the more vain Levitt becomes. All the merchants compliment Levitt on his acquisition of Rose, in the way a man might complement another on his beautiful wife. Marsden, for instance, grips Mr. Levitt by the shoulder for emphasis when he tells him, "I envy you that fellow. A real live wire....The finest salesman... in this town today, Levitt, the finest Salesman..." Levitt responds with the suggestive comment, "He has given every satisfaction." Rose's (sexual) success is so central to Levitt, that it enhances his sense of self.

Every store that Mr. Levitt went into afterwards, the heads would approach him and congratulate him on his wonderful shrewdness in procuring the services of a man like Rose; so much so that Mr. Levitt, at the age of forty-nine, was beginning to think that he had always been too humble in the estimate he had made of his own cleverness. In fact, he was actually beginning to believe that it was himself who was clever and then Rose a long way behind. (The Beacon II/7:13)

Levitt denies his own vanity and desire, clinging to the now absurd assertion that Rose is a good salesman because he is a religious man: "Every Sunday since he has been here

I've seen him in church," Levitt tells his wife, "And his department, in that short time, is doing fifty percent more business." The power of Rose's auto-eroticism over the bourgeoisie suggests that narcissism, not a concern for religion or breeding, governs the ruling class.

Levitt negotiates or sublimates his own desire for Rose through his son, who cements the father's relationship with Rose by becoming Rose's lover. The pattern parallels the fairy tale or business deal in which the king gives his daughter as a prize to a young man he especially esteems or a business man marries his daughter to a man he wishes to make a partner in business. Levitt virtually forces his son to accept Rose as an admirer. When Levitt's son first meets Rose, he is eleven years old and takes an instant dislike to Rose, who shows him special attention. Levitt summarily dismisses Richard's initial dislike for Rose and both parents "agreed that Rose was having a splendid influence over the boy and encouraged the relationship as much as possible" (The Beacon II/7:14). The parents encourage Rose's apparent infatuation with their son; they are the most "amused" by Rose's gesture of dancing with Richard at the first cocktail party they invite him to. They see nothing untoward when Richard returns from his frequent walks with Rose, "red in the face, his clothes all covered with sweethearts and wet through with perspiration..." (14). When Richard reports that he likes Rose because Rose "kissed and fondled him until his tiredness had all disappeared," "the parents would laugh feeling happy in their knowledge of the fact that a man like Rose was so fond and kind to their little boy"(14). The Father has so internalized Rose's superiority that he views Rose's friendship with his son as evidence, "that boy must have something in him... For a man like Rose to be so attentive to him"(14). Ultimately, however, Levitt is "very proud" of Rose's relationship with Richard because Richard is an extension of Levitt. Levitt experiences Rose's desire and love for Richard as Rose desiring Levitt himself. Mendes makes this explicit using

Richard's nickname, "Dick," a slang word by 1891 for penis: "At Christmas table Mr. Levitt told Elizabeth how pleasing it was to have people notice that Rose was fond of their Dick"(16). This sentence positions the son as the father's penis and suggests that the father experiences Rose's kisses and fondling through his son. Thus, though Mendes positions Rose as the desired woman, Rose leads the heterosexual patriarch to place himself in the passive position of the desired woman. In this way Rose is not emasculated, though he is effeminate.

Rose becomes the most desirable man at the highest social level in Trinidad. He seduces the rest of Trinidad with the same techniques he employed with Levitt. All men accept his superiority and respect him as the greatest speech maker among them; all eligible women want to marry him; the governor consults with him. No one has more power than Rose. His effeminate seductiveness even renders him immune to scandal. People gossip behind his back, but no one drops him from the social calendar when he is arrested for carousing with Afro-Caribbean men in drag. Levitt is so infatuated with Rose that he accepts Rose's explanation that it had been "a lark"(16) and asserts that he "used to do the same thing myself, when I was his age"(16). Mrs. Levitt is disturbed not so much by the transvestism, which she notices, but by Rose's willingness to fraternize with "ordinary coloured men." High society attacks Rose not for homosexuality but asserts "that he must have some 'low' blood in him to go spreeing about the town with coloured men"(17). Though, "anybody else...behaving in that fashion would immediately be boycotted by society...[Rose] escaped scot free"(17). Mendes here ridicules the Trinidad's upper class society for being so concerned with color, that they are blind to homosexuality which ostensibly undermines their patriarchal heterosexual ideology.

Mendes's full ridicule of the "degenerate" morality of the upper class occurs with Rose's death and Levitt's viewing of his effects, which include "snaps, taken by

sunlight, as well as flashlight, of naked young men and boys, in varying stages of erotic excitement” of which “at least a dozen of them were of young Richard, Levitt’s son”(17). Levitt must then see that he and his son have been seduced by the best salesman on two legs and that what made Rose such a strong salesman was a homosexual seductiveness. These photographs complete the economy of visual pleasure. The scandal is that Levitt’s son has been physically penetrated and that he has been made into a spectacle for visual pleasure, a feminized and sexual object.

In “Snapshots” suggests not only that the strongest form of masculinity is homosexual but that the capitalist economy of exchange is influenced by homoerotic desire; Rose’s salesmanship of self functions as a type of homosexual prostitution. In showing that bourgeois culture encourages homosexuality and prostitution, Mendes defines the bourgeois class as doubly degenerate. Mendes seems to achieve this critique without vilifying Rose or homosexuality. Mendes, for instance, emphasizes the humor in Rose’s affair with Levitt’s son, not its immorality. Yet, ultimately the logic of Mendes’s critique is rooted in his assumption that homosexuality is abnormal. If it weren’t in some way “bad” or degenerate to be homosexual, what would the harm be in Levitt’s and Trinidad society’s latent homosexuality? The English standard of masculinity remains intact.

In his nine-part series of travel essays, Jean de Boissiere extends The Beacon’s discussion of homosexuality by employing homosexuality and homoeroticism to contest the local bourgeoisie’s identification with a strong, European domestic ideal of masculinity by depicting both creole and European masculinities as often governed by homoerotic desire. His journey from northern Europe to the Mediterranean brings together three traditions of travel: colonial conquest of the Americas, homoerotic tourism to Mediterranean, and depression vagabondage.

As a travel narrative written by a creole about Europe, de Boissiere’s text

positions itself as a “writing back” against European travel narratives of the new world, a stepping into and a reversing of the footsteps of Columbus, James Anthony Froude and Charles Kingsley. The exigencies of creole travel invert the ideal and the European model. As de Boissiere informs us early on in his journey: “It is far more interesting to travel through a country leisurely, but with no money this is impossible at all times. For, having no money, the quicker you go the more comfortable you are”(II/ 2: ). De Boissiere, a white and therefore distant cousin of the inter-racial R.A.C. de Boissiere, came from one of the most prominent French creole families; his assumption of the position of a poor man, no doubt is an insult to that family and the reputation of the upper class French creoles in an of itself. But it is precisely this poverty that adds grandeur to his travel, transforming the journey across the oft-traveled European landscape into a classic voyage of discovery. De Boissiere suggests this transformation in his introductory comments:

To enter a country for the first time with no previous knowledge of its people or language ... holds definite thrill. But to enter such a country, entirely lacking the wherewithal to pay one's way, or even for the simple necessities of life, holds something more than that definite thrill. It gives the feeling of an adventure into the Great unknown - a sensation such as Columbus and Marco Polo must have experienced! (The Beacon II/1:22)

For de Boissiere, Europe becomes the new world at the time of conquest and Europeans in the position of Amerindians. De Boissiere's traveling partner is Irish -- their partnership in poverty indicates a link between the colonized people of Ireland and of Trinidad.

De Boissiere complicates this reversal of the colonial model by inserting it into one of the central travel narratives of gay European history (Aldrich *passim*, e.g. 4).

Robert Aldrich traces a lineage of northern European intellectuals who traveled to the Mediterranean in search of the history of “manly love” in classical antiquity and contemporary sexual freedom from the more stringent anti-homosexual mores and laws in the Northern countries (99). This included well-known figures from Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Byron and Shelley, to Oscar Wilde and E.M. Forster. The Mediterranean evoked the erotic in the English imagination (Aldrich 69). In its erotic and sexually objectifying fantasies, the northern European construction of the Mediterranean paralleled Europe’s vision of its colonies. English Victorians identified Africa and the Mediterranean as zones of homosexuality (Sedgwick 183).<sup>117</sup> Finally, de Boissiere participated in an international culture of vagrants rendered jobless and homeless by the depression. That de Boissiere as a white creole joins the ranks of working class vagabonds suggests an association, a common ground between (white) creoles as a colonized people and the working classes of Europe. Their participation in the vagabond culture of the depression indicates that this “hybridity” of de Boissiere’s narrative enables him to make an international critique that sees European fascism and colonialism as parts of one international capitalist system of labour exploitation.

Gender and sexuality – the keystones of domesticity – are central to de Boissiere’s critique of colonialism. He parodies the late 19th-century English logic that Afro-Caribbeans required colonial rule because their men were weak and their women strong. By appropriating Froude’s description of the burdened Jamaican market women and the “lazy” men, riding leisurely on donkeys at the women’s side. Observing a parallel scene in Germany, de Boissiere shows that, men are weak and lazy and women industrious and overburdened:

---

<sup>117</sup> In reference to Sir Richard Burton, Eve Sedgwick writes, “the most exploratory of Victorians drew the borders of male homosexual culture to include exclusively, and almost exhaustively, the Mediterranean and the economically exploitable Third World”(183).

In Baden-Baden we saw a simple, but striking example of the older German's attitude towards his woman folk.... In front of us were three women all heavily laden with bags, boxes, chairs, and all other things people think necessary for the full enjoyment of a day in the forest. A little in advance of these women, who looked like packhorses, strove the magnificent and all-powerful male, unencumbered, and conducting his train by flourishing his climbing stick!(II/1:23).

Yet de Boissiere does not represent the transgression of European, middle class gender roles as a sign of the political and moral degeneracy of Europe. Instead he treats the exploitation of women as inherent to normative gender roles, which he defines as so many "straight jackets." In Capri, the famous gay resort, he finds "the men and women in the most amazing clothes, the women nearly all wore trousers and the men all but skirts." Rather than praise this reversal of roles, he asks that the cross-dressers liberate themselves from gender roles all together,

If only they had looked as if they were accustomed to what they had on and as free from convention as they pretended to be. But on the faces of each one was the expression of a man who had but a week or two to live. In a week or so all of them would be back in London, Paris, or Berlin, back in their everyday straight jackets pretending to be anything but what they really were" (III/3:57).

De Boissiere's world of the creole traveler is a male world: the economy of exchange, the means of survival, the gaze of desire all operate along a seamless continuum of homosociality, homosexuality, and homoeroticism. Unlike heterosexual male colonizers who made the sexual conquest of indigenous women part and parcel of discovery, de Boissiere's adventure in Europe is accompanied by a series of sensual relationships with European men. De Boissiere never explicitly states the physical or

romantic quality of these encounters, but the experiences he relates fit a long established pattern of representing homosexuality implicitly through male-bonding and comradeship: "The situations or images so coded were those in which male nudity, male-bonding or intimate friendships could be presented: the camaraderies of all-male boarding school, ships or military barracks, for example, or places overseas where usual norms of deportment were relaxed or puritanical mores suspended"(Aldrich 7). They were often unnoticed by readers not "initiated or interested" in homosexuality (Aldrich 7). Because de Boissiere was known to be homosexual, these references may have been quite clear to many readers.<sup>118</sup> Traveling alone to Naples, for instance, de Boissiere asks an agricultural worker for grapes. The man gives him "the largest and blackest grapes I had ever seen" and then takes de Boissiere "to the beach where we stripped and plunged gaily into the water. We swam for hours in that sensuous sea"(II/11:11). De Boissiere then spends the night in the man's small house. The gift of sensuous grapes accompanied by the naked swimming indicates an intimacy as if it is not the sea alone that is sensuous but the relationship between the men. This suggestion becomes stronger when we place de Boissiere's text in a tradition gay male travelers to the Mediterranean, who viewed Mediterranean men as beautiful and open to sexual involvement with men (Aldrich 4). These relationships often involved intellectual or bourgeois Northern men taking working class Mediterranean men as lovers. De Boissiere's encounter with a peasant fits this inter-class model. Yet as a citizen of colonized Trinidadian, de Boissiere was also a "southerner" -- his southern, colonized identity complicates the class relations of this model.

---

<sup>118</sup> De Boissiere's homosexuality was so well known in Trinidad that "his notoriety had spilled over into most of the other islands in the Caribbean before he quit Trinidad for a protracted sojourn in the U.S.A."(Mendes "Writing -- Trinidad" 91). The playfulness of these essays indicate that they predate de Boissiere's malicious and notorious days.

De Boissiere repeatedly describes such relationships. In Naples, he joins a group of young German men. Together, they eat sensual “ripe figs” and swim naked - - “occasionally taking a dip in the surf”(II/11:11-12). De Boissiere alerts us to the beauty of their naked bodies: “I am sure,” he writes, “we cut a much better figure on that beach with our lean hardened bodies than all the fat husks, with the gay awnings and silks that enclosed them.” He becomes an honorary member of the Neureuterbund, a German youth organization. He travels with this organization to Capri, perhaps the most famous homosexual tourist spot in Italy (Aldrich 125-34). One of its leaders takes an intense interest in de Boissiere, desiring his company so much that he asks de Boissiere “to return to Germany with him when they returned from Egypt”(III/3:56); he would then circulate between Weimar Germany and Egypt, both sites associated with male homosexuality.

In fact, de Boissiere and his traveling companion Bushy employ their sexual attractiveness to men as a means of survival. De Boissiere humorously describes an instance in which he and Bushy endure the advances of two older gay men in exchange for transport and probably other material assistance:

We were given a lift almost from the Austro-German frontier to Innsbruck. The two men in the car were obviously homosexuals. I sat in front and did not have any truck or trouble with my host. The man in the back seat with Bushy looked about forty but was very probably more, since he seemed to have been made up for the front row of a male chorus instead of a drive through the country. He said he was a Viennese actor, and certainly looked it.

Every time I turned around I could see Bushy glancing at me with horrible looks of repulsion on his face, for the man kept stroking his leg and making other advances to him. (II/4:27)

Though he presents the men in a comic light, de Boissiere, defends homosexuality, telling Bushy “that intolerance of such things and people, apart from being an expression of what Oscar Wilde calls ‘the supreme vice of stupidity’ was very impractical on such a trip as ours, since the more cultured type of homosexual was liable to be most sympathetic and of great help to us”(II/4:27).

De Boissiere’s homoerotic gaze intensifies his attack on colonialism. Rather than sexualizing the European woman, which de Boissiere’s narrative would have done if it had taken a heterosexual view of Europe, de Boissiere’s homoerotic lens places the colonizing male in the position occupied by indigenous women in narratives of discovery and conquest. The relationship between the narrator/observer and the viewed European male parallels the dynamic of power and visual pleasure Laura Mulvey describes in heterosexual, patriarchal Hollywood films. In Mulvey’s model, the gaze of the male character, the camera, and the audience constitute a “determining male gaze” that “projects its phantasy onto the female figure.” The gaze is scopophilic, taking pleasure in the act of looking. In de Boissiere’s text, men are the objects of sexualized and dominating gazes; and the European male/colonizer is disempowered, “coded for strong visual and erotic impact,” reduced to a “sexual object”(589). The colonial subject takes erotic pleasure in beholding the European male. In Germany we see, “peasants at work, tilling and breaking the soil and reaping the harvest, their powerful sunburnt bodies naked to the waist”(II/I:22) and “the body of the body at its highest pitch” in a Munich gymnasium “full of young men or nearly all young. Their naked bodies show wonderful proportions and splendid development...”(II/2:29).<sup>119</sup> In Rome, de Boissiere points explicitly to a homoerotic tradition in art when he finds a beautiful youth an appropriate model for Michelangelo, the “adorer at the shrine of

---

<sup>119</sup> The image participates in a convention of representing the peasant and athlete as objects of homoerotic desire (Aldrich 7).

physical beauty in young men.” (II/8:13)<sup>120</sup>

De Boissiere’s obsession with men in uniform illustrates that his homoerotic gaze is also a form of political resistance. In Austria, de Boissiere comments, “had this been a conventional travel-article, I would attempt to describe the glorious valley through which winds the river Inn. Instead,” because he is a creole, traveling with too little money to travel up the valley or to visit the inn, he “shall describe the magnificent uniform of the Austrian policeman.” This suggests that his series of erotic descriptions of policemen derives not only from the homosexual convention of eroticizing men in uniform but from de Boissiere’s position of powerlessness as poor man and a creole. He mockingly links the policeman to bygone empire, defining his uniform as “one of the few things that remain to remind one that Austria was, until recent years, the heart of that great and powerful empire of which a great statesman of the last century remarked that it was neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an empire.” De Boissiere employs an eroticizing gaze to disempower and feminize the policeman and through him imperial power:

Can you imagine one’s surprise on seeing a policeman directing traffic while standing on a pedestal in the middle of the road, attired in white leather breeches encasing a magnificent pair of muscular limbs like a glove, his torso covered by a braided green jacket complete with golden epaulettes. At this side hangs a large and imposing sword. His boots, of black patent leather, glitter like two solid masses of black diamonds, and on his head rests a helmet of burnished brass, surmounted by a white plume”(II/4:27-28).

The pedestal meant to enhance the police man’s power and visibility renders

---

<sup>120</sup> Wilde referred to Michelangelo as a homosexual in his defense of homosexuality (Aldrich 89); De Boissiere’s earlier reference to Wilde’s caution against homophobia suggests that de Boissiere is also referencing Wilde here.

him a sexual spectacle. In the spectacle of the splendid police costume, de Boissiere sees the opportunity to deconstruct the power of empire by repositioning its figure head, as the object of the colonial's erotic gaze -- displaying his body parts individually and sexually. First de Boissiere describes the man's thighs in sexual terms as "a magnificent pair of limbs" whose magnificence is enhanced by the precision of their display in glove-tight white breeches. His chest, again an erotic part of the body, is described as decorated, with "braided green" and jeweled with golden epaulettes. De Boissiere externalizes his penis in the form of a "large and imposing sword" and his black leather boots seem fetishized, transformed through de Boissiere's gaze from the threatening tools of power into the combination of masculine strength "solid masses" and feminine jewels, "black diamonds." With his arc of white plume spewing forth from his helmet, the policeman seems to be a penis personified, a mockery of the phallic power of empire. Once dissected into individual sexualized parts, the highly decorated, peacock-like policeman is empty of authority and out of place in a country of impoverished people. De Boissiere's poverty and anti-capitalist politics lead him to highlight the gross discrepancy between the proletariat and the figure representing bourgeois and imperial power. "Really magnificent," de Boissiere comments, "but oh, so terribly incongruous beside the poverty-stricken people who pass him at his post!" (II/4:27).

In Italy, de Boissiere even more clearly employs a homoerotic description of the police to invert their relation to the colonized other. De Boissiere fears the fascists because he is essentially a beggar; in Verona, he "would not go in a mile of the police, of which there must have been a hundred different varieties." Yet, in great detail, he describes "the *Carabinieri* [who] were the most attractively garbed" of all the many types of policemen. He reduces the policeman's power by describing his uniform as "tight-fitting trousers" which display the man's thighs. Asserting that their uniforms

are designed “rather in the manner of the soldier in the Opera La Tosca,” he presents the uniform as a costume, and the officers’ masculinity, a performance. Once their masculinity is reduced to a suggestively sexual opera costume, the fascist *Carabinieri* no longer seem so dangerous. The homoerotic gaze thus has the power within the travel narrative to counteract the military masculinity of fascism. In de Boissiere’s narrative, the position of gazing thus does not derive from a position of power as Mulvey suggests; rather it transforms de Boissiere’s relative weakness – his poverty and creole identity – into a position of power. The homoerotic gaze appears to function as a form of resistance in a way parallel to and perhaps imitative of enslaved people’s use of the gaze as a form of resisting slavery. In plantation society, the politics of looking were clear cut: slaves were not permitted to stare directly at white people because such a stare claimed an equality, claimed an agency slavery by definition denied. This politics of looking outlived slavery, and, as a creole and member of a planter family, de Boissiere would have been quite familiar with them.

De Boissiere fills his world with a multiplicity of gazes and gazers. Though his gaze sexually objectifies and thus disempowers the policeman, he often is sexually objectified himself. The first person to objectify de Boissiere is the indigent German man, who listens to and observes de Boissiere in order to determine whether de Boissiere will be willing to provide accommodation in exchange for sex. In contrast, wealthier gay men gaze on de Boissiere and offer him transport and assistance in exchange for his attractive physical person. The multiple meanings of looking, that the privilege of looking may reflect the entrenched position of power of the state or that it may constitute a form of resistance against the state, that it may be a means of pleasure, or a reflection of powerlessness suggests that de Boissiere’s text destabilizes the patriarchal, linear hierarchy of power, the equation between looking and power.

If we borrow from Mulvey’s model, in which the audience stands in the same

position to the displayed woman as the male observer within the film, we see that de Boissiere places the reader in his position, that of the homoerotizing gaze (590). Because many upper class Trinidadians read The Beacon, de Boissiere places the morally upright colonial bourgeois readership in the position of the observer with homoerotic desires -- a position fundamentally antagonistic and abhorrent to their heterosexual, Europe-emulating identity. But sexually desiring the colonizer, as de Boissiere does, and desiring to be like the colonizer, as the colonial bourgeoisie does, may not constitute opposing positions. In her introduction to Identification Papers, Diana Fuss argues that Freud constructs an artificially impermeable distinction between identification and desire with the result of pathologizing homosexuality. Rather, Fuss asserts, desire and identification often blur (11).<sup>121</sup> In placing Trinidad's white bourgeoisie in the position of desiring the colonizer, de Boissiere's text may reveal the proximity of the bourgeoisie's idealizing mimicry of English masculinity to homoerotic desire.

Underlying de Boissiere's criticism of the colonial bourgeoisie is a more fundamental criticism of international capitalism. The strongest evidence of the failure of the capitalist system is that it has reduced many "normal" skilled workers into such poverty that they regularly prostitute themselves. In the Stuttgart train station, de Boissiere and Bushy are approached by "a youth of about eighteen...tall, well made, handsome, and essentially masculine young man" who in exchange for one night's accommodations "did not mind what we demanded of him"(II/1:23). He explained that "there were hundreds of thousands of young men in the same position as himself." From this de Boissiere concludes that male prostitution and unemployment are testimony to the failure of capitalism:

---

<sup>121</sup> Fuss writes, "for Freud, desire for one sex is always secured through identification with the other sex; to desire and to identify with the same person at the same time is, in this model, a theoretical impossibility"(11).

That such vast numbers of young, healthy, intelligent and highly capable men should have to stoop to mendiancy and prostitution in order to live, does not suggest a very high standard of political, economic and moral codes imposed upon the peoples of the nations of the Earth under the capitalist system. (II/1:23)

The beautiful young German who prostitutes himself for housing stands in a parallel position to two creole figures: de Boissiere, the hobo who uses gay men's attraction to him as a means of facilitating his travels; and the Afro-Trinidadian women of yard fiction who due to lack of adequate pay and job opportunities, used sexual relations with men for financial support, particularly to pay the rent. These women are the central figures of Yard fiction and a common theme in Calypso because the world depression had forced an increasing number of Trinidadian women into prostitution to supplement or substitute for their wages.

## Conclusion

The Beacon's appropriation and transformation of European discourses of domesticity and degeneracy effectively critique the colonial bourgeoisie and English discourse itself by blurring the distinctions between white and non-white, the upper and the lower classes. In "Boodhoo," Henry Lawrence's child may or may not be white. In "Brotherly Love," the upper class white woman, Doria, proves to be no different from the stereotype of working class black street women. Blurring these distinctions constitutes a significant challenge to the status quo because the power of English discourse and of Trinidad's white bourgeoisie depended on them.

The strategy is, however, limited in two significant ways. First, its very subject matter restricted the people who could participate in it. It is no accident that only white male authors wrote stories about the immorality and degeneracy of the local elite.

Both the Afro-Caribbean and the Indo-Caribbean middle classes were educated and could have participated in The Beacon, but they defined themselves and competed for power by assimilating English domestic values of housewifery and marriage. This was especially the case for Indo-Trinidadians in the 1920's and 1930's as they established themselves as a legitimate Trinidadian community in the aftermath of indentureship which legally ended in 1921. The Sita ideal of womanhood, which closely paralleled the English model of domestic womanhood, was adopted by the Indian community (Reddock Women, Labour, and Politics 61). Just as the Indian middle class is most invested in domestic ideology, The Beacon decides to attack the oppression of Trinidadian society by attacking domestic ideology.

For white women and people of color to write about incest, adultery, and homosexuality meant risking their social status. Yet this is precisely why men like Gomes and Mendes rejected respectability – because it perpetuated the rigid and exploitative class system. Thus, the very strategy The Beacon adopted to challenge racial division restricted the ethnic diversity of the journal, limiting it to white and Afro-Caribbean men who were fairly immune to moral attack and to a few white women, like Greig, whose social position was so established that her feminist writing could not injure her socially.

The fiction of white degeneracy is also limited by its strategy of inversion. Though it redefines who is degenerate and translates the discourse of degeneracy from the language of race science to that of class, it retains the terms and definitions of English discourse. With the exception of Jean de Boissiere's work, homosexuality and promiscuity continued to be considered abnormal. The Beacon's stories about the degeneracy of the ruling class thus fail to effectively challenge the colonial, patriarchal hegemony because they operate within the hegemonic discourses of degeneracy and domesticity. The Beacon's fiction reforms these discourses but it doesn't break out of

them. No matter how humorously displayed, no matter how playfully toyed with, homosexuality and inter-racial sexual freedom remain signs of degeneracy as they do in European theories of white degeneracy in the tropics.

Yet The Beacon did exceed the limitations of a politics of inversion in at least two respects. Most importantly, The Beacon's insistence on the naturalness or acceptability of women's sexual desire challenged white patriarchal constraints on white female sexuality and the dichotomy colonial discourse made between white and Afro-Caribbean womanhoods. Finally, de Boissiere's travel narrative goes beyond a critique of inversion by rejecting gender roles altogether. Further, the multiplicity of gazers and gazes in his text appears to upset the model of visual pleasure and power relations in a heterosexual and patriarchal system. His travel narrative is not just an inversion of Columbus's journey; it merges anti-colonial, queer, and class perspectives, enabling de Boissiere to critique international capital through an implicit comparison of the exploitation of workers in Europe and in the British West Indies. Set in Europe and concerned with Europeans, de Boissiere's narrative, however, doesn't present an image of Trinidad or address ethnic division within the working classes or within Trinidad as a whole. This is the work of yard fiction, which would pose the most effective weapon against the bourgeoisie by rendering Trinidad's national identity in the image of urban, poor, and sexually transgressive women.

## Chapter 6: Douglas in the Yard: Creolization in Trinidadian Yard Fiction

She was a black woman, too black to be pure negro, probably with some Madrasi East Indian blood in her, a suspicion which was made a certainty by the long thick plaits of plentiful hair. She was shortish and fat, voluptuously developed, tremendously developed.... But for the last nine weeks she had been 'in derricks', to use Celestine's phrase. First of all the tram conductor who used to keep her... had accused her infidelity and beaten her. Neither the accusation nor the beating had worried Mamitz. To her and her type those were minor incidents of existence; from their knowledge of life and men, the kept woman's inevitable fate. (C.L.R. James "Triumph" 1929)

Anybody could see that he was a *dougl*: in other words, that one of his parents was an East Indian the other a negro. His black hair, long and curly, clustered about his head in a great tangle. The electric lights shone upon his chocolate-brown face, giving it a bronze appearance. The grey suit he wore, with tie and socks to match, was a present from Mamitz. Indeed, everything Seppy owned had been given him by Mamitz.... The only condition tacitly exacted by the woman from the man in the bargain of his becoming her sweetman was that he should be faithful to her... Seppy had always, because of his dislike for work, tried his best to observe his part of the bargain. (Alfred Mendes "The Sweetman" 1931)

In 1929, the Barrack yard was, as C.L.R. James explains in his story "Triumph," simply Trinidadian for "slum." Trinidadians identified the yard with the Afro-Trinidadian underclass or Jamette culture of 19th-century carnival and calypso. It was not yet seen, as it is today, as the space in which Trinidad's national culture was formed through a creolization of Asian, African, and European Trinidadian cultures, producing carnival, calypso, soca, chutney soca and the literature of the yard. In the 1920's and 1930's, Port of Spain's yards were rows of rooms, often formed by partitions that did not reach the ceiling; residents shared the yard, a stand pipe, a toilet, a rock pile for laundry, and each other's business. The yard was in crisis -- and with it Trinidadian society as a whole. By 1929, 33% of Port of Spain's population were yard residents, by 1937, 50% were (Singh Race and Class 112-113). Yards were not neatly tucked away in one or two sections of the city; they were scattered among middle class dwellings throughout much of the city because their residents worked as domestic servants for middle class families (Pearse 190-2). Their proximity, ill-health,

immorality, and violence posed a threat to the middle and ruling class. This crisis of urban slums had many causes: the precipitous drop in agriculture prices, a post-WWI depression, the Great Depression, and Port-of-Spain's position as a regional center of employment, which attracted workers from British Guiana and the "smaller islands." Although "the Great Depression struck Trinidad with the power of an earthquake," the underlying cause of working class poverty was the colonial policy of maintaining a white minority in power and tolerating their extreme exploitation of workers (Mendes "Writing-Trinidad 1931-1933" 90; Singh Race and Class 68-69; 223).

The middle class writers of The Beacon made the urban Afro-Caribbean woman of the yard the central figure of their fiction, fashioning her image to their ideological purpose and accordingly altering her historical experience and her representation in English colonial texts. Their focus on poor women as representative of the yard reflects historical reality. Women were disproportionately represented among the "certified paupers" of Port of Spain, numbering 17, 013 out of 31,888 in 1935 (Singh 115). They suffered a disproportionate amount of unemployment. As a result of the loss of jobs after WWI, reorganization of sugar production and an intensification of domestic rhetoric, women virtually disappeared from the manual workforce between 1920 and 1937 (Reddock 47).

Yet The Beacon's rhetorical focus on working class black women goes beyond a reflection of historical reality. With few exceptions, most notably Kathleen Archibald, writers of yard fiction present a stereotype of underclass women as people whose object was not to find work but to find men to support them. Yard fiction denies the diversity of underclass women. In particular, it refuses the possibility that some working class women sought to assimilate domestic respectability. In so doing, yard fiction re-visions both Trinidad's history of strong and transgressive underclass women, and late-nineteenth century English accounts of the Caribbean.

The image of the yard woman reflects The Beacon's ambivalent relation to both colonial discourse and to the working class. On one hand, yard fiction challenges colonial discourse by showing that black working class women's inversion of the English domestic ideal results from English economic exploitation and not, as English discourses had for centuries asserted, from black women's intrinsic degeneracy and immorality or from the climate. The literary focus on the yard indicates that the Beacon group viewed the black working class, not the imitative elite, as the foundation of Trinidadian identity and culture. Perhaps, as Rohlehr asserts, they saw that "to liberate themselves, they would have to liberate the barefoot man, and that in order to find themselves they would have to come to terms with the so-called "Jamette" [underclass] class" (quoted in Sander 16; Rohlehr, Gordon. "The Development of the Calypso: 1900-1940"(unpublished manuscript), 1972: 27-28).

On the other hand, yard fiction expresses The Beacon's reluctance to envision a politically powerful working class. Beacon writers appropriate the anti-black argument of Froude and Kingsley that black men don't deserve the vote because they are subordinate to their women. They transform this argument, deploying it within the class context of Trinidad to feminize and emasculate the working class. In addition, intellectuals use yard fiction to carry on their battle against the bourgeoisie. In this respect images of the yard were not shaped by working class experience, but by the intelligentsia's assault on bourgeois respectability. The Beacon used yard fiction to articulate its position vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie in three important political debates: the definition of art, the debate over slum clearance and the introduction of divorce legislation. The image of the yard was thus shaped by two types of conflict: that between the intelligentsia and the working class and that between the intelligentsia and the conservative upper and middle classes. It carved out a space for the oppositional intellectual in the political future of the colony as it moved towards independence.

And, in fact, The Beacon's editor, Albert Gomes became a kind of de facto chief administrator in the colonial government during the transition period of the 1950s.

The focus on the Afro-Caribbean yard shaped early Trinidadian literature's presentation of creolization. The focus on Afro-Caribbeans severely restricted The Beacon's ability to represent the Indo-Trinidadian population and its interaction with Afro-Trinidadians. It reflects an unwillingness to represent inter-ethnic creolization, an inability to imagine breaking down the barriers between Indo- and Afro-Trinidad.<sup>122</sup>

To illustrate yard fiction's relationship to colonial discourse and to the working class, I would like to contrast C.L.R. James's short story, "Triumph" with Kathleen Archibald's story "Clipped Wings" and James's Cummings essay, "Barrack Rooms." Both James's "Triumph" and Kathleen Archibald's "Clipped Wings" appeared in the first issue of Trinidad in December 1929. James's depiction of yard women subordinates their poverty to the comic aspect of their sex lives. It flaunts morality and contrasts strongly with Archibald's grim vision of the yard as a place in which poverty destroys morality, motherhood, and childhood. This contrast illustrates the conflict within yard fiction over morality, and it illustrates that Trinidad and The Beacon's ability to contain contradiction can intensify its anti-colonial critique. Only together do these two brands of yard fiction construct the yard as the absolute opposite of the English ideal of womanhood -- inversions of both wifedom and motherhood. In its composite vision of the yard The Beacon plays out its politics of inversion with English domesticity and allows us to see the complex and ambivalent relationship of the intelligentsia to the working class .

---

<sup>122</sup> C.L.R. James's Minty Alley is probably an exception in that one of the central relationships in the novel is the relationship between an Afro-Trinidadian woman and her Indo-Trinidadian servant. However, James illustrates how false prejudice in the Afro-Trinidadian -- in this case through the obeah man -- destroys the relationship.

## “Clipped Wings”

Kathleen Archibald’s “Clipped Wings” insists, without the relief of humor, that women’s poverty transforms maternal love into physical abuse and destroys the morality of Trinidad’s future generations. For Archibald, the yard is defined by the absence of respectability: “Clipped Wings” takes place in a yard with “not one respectable house” – a phrase which must refer not only to the architecture of buildings, but to its inhabitants’ inability to adhere to the tenets of domesticity (82). The family in Archibald’s story consists of a self-supporting woman and her two children. No father is mentioned. Instead of a central adult male protagonist, Archibald presents a young child, Willy, who goes hungry, has but one set of clothes, can not afford school, and is beaten regularly, without explanation, by his mother. Archibald represents the beatings as a function of the mother’s hunger. Because she has only the food her employer provides for her breakfast with which to feed her children, she eats nothing and beats her children out of frustration. Archibald thus upholds the idea of mother-love – Willy’s mother sacrifices her own food for him, while she shows low wages transforming that love into physical abuse. The relationship between the mother and child becomes alienated; the child “thinks that his mother is unfair, cruel, and she that the child is stubborn”(84).

Poverty, Archibald suggests, destroys the future generation by alienating it from Christian values. Willy, for instance, comes to think of murder as a “good thing” because a man’s murder enables him to make money and to escape hunger. Coxi, a young woman in the yard, stabs a man who taunts her. For nights afterwards, the yard is a battlefield between those who support Coxi and others who support the man she stabbed. Willy assists in charging an entrance fee to spectators. Instead of feeling sadness and horror at the murder, Willy “looks at the money and thinks what a good

thing it is that Coxi killed Eddy”(7). Willy envies children with enough money for school clothes, not because they will receive an education but because they will get Christmas presents. For Willy, “Christmas is to fight and drink rum” not a time of family gathering, of religious significance, or of presents (7). When he watches men fighting in a film, he screams, “Ay, Ay, all you making love”(7).

Set within the context of 1929 Port-of-Spain, “Clipped Wings” illustrates the consequences of colonial policy and exploitation – the refusal of the local elite to pay a living wage and the decision of colonial government not to establish a legitimate minimum wage. The details we are given, the low wages, the long hours of work and the provision of food, suggest that Willy’s mother is a domestic servant, a figure that reflected the urbanization and the removal of women from public sector jobs. Archibald presents her abuse of her children not as a result of her personal immorality or laziness or even of racial inferiority but as a result of poverty caused by insufficient pay. In this way, Archibald points to the employer class as responsible. Low wages were a critical political issue at the time. The Wage Advisory boards of 1920 and 1935 used the opportunity to establish an artificially low standard for wages rather than to insure adequate income for workers (Singh Race and Class 38-40).<sup>123</sup>

The exploitation of workers produced the wealth of the ruling class, permitting it to have a life of bourgeois respectability, binary and complementary gender roles, educated children, and a leisured class of women. Thus, the yard with its working

---

<sup>123</sup> Minimum wage legislation was doubly ineffectual because it applied to neither domestic servants nor to agricultural labor, and though it refused the concept of a family wage for men, it justified lower wages for women on the grounds they did not need to support a family (Reddock Women, Labour and Politics 66). Trinidad’s legislative council postponed the implementation of British legislation allowing the government to intervene in the case of artificially low wage from 1931 to 1935 when they set up a Wages Advisory Committee that recommended very low wages (Singh Race and Class 119-23). Finally, the government refused to instate even that legislation.

population was one foundation on which the upper class built its respectability; its lack of respectability enabled the respectability of the ruling class. The power of yard fiction lay in exposing this falseness in the domestic virtue of the Trinidad bourgeoisie.

In attributing the yard's lack of morality to economic exploitation, Archibald nevertheless upholds the standards of British domesticity by showing the devastating results that occur when it is absent. For Archibald, that children have grown accustomed to hearing and seeing sexual intercourse is a sign of the degradation of the yard. She comments that "love is being made in the gateways and because of this a man and a woman quarrel and fight.... Those in the barracks who hear are not disturbed in the least. Why should they be? They themselves have experienced the same thing before..."(4).

A yard resident himself, Beacon writer James Cummings supports Archibald's view that immorality is the great evil of the yard in his " Barrack Rooms," a documentary essay on the yard (21-22). Cummings describes physical conditions of the barrack rooms – their small size, the poor conditions of the walls and roofs, the roaches and rodents, the resulting deterioration of people's possessions, the dirt, the stench, the lack of privacy, the harassment by sanitary inspectors, the exploitation by landlords, the absence of places for children to play and inadequate garbage disposal. As a result, he holds, a class of people wears the yard experience on their faces – "an expression of care worn fatigue." For Cummings, however, the greatest harm is the gambling and prostitution and the most seriously threatened person is the young girl, whose virtue is vulnerable in an environment, where "prostitution is born and here, too, prostitution flourishes"(22). Thus, for Cummings the most serious consequence of the barrack yard is its corruption of young girls, its destruction of respectability. At least, these provide the most compelling symbol to present his middle and upper class audience.

Archibald, a white creole woman, and Cummings, an Afro-Trinidadian male of the lower middle class, represented the poverty and disorder of the yard in the language of middle class morality and respectability that appealed to The Beacon's primarily middle and upper class readership. They did so in an effort to transform the yard by forcing this readership, many of whom had the franchise, to improve the conditions of the yard. These stories contributed to a contemporary political debate on slum clearance. Cummings defends his description of the barrack rooms against a planter's assertion that the barrack yard is not of interest to the "cultured public," by arguing that it is necessary to represent the squalor of the yard in order to improve it: by what other means, he asks, "must such an abominable and disgraceful evil as the barrack room be alleviated and brought to the interesting standard of our beautiful valleys, beaches, and mist-capped mountains?" (The Beacon I/8:21). Even the more comic yard stories were read as exposés of the conditions in the barrack yards at least by the readers of The Labour Leader, the paper of the Trinidad Workingman's Association, which took a pro-Garvey stance. One letter defends C.L.R. James's "Triumph" on the grounds that "fact and not figments of the imagination have been disclosed." The reader reports that James's representation of the yard serves as a "scathing indictment of our present social organization which stands self-convicted of the barrenness of their enterprise" (The Labour Leader 1 February 1930:13).

### "Triumph"

Despite their shared condemnation of the exploitation of Trinidad's working classes and an association with The Beacon, Archibald and James could not have espoused more antithetical views of sex and life in the yard. The Beacon's format allowed these two visions of the yard to coexist and to illustrate the conflicting and ambiguous relations of the middle class writers to their working class subject. Yet we

must be careful not to conflate the two positions -- or to ignore the contradictions and confusions each reflected and generated.

With its focus on the sex lives and rivalry of black yard women, its stone pile for bleaching, its smelly toilet, and its humor, James's "Triumph" stands as a blue print for yard fiction of the lighter, more comic variety.<sup>124</sup> Its figures and plot will be reworked by most authors of yard fiction, most closely by Mendes in "Afternoon in Trinidad." "Triumph" focuses on three women Mamitz, Celestine, and Irene, all of whom take lovers for economic support. Having lost her keeper and unable to find work, Mamitz is destitute. She will be evicted shortly and depends on Celestine for food. In contrast to Archibald and Cummings, however, James does not belabor her poverty so much as he plays with the comic, highlighting not social disintegration but the sexual and economic rivalry between the women that results when Mamitz finds a new man. Mamitz views her new man with pragmatic eyes. A womanizing, loan shark, with a flare for clothing and rum, Popo des Vignes is at best a temporary source of economic assistance. She uses his cash to fatten up and to dress alluringly; as a result, she attracts a steady man, Nicholas, the butcher. The dilemma of the story then shifts from Mamitz's economic plight to her largely comic rivalry with Irene and her negotiation between two men, the attractive but fickle Popo, whom she desires, and the dull but solvent Nicholas, whom she needs. The climax of the story occurs when Irene reveals to Nicholas that Mamitz has been entertaining Popo in her room. Nicholas arrives in a rage just after Mamitz has cleared away all evidence of Popo's presence. To compensate for his rage and suspicions, Nicholas gives Mamitz all his money from

---

<sup>124</sup> Sander refers to "Triumph" is programmatic for the genre, featuring all the yard's stock literary figures: "the elderly black woman versed in the arts of obeah...[who] acts as everybody's *confidante*"; "the typical barrack yard heroine -- pretty, indolent fat"; "the trouble-making 'other woman'"; a loyal female friend, and two types of men, one flashy and fickle, the other dull but reliable (56-57).

the week, which she pins in all over her door and lords it over her.

With the exception of the two stories by Kathleen and Charles Archibald respectively, all yard fiction revolves around women's desire and need of men. "Afternoon in Trinidad" even takes the same details of plot as "Triumph." In it, the attractive and "ample" Corinne is without a keeper; she meets a very stylish but fickle man, Napoleon, and Queenie, another yard woman, attempts to take him from her. The significant difference is that "Afternoon in Trinidad" betrays the yard's history of violence and ends in a brawl and prison rather than a comic victory. In the fiction of James and Mendes, the representation of yard women is so formulaic that many characters share the same name. Mamitz is a main character in James's "Triumph," Mendes's novel Black Fauns and his short story "Sweetman"; Ethelrida similarly appears in both Black Fauns and "Sweetman."

Women's quest for men remains the central theme even in the short stories of C.A. Thomasos and Percival Maynard which featured more European characters and plots.<sup>125</sup> In Thomasos's "Douglu," the plot is simplified. Ketura has been abandoned by her man. Like Mamitz and Corinne she suffers from poverty. With her beauty and a red dress, she easily wins back her man at a dance. In Maynard's "Her Right of Possession" the heroine has a romantic attachment to her man. The story ends when she refuses to take a new lover and returns to the abusive Pedro, explaining to her friend, that she "couldn't give somebody else -w'at was his" (The Beacon I/12:8). Such romantic attachments are unthinkable in the yard fiction of Mendes and James, in which

---

<sup>125</sup> Reinhard Sander divides yard fiction into three varieties, James' and Mendes' fiction and novels which focus on the physical reality and human resilience of the yard; Percival Maynard's and C.A. Thomasos's short stories whose plots and figures seem more European; and finally Kathleen and Charles Archibald whose stories focus exclusively on the harsh conditions, abuse, and "immorality" of the yard (64).

women's economic dependence on men has eliminated romance.<sup>126</sup> Yet both types of yard fiction render women dependent on men whether emotionally or financially.

Yard women in their overt sexuality and their refusal of marriage resemble the frightening black woman figures of Victorian English travel writers. For these English writers, women's refusal to marry represented a refusal to accept subordination or "slavery" to a man and formed a linch pin in their argument that Afro-Caribbean men were not worthy of the franchise because they were incapable of subordinating their women. Yard fiction generally rewrites colonialist stereotypes by asserting that Afro-Trinidadian working women refuse marriage for two reasons: first, the working class as a whole is kept at a subsistence level by low wages and therefore can afford neither the expense of the ceremony nor the lifestyle associated with it. Second, Trinidadian women want sexual freedom. They reject the restriction of domestic womanhood and patriarchy. In Mendes's short story, "Her Chinaman's Way," the heroine's confidante, Philogen frames women's sexual independence as an issue of women's rights and equality with men. She advises Maria, "Gerl, you likes too much man. You carn' stick to one for longer dan you can help. But, perhaps you right. Man does go all about; I don' see why woman carn' go all about, too.... An' I don' blame you, for is time dey see dat us women got rights too" (107). Reinhard Sander observes, yard fiction did not represent yard women as exploited victims nor did it cast judgement on their sexual choices. Rather, Sander sees yard fiction as exposing women's loss of independence when they form marriage-like relations with men (57). Sexual freedom is the Beacon's political battle with the bourgeoisie; it was not necessarily a cause yard women endorsed. This insistence on women's right to sexual freedom is politically radical

---

<sup>126</sup> In the independent and pragmatic Maisy, James's Minty Alley presents the strongest counter example to this model of dependency, and even Minty Alley centers around female dependence on and rivalry over a man -- the competition between the Nurse and Ma Rouse for the sweetman Benoit.

within the context of bourgeois ideology and culture. But its significance vis-à-vis working class women's experience and the political role of the working class as a whole is much less straightforward.

James's Mamitz and other yard women resemble the strong sexually and economically independent women who so impressed English writers like Froude and Kingsley in their blackness, class status, their "volumptuous" largeness and free sexual behavior.<sup>127</sup> Yet on the pages of The Beacon, they lack the Victorian figures' power and autonomy. Mamitz is the Victorian strong black woman without the strength. Afro-Caribbean women impressed and threatened English men because they had the physical strength of men; they performed masculine roles as manual laborers, and, as family breadwinners, they enjoyed a sexual freedom European cultures barely allowed men and absolutely forbade respectable women. Mamitz is noted for her physical largeness, but that largeness is a fatness that connotes her sexual desirability not her masculinity or strength. "She was," James notes, "shortish and fat, voluptuously developed, tremendously developed, and as a creole loves development in a woman more than any other extraneous allure, Mamitz...saw to it when she moved that you missed none of her charms"(110). In both Mendes's "Afternoon in Trinidad" and Black Fauns, it is the fat woman who attracts men. Corinne, the heroine of "Afternoon in Trinidad" is "fat as a cow in the family way and as lazy and helpless as one. For all her nine years of womanhood -- she was now twenty-three -- she had depended upon men for her living and had never wanted for one because there's nothing your creole admires more in a woman than ample proportions"(1; quoted in Sander 56). Reinhard Sander cites fatness as one of the stereotypical characteristics of the desirable woman in yard fiction (56). In making women's largeness a sign of sexual desirability, yard

---

<sup>127</sup> In one of the versions of "Triumph" there is "voluptuous" is spelled "volumptuous" -- perhaps it is not a typo.

fiction transforms the masculinity of English images of Trinidadian women into a feminine, sexual characteristic.

Whereas Froude's black women are economically independent and physically industrious, Mamitz, Corinne and their peers are indolent and depend on men for their keep. Mendes repeatedly describes Corinne as "lazy," commenting that "she did her washing quietly, with the greatest economy of movement...when she didn't have any washing work to do,...she sat on her doorstep gazing into the yard and putting in a word only now and again" (2). Yard women's goal is not the respectable, male goal of economic independence but the dependent goal of finding a man to support them so that they do not have to work at all. This is the bone of contention in Mamitz's yard: she and Celestine are accustomed to being fully supported; Irene tries to sabotage out of envy because she must work as her man is married and can not fully support her. Women are even weaker in the stories of Percival Maynard. In "His Right of Possession," Vera feels she belongs to Pedro despite his abuse. In Maynard's "His Last Fling," Kezia is a figure of absolute weakness. After a brief "fling" during the Siparia fete with a Port of Spain man, Kezia is left pregnant. When Snakey returns the following year he finds her living in a shack, sick with an ailing infant, who is his child. Snakey ends up in prison after gambling her last 36 cents. Even the mother in Archibald's "Clipped Wings" who is economically independent is represented as a weak and depleted figure. Thus, while Froude saw women's sexual and economic independence as unnervingly masculine, yard fiction ironically removes that threat by placing women in a conventionally feminine or feminized position of concubine, prostitute, or victim. Their economic dependence and their leisure parallel that of upper class women. The main difference between the proper women and the women of yard fiction is wealth and the ritual of marriage. Here is an instance in which intellectuals weaken the working class with the same stroke that they attack the falseness of upper

class superiority based on respectability in the form of leisurely housewifery.

In confining the women of the yard to men's money and love, yard fiction doesn't only rewrite English stereotypes; it tames working class women's social and cultural history. Yard Fiction bases its characters not only on the contemporary yard of the post WWI depression, but on the notorious and vibrant yard of the second half of the 19th century, in which women played a central and often violent role. From the early 1860s until the 1884 Peace Preservation Ordinance, the underclass took on an increasingly powerful role in carnival (Rohlehr 213; Cowley 56-62). Yard fiction takes this underworld or *jamette* world for its subject: "it was the singers, drummers, dancers, stick men, prostitutes, matadors, bad-johns, dunois, makos and corner-boys, that is to say the *jamette* class, who dominated the Carnival of the day" (Pearse 192).<sup>128</sup> The *jamette* class often rebelled when their carnival was curtailed or refused permits. Cowley's description of one such rebellion as flaunting respectability suggests that the *Jamette* class appeared to embody the connection English discourse made between blackness and sexuality: "The *jamettes* were expressing 'solidarity without authority.' They represented revolt, obscenity (the flouting of taboos), fearlessness, and rejection.... Underlying these was an unstated but assumed association with African magic, the devil and devil power, and 'blackness'" (123-4).

As the leaders of fighting bands, as stick fighters in their own right, as cross-dressers, and even as singers, women played a central role in that violent and transgressive underworld culture.<sup>129</sup> Along with the tradition of violence and stick fighting, women and gender transgression defined carnival in this period. Although

---

<sup>128</sup> *Jamette*, Pearse explains, derives from *diamet*, *diametre*, below the diameter of respectable society. *Jamette* came to mean prostitute but in the context of 19th-century carnival, it referred to the whole underclass (Crowley 196).

<sup>129</sup> Women headed or were "queens" of fighting carnival bands; Cowley records seven during the Carnival of 1868 (59-60).

men were the primary stick fighters, women attended stick fighting and some women were renowned for their prowess. Their power correlated with an apparent inversion of English gender roles.

In the words of the contemporary reporter these women 'controlled the underworld', and by working-class standards, were often wealthy, well-dressed, kept 'sweetmen', and wore a great deal of gold and other jewellery. Rumour had it that they kidnapped and kept men, and that women fighters had to first prove their 'mettle' by beating their husband or man before being allowed to go on the road. (Reddock Women labour and Politics 80)

Gender transgression, particularly cross-dressing was also central to the jamette-dominated carnival of the late 19th century. The most noted was the *Pissenlit* for which the men dressed as menstruating women (Crowley 196). Crowley cites the conservative paper, The Port of Spain Gazette, from 1874 describing the indecency and gender transgressions of the yard: "As for the number of girls masked and in men's clothing, we cannot say how many hundred are flaunting their want of shame. As many men, also generally of the lowest order, are in like manner strutting about in female dress, dashing out their gowns as they go"(73).

The bourgeoisie strove to wrest control of carnival from the jamette class and to make Carnival compatible with bourgeois culture. By 1896, all masques that included violence or cross-dressing were restricted or forbidden (Crowley 132). With the sanitation and bourgeoisification of carnival, underclass women -- with their powerful, violent, and transgressive roles -- lost power and visibility. Rohlehr suggests, for instance, that men took over women's role as banter singers when stick fighting was outlawed in 1884 (213). However, strong and violent women of the underclass reappeared in the 1903 water riots and at other times in the early 20th

century (Cowley 161-2; 170). And they loomed large in the Trinidadian cultural memory as is indicated by The Beacon's publication of two essays recounting transgressive aspects of 19th century carnival -- Lewis O. Inniss's "Carnival in the Old Days" (The Beacon I/12 April 1932) and Joseph Belgrave's "Reflections on Carnival" (The Beacon II/1 May 1932 ).

Yard fiction's humorous sexual intrigues, even its victimized and exploited women in Archibald and Maynard's writing, obscure the power, the violence and transgressiveness of Jamette women. We see hints of this violence in the ending brawl in "Afternoon in Trinidad," a murder in Black Fauns, an attempted poisoning in C.A. Thomasos "A Daughter of Jezebel" (The Beacon II/9:7-9) and the reported case of woman knifing her man in F.V.S. Evan's "On a Time" (Trinidad I/1 (1929) 79-80). But yard fiction's prototypical heroines -- dependent, fat, lazy, and passive -- are hardly the powerful, stick-wielding, cross-dressing women of the jamette class. Yard fiction transferred the role of sexual and gender rebel, historically that of the jamette class, to the intellectual. In The Beacon, it is the male intellectual who bends gender and flaunts immorality in his stories though he does it in the relatively safe venue of fiction, not on the street as the barrack yard women of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Yet it is not only the yard's women that yard fiction tames but its stick fighting, bottle wielding, cross-dressing men. Whereas English travel narratives had portrayed yard women as the real men of the working class by depicting men as weak and irresponsible, yard fiction deprives of the yard of all real men by depicting it as a female space and emasculating its few male figures. In depicting non-working women's struggle to find lovers and domestic servants and freelance laundresses who were not part of the organized workforce, yard fiction gives the reader no sense of the organized and militant working class which had, despite much oppression, asserted itself since 1919 strikes. Though women participated, the 1919 strike movement grew out of the

male protests over the government's failure to compensate returning soldiers from the West Indian Regiment; its leadership and greater part of the strikers were male. Its feminization of the yard reflects The Beacon's reluctance to represent a militant and masculine working class as the central image of Trinidadian national identity. Rather, The Beacon employs its representation of the working class as feminine and apolitical to carve out a space for intellectuals, like Gomes, to play a central role in the political transition to independence.

Even the masculinity of the few men who do appear in yard fiction is compromised. The Yard was as barren of men who conformed to English definitions of masculinity as it was of models of domestic womanhood. In yard fiction, hard working men are needed but barely tolerated by their women. "Triumph"'s Mamitz and other yard women as Queenie and Corinne of "Afternoon in Trinidad" desire the extravagantly dressed man who breaks all rules of English manhood. Mamitz desires Popo des Vignes, who dresses fastidiously but gives "the impression that [he] is a man of pleasure rather than of work." James seems to fashion Popo in the image of England's negative stereotype of the lazy black man: he comments that Popo "is not fastidious as to how he makes his money, and will do anything that does not bind him down, and leaves him free of manual or clerical labour"(8). Worse than simply not working, as a usurer Popo exploits other people's industriousness. He lends money for 120% interest and preys on naive cocoa farmers, underpaying them for their crop. Like Popo, Mendes's Napoleon in "Afternoon in Trinidad" flaunts the English concept of masculinity. Napoleon is a womanizer of great beauty and strength. A stick-fighter, known for his ability to lift 240 pounds of sugar, he applies his strength to seducing women rather than to work. Though he has many children, he is not the responsible family patriarch. Rather he abandons his women and children; there are "three or four maintenance orders out against him and he had defaulted on all of them and the

mothers were mad looking about the town for him”(1). Rather than defining himself through industry, he refuses traditional work and makes a living by “slight-of-hand tricks with the cards.” On one hand, James and Mendes seem to consciously invert English ideas of manhood, that they must be parodying them, pointing to the irrelevance of English masculinity to the yard. Yet the men’s refusal to engage in the wage labour system does not seem to be presented, like women’s inability to marry, as a critique of ruling class exploitation. Their refusal of industry is never represented as a form of resistance or alienation from a system designed to emasculate working men by denying them enough money to be able to support their women and children.

The figure of the sweetman is the ultimate instance of Yard fiction’s inversion of English masculinity and suggests that it functions to emasculate the working class male rather than to protest the ruling class for oppressing working class men. The woman and her sweetman form a domestic unit that inverts the economic and power dynamics of the middle class married couple: the woman financially supports her sweetman, gaining prestige from the fact that he need not work and from the quality of the clothing and accessories she can buy for him. Like the married woman, who is responsible for ensuring the legitimacy of her husband’s offspring, the sweetman’s greatest and only responsibility is to remain sexually faithful to his woman. In “Sweetman,” Mendes describes the relationship between the sweetman, Seppy, a beautiful dougla and his Afro-creole keeper, Mamitz.

Sweetman, for him [Seppy], was a man kept entirely by a woman. Such a man never did any work, and the truth is that Seppy, though twenty-four at the time, had never done a stitch of work in his life. So far, because of his fine voice, attractive person and facility for dancing, women had kept him: had worked for him, had fed him, had clothed him and given him everything he wanted. (The Beacon I/7:2).

Seppy's sweetman masculinity clearly succeeds because many women desire to support him. But both the narrator and his companions suggest that his dependence on women has deprived him of his masculinity. The narrator indicates this weakness when he relates that Seppy is "afraid of her [Mamitz], especially when sober, so that, whenever out with her, to give him courage he would take a little more than was good for him" (The Beacon II/7:2). At a dance, Seppy drinks rum surreptitiously to avoid Mamitz's wrath, but his friend, Shorty tells him that "Everybody laughin' at you how you fraid you woman" -- as is evidenced both by Seppy's need for rum and his efforts to hide his drinking. Finally, Shorty challenges Seppy to prove his manhood, by claiming that Seppy doesn't have the courage to defy his woman -- "you ain' name man do dat" (The Beacon I/7:5). Seppy meets the challenge by dancing with a previous lover against Mamitz's wishes. Mamitz, however, proves that she is the man in the family, by taking a knife and cutting Seppy's clothes which she purchased, until he stands naked in the middle of the dance floor, "like a whipped puppy."

In claiming that women own and control men, yard fiction if anything intensifies Froude's assertion that black men do not deserve the vote because they can not rule their women. Though universal suffrage was not granted until after WWII, it was a live political issue in the twenties and thirties. The Trinidad Workingman's Association, the largest labor organization in Trinidad, campaigned for adult suffrage as part of its struggle for West Indian federation in the early thirties.<sup>130</sup> At the time, the franchise was strictly limited in terms of class. Mendes's "Sweetman" would not be competent to vote because he is not his own man; his woman controls him and thus his

---

<sup>130</sup> TWA general secretary, William Howard-Bishop succeeded in getting the Colonial Office to send the Wood commission to Trinidad to evaluate the need to extend the franchise in 1921. At that time, the TWA suggested an income level that excluded a working class vote (Singh Race and Class Struggle 50-51), but Cipriani's proposal for a West Indian Federation in 1931 calls for "adult suffrage" (The Beacon I/9:1).

vote.

In compromising working class masculinity, Beacon writers express their ambivalence towards working class voting rights. Afro-Trinidadian writers like Ralph Mentor and C.L.R. James supported universal suffrage, but Gomes, as editor, and other white writers doubted Afro-Trinidadian competence in both politics and culture. Although Gomes stridently called for the improvement of living and working conditions for the working class and frequently leveled a class critique of colonialism, he did not support universal suffrage.<sup>131</sup> Under the guise of protecting the working classes from the oppression of local elite politicians and the threat of U.S. economic imperialism, Gomes argues that Trinidad was not yet ready for universal suffrage. Universal suffrage, he argued, “involve[d] two serious dangers: first, the placing of political influence into the hands of persons who are intellectually incapable of putting it to any good use and are likely to abuse it; secondly, there is an even greater danger of its permitting Capital to enjoy absolute control of the political machines, e.g. the United States” (The Beacon II/3:7). But at the root, Gomes refuses to view the working class as politically and intellectually competent. After all, having put Trinidad’s oil under the control of US companies, British colonial rule had exposed Trinidadians to US capitalism. For Gomes, “the average member of the working class is on an intellectual parity with any ape” (The Beacon I/10:3). Here, Gomes’s language echoes scientific racist discourse which defined Africans as closer to apes than Europeans. This is a significant instance of Gomes’s ambivalence, a significance underscored by the The Beacon’s involvement in a debate over “scientific” arguments about the “Negro intelligence,” in which it vigorously attacked scientific racism. Gomes wrote one of these articles himself (The Beacon I/7 23-4).

---

<sup>131</sup> Sander notes this apparent contradiction in discussing Gomes’s opposition to West Indian Federation (35).

When Gomes denied the political competence of Afro-Trinidadians, he denied Trinidad's history of labor protest and organization and slighted the existing labour movement. This may be partially motivated by Gomes's animosity toward A.A. Cipriani, the French creole president of the TWA and Gomes's criticism of the working class for accepting Cipriani as its leader.<sup>132</sup> But Gomes's dislike of Cipriani does not justify or explain the fact that he ignores the TWA's history of radicalism that predated Cipriani or the more radical elements of TWA. Having ignored the contemporary black political figures, like William Howard-Bishop Jr. secretary general of the TWA and editor The Labour Leader, Gomes told the Afro-Trinidadian population what it ought to do. In his article "Black Man," Gomes stridently calls on "black men" to desist from assimilating European culture.

Black man, bearded old son of a slave, your children are being slain by the dozens in America, in Africa, in the Indies... bare your fangs as the white man does. Cast off your docility. You have to be savage like a white man to escape the white man's savagery. *But the white man won't spare your neck!* (The Beacon I/4:1)

Here, Gomes may be expressing his desire for the Afro-Trinidadian middle class to fight the English system rather than to try to rise within it by assimilating English domestic ideology. This would parallel his argument that Trinidadian writers must desist from imitating English literature, and embrace Trinidad's working classes as the subject of literature. Gomes's authoritarian approach to "black men," however, expresses his underlying assumption that Afro-Trinidadians don't have political competence and that he Gomes must speak for them.

Expatriate writer Stephen Haweis assumes a similar position of authority over

---

<sup>132</sup> Gomes repeatedly attacks Cipriani in his editorials in The Beacon. See for example, his editorials on the Cipriani's support of a West Indian Federation, (II/3(June 1932):7).

“black men” and espouses a similar message for Afro-Creoles to abandon “white” culture and embrace African cultural practices. Haweis celebrates African culture; sounding a good deal like an author of negritude, he writes “that the future civilization of the Negro will begin when the educated Negro turns to study the roots of his being... his heredity, his antecedents, his arts, in a word Africa”(The Beacon II/9 (March 1933:5). Yet underlying this respect for African cultures is Haweis’s belief that “there has never been never been a black man who has come even near equality with the finest type of white, but what of it?”(The Beacon II/9 (March 1933):4). In his poem, “Black Man,” Haweis calls on “black man” to repay his “debt” to Europeans for liberating him from slavery (The Beacon III/3:67). On one hand, the poem assumes that Afro-Caribbeans exerted no power to free themselves. On the other hand, it chides them for not having effected revolutionary political change since emancipation -- the liberation of slaves in Africa and of wage laborers in England. Another Beacon writer, Beatrice Greig chose to read Haweis’s poem at the centenary celebration of emancipation in 1933, and thus signaled her participation in The Beacon’s denial of Afro-Creole political agency.

Yet The Beacon also published Afro-Trinidadian writers’ counter arguments. C.L.R. James, Ralph Mentor, and Alfred Cruickshank stridently argued for the intelligence of the Africans and for universal suffrage. The Beacon thus performs its ambivalence about race.

Mendes articulates Gomes’s and Haweis’s ambivalence towards Afro-Trinidadians in the arena of culture. Mendes is the most prolific author of yard fiction; he rented a barrack room for six months to learn through personal experience the conditions of the yard (Sander 75). These acts indicate a belief in the importance of the Afro-Caribbean working class and a dedication to establishing its culture as a fundamental element of Trinidadian national culture. Yet Mendes denies the very

possibility of African and African diaspora culture in a letter to The Beacon in which he argues that the “Nordic race” was unquestionably superior in intelligence to the “Negro race.”

With our present day standards of judgment, can we without fear of contradiction assert that the Nordic race is superior in intelligence to the Negro race? It is indeed a rash man who will dare to contradict me when I say: yes. We have only to remember what the Nordic race has contributed to Science and Art for the fact of his superiority to become axiomatic. What contribution towards Art and Science has the Negro race made? Not one that I can think of for the moment...out of Africa has come no literature, no painting, no music...(The Beacon I/6 (September 1931:27)

Here, Mendes’s mimics English discourse in claiming that only “the Nordic race” or the “white race” has created culture, but his mimicry highlights Mendes’s own ambiguous position as a Portuguese creole vis-à-vis European identity. In Trinidadian dominant culture, Portuguese were “off-white,” part black. In English discourse, Portugal, a southern European country, was considered less civilized than northern European countries. Further, many Trinidadian Portuguese came from Madeira, which is an island off of Africa. In no clear sense is Mendes Nordic. Yet as the son of a wealthy and established Portuguese merchant, he has assimilated and identified with English/Nordic culture to such an extent that he perceives himself as Nordic and European. Denying African culture is a means of asserting the superiority of “his” white culture, the difficulty for his strategy is that in articulating his claim to superiority, he exposes himself as not exactly European or Nordic. His is a cultural claim, distinct from Gomes’s political criticism of Afro-Caribbean. This follows as Mendes was a cultural worker and Gomes sought a political career. Both the political

expression of Gomes and cultural expression of Mendes rely on undercutting black masculinity.

In the case of “The Sweetman,” the working class, in fact, rebelled against the emasculating images of yard fiction. The character, Seppy, is based on a working class man, Septimus Louhar, who sued Mendes for libel and won his case. His suit suggests that working class men saw the image of the sweetman as a source of shame and social discrimination, not a celebration of Trinidadian identity. Louhar’s lawyer, Mr. Hudson-Phillips asserted that Mendes’s portrayal of Louhar was so detrimental that “nothing worse could have been done to the plaintiff except to kill him” (Trinidad Guardian 21 Oct. 32:1)<sup>133</sup> Louhar, himself, asserted that he thought Mendes “wrote the story to spite me” because a dispute over wages. In court, Louhar claimed that when the story was published, the father of his fiancé broke off the engagement and only reinstated it once he read Mendes’s letter of explanation. He alleged that he suffered social discrimination as a result of the story.

My friends have stopped speaking to me in Port-of-Spain, San Fernando, and Penal. My family looked upon me as a vagabond. They would not let me enter their homes. I have relatives in Grenada. I am tormented on the streets by people. In Grenada ...people said ‘Here is Seppy Louhar little ‘Sweet man’ of Trinidad’ (Trinidad Guardian 22 October 1932:1).

In addition to illustrating that The Beacon was widely read, Louhar’s account makes plain that working class men were deeply offended by the economic dependence and cowardice of Mendes’s sweetman. The sweetman was not a persona men of the yard proudly took on – at least not in the official discourse of the legal system and The

---

<sup>133</sup> Michele Levy, editor of Mendes’s literary papers, very generously gave me both the articles from the Trinidad Guardian and Mendes’s description of the suit from his unpublished autobiography.

Trinidad Guardian.

Mendes, in fact, based "The Sweetman" on his knowledge of Louhar's life. Louhar worked in Mendes's father's slipper (alpargarata) factory. Mendes befriended this "handsome young man from the slums" because his barrack yard background and "undisciplined" "life style" made him "excellent material for my fiction" (Mendes "Writing – Trinidad 1931-33). In his fiction, Mendes appropriates Louhar's name, age, lifestyle, appearance, and racial identity.<sup>134</sup> Yet, Mendes changes the material in two significant ways. First, in the short story, Mendes asserted that "Seppy though twenty-four ... had never done a stitch of work in his life" (The Beacon 1/7:2). But it is clear from both The Trinidad Guardian and from Mendes's autobiography that Louhar worked – The Trinidad Guardian cites him as a "shoe-maker" and Mendes as a worker in a shoe factory (Trinidad Guardian 22 October 1932:1). Louhar, thus, could not have enjoyed complete financial support from his women. Finally, Louhar was engaged and finally married -- this is again recorded in both The Trinidad Guardian and Mendes's autobiography. Louhar's marriage contradicts not only the short story, which portrays him as the antithesis of the marrying man, but the fundamental principle of yard fiction -- that the working class has no interest in marriage and rarely therefore marries. That Mendes is faithful to Louhar's biography except in the respects that fit the stereotype of the sweetman suggests his refusal to represent the men of yard as economically independent and as desirous of the socially respectable, economically responsible position of husband. I am suggesting that Mendes's resistance to representing men of the yard as masculine reflects his hesitance to acknowledge the masculinity and (political) power of the working class. Clearly, Afro-Trinidadian working class men

---

<sup>134</sup> Trinidad Guardian reports that Louhar is twenty-four – the same age that Mendes gives Seppy in "The Sweetman" (22 October 1932:1); Louhar's lawyer asserts that Louhar is known by the name Seppy and that he is a dougla (Trinidad Guardian 21 October 1932:1).

are less threatening to him when they are simply “material” for fiction than when they are agents asserting their legal and political rights.

When we place yard fiction beside the fiction of white degeneracy -- as it stood in The Beacon -- we can see that the two genres of fiction function as a double-edged sword. The fiction of white degeneracy critiques the power of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes which imitated it while yard fiction undercut the power the working class. The intelligentsia are left as the only “men” -- a role Gomes particularly plays out in his authoritarian editorials or his essay “Black Man.”

In addition to expressing the intelligentsia’s ambivalence towards black political power, yard fiction served to express the intelligentsia’s position on critical political issues. This is relevant to our analysis because Beacon writers seem to have defined the yard as anathema to marriage not in response to yard women’s concern with marriage, but out of their desire to impress its readership with the ridiculousness of the Roman Catholic Church’s campaign against the introduction of divorce legislation in Trinidad. In almost every story, the yard is defined by its incompatibility with marriage. No women in yard fiction are married with the exception of older women, whose husbands are long dead -- Ma Nenine in “Afternoon in Trinidad” and Ma Christine in Black Fauns. When marriage is attempted among Trinidad’s poor, it is travestied. The protagonist of Mendes’s “Five Dollars Worth of Flesh” is a married woman, but her alcoholic and violent husband desires her to prostitute herself to support the family. Her decision to take a lover for money, in order to feed her children illustrates the impossibility of marriage in the yard. Mendes’s “Lulu Gets Married” exists as a story almost exclusively to prove that marriage and the yard are incompatible. In it, Lulu consents to marry a man she does not love for economic security. Mendes paints the wedding preparations and celebration as ludicrous. Any sense of sanctity of matrimony is lost in the yard resident’s competition to have the best dress and the race among

carriages to be first in line. The groom's abandoned mistress disrupts the wedding ceremony; the story and the marriage end when she fatally shoots the groom during the reception.

The Catholic Church's no-holds-barred campaign against divorce reached a crescendo during the Beacon's first year of publication with the vote in the Legislative Council in the fall of 1931.<sup>135</sup> The Beacon was very active in the campaign for divorce. Mendes remembers, for instance, "many a predawn night found me in the streets of Port of Spain sticking pro-divorce posters on walls and running from the police" (Mendes "Writing -- Trinidad 1931-33" 83). It was a fight against the power of the church as a whole. The Beacon group held that the Roman Catholic Church had no right to control Trinidadian politics, that unhappy couples had every right to separate and remarry, and that the question of divorce and marriage were of little importance as both were class privileges; the vast majority of Trinidadians could afford neither marriage nor divorce. They expressed these views in editorials in the TWA paper The Labour Leader in 1930, and in The Beacon once it started publication in 1931.<sup>136</sup> In 1929 and 1930, The Labour Leader was the mouth piece for the intellectual left which would form the Beacon Group. The main writers of The Beacon -- R.A.C. de

---

<sup>135</sup> The Catholic Church lobbied for the censorship of The Beacon, so the journal had other reasons for to attack the Church. In "The Muzzling of Thought," Ralph Mentor attacks Father O'Dea for calling for the censorship of secular magazines on the grounds that they were fulfilled a public desire for evil literature. Mentor responds that the father should educate his flock and that no "self-respecting government [is] going to invade the rights and privileges of a people at the dictates of any religious obscurant" (The Beacon II/7 December 1932: 5-7).

<sup>136</sup> Cipriani was president of the TWA, but under pressure from the Church he renounced his 1926 endorsement of divorce legislation and campaigned against divorce. Cipriani's support of the church divided the TWA, severely weakened his political power, and caused a rift between the TWA and its paper, The Labour Leader, which staunchly supported divorce. Apparently, it stopped publishing shortly after because of the rift with Cipriani. The Beacon would continue to attack Cipriani on his support of Divorce into 1932.

Boissiere, Beatrice Greig, Albert Gomes, Albert Mendes, W.V. Tothill, Ralph Mentor, and Percival Maynard – all wrote letters to the Labour Leader in favor of divorce.

These letters articulate the positions that The Beacon's two genres of fiction embody.

Beatrice Greig's letter points to the emptiness of many middle class and upper strata marriages – an emptiness The Beacon's fiction of the middle and upper classes amplified in stories like Mendes's "Boodhoo," Cecil Pantin's "the Barrier," and Percival Maynard's "Divorce and Mr. Jerningham."<sup>137</sup> Greig argues that marriages are economic contracts that often oppress women and that without love and understanding, marriage amounts to legal prostitution. She reveals what other writers repress, which is that, in Trinidad, white men practiced polygyny and regularly abandoned their wives. She also reminds the reader of "the reality that it [divorce] will be available on one charge: adultery and that that adultery must be proven" (The Labour Leader 28 November 1930 :2). For the first time, divorce legislation would allow women to divorce their husbands for adultery in a country in which men's practice of polygyny was virtually institutionalized. Divorce had the potential to affect women in particular – this is lost in The Beacon, which publishes Pantin "The Barrier," a short story that illustrates that women's infidelity is the grounds for divorce legislation.

In his letter to The Labour Leader, R.A.C. de Boissiere articulates the reality yard fiction embodies: that "as everyone knows... this divorce law is a law for the well to do, and in no way affects the poorer classes who will go on separating from those with whom it is impossible to find peace and happiness as they have always done" (The Labour Leader 28 November: 7). Gomes and Tothill both echo this stance in their letters, insisting that "the working man" and "the proletariat" reject marriages. Gomes writes that "the proletariat has never made much (if any) use of marriage. They have

---

<sup>137</sup> Greig's message is, however, distinctly feminist in contradistinction to the ambivalence towards women's sexual freedom expressed in Pantin's "Barrier" or Margaret Beattie's "Pastoral."

always displayed a keen love for the looser tie. Even the religious members of that class are loath to pay the enormous sums demanded by the clergy to have themselves married.” Tothill speaks for the working man – a typical move for The Beacon -- claiming that he prefers “his system of living with a ‘keeper’” to marriage.

The desperate poverty of Archibald’s and Cumming’s texts connect the divorce issue to that of “slum clearance” by supplying evidence that the concern of the government ought to be turned towards ameliorating living conditions and creating work and educational opportunities for yard residents, rather than towards the intricacies of upper class marriage, which was an institution that participated making the yard impoverished and alienated.

But the call for sexual freedom repeated so frequently -- in the magazine’s editorial on local fiction, in its argument for divorce, in yard fiction and the fiction of white degeneracy -- was not merely an expression of The Beacon’s rage against bourgeois respectability and conservative political stances. It was a fundamental principle with great political significance. Giving women sexual freedom constituted a rejection of patriarchy, liberating women’s sexuality from male control. The Beacon was the only institution to challenge patriarchy in a country and an empire based on patriarchal power and during a period, when strong pressure was placed on working and middle class women to conform to a model of female economic dependency and patriarchal marriage.<sup>138</sup> Trinidad, Patricia Mohammed argues, was structured on a hierarchy of three patriarchies, the white on top, followed by the Afro-Trinidadian, and finally the Indo-Trinidadian (35). The white ruling class, of course, always defined

---

<sup>138</sup> The Beacon’s feminism was, of course, as conflicted as its labor politics. It championed women’s ability to work outside the home and at the same time suggested the importance of women in the tradition role as caretakers. However, the fact that they asserted women’s right to sexual freedom -- across race and class boundaries -- carries significant weight even if the journal was also ambivalent.

itself through its women's rigorous practice of respectability and submission to patriarchal marriage. Trinidad appears to have had a particularly rigorous form of domestic ideal as Eleanor Waby's memoirs and Beatrice Greig's article suggest.<sup>139</sup>

The brown elite had arrived in Trinidad as a wealthy and respectable class in the late 18th century; the black middle class had assimilated respectability as a strategy for improving social in the 19th century, and Indo-Trinidadians followed suit in the early 20th century (Segal 91). Seventy five years of indentureship had severely weakened the Indian patriarchal family structure. Few women were brought to Trinidad in the first decades of indentureship, and the plantation system did not encourage marriage until the late 19th century (Reddock "The Indentureship Experience" 30). Their scarcity increased Indian women's value, which was sometimes expressed in very high bride prices (Reddock "The Indentureship Experience" 41). As a result of this and plantation social structure, many Indian women in Trinidad experienced more social and economic freedom than their counterparts in India. They were often more able to negotiate domestic partnerships and less likely to be confined to one marriage for life. Reddock even cites constraints on women in India -- "the ban on widow re-marriage, the problems of pregnancy outside of wedlock, and difficulties within their domestic situation" -- as incentives for women come to Trinidad ("The Indentureship Experience" 30).

The end of indentureship between 1917-1921, the growth of Indian peasant villages and an Indian middle class brought a concerted effort to reinstate the marriage practices of India. Starting in the late 19th century, Indo-Trinidadians strengthened the family structure as they moved from the plantation barracks to villages, where they

---

<sup>139</sup> Waby records the expectation that English wives either be absent or very submissive. She tells us that she restrained herself, but even so, she "was always transgressing some written or unwritten law of red-tape or etiquette" (*The Beacon* II/6:20).

constituted themselves as an indigenous, rooted Trinidadian community (Mohammed 34). This coincided with a trend to remove women from paid estate work to unpaid work on the family's land. The community tirelessly strove to reestablish the Indian community's patriarchal family structure as a means of legitimating the community as a whole, in order to compete more effectively with Afro-Trinidadians and whites for social and political status -- "a consolidation of the traditional patriarchal system brought from India would place them in a better position to compete in the patriarchal race." (Mohammed 35).<sup>140</sup> The Indian middle class press was strongly influenced by Gandhi's "Sita" ideal of womanhood, which the Arya Samaj pundit Mehta Jaimini disseminated in his lecture tour of Trinidad in 1929. He defined "the five ideals of Indian women as: "(a) chastity; (b) Devotion towards husband; c) Mistress of the house; d) to produce children - good citizens useful to the society; e) To bring forth peace and happiness in the family and society" (Reddock Women, Labour, and Politics 61). This model, as Reddock points out, differed little from English domestic womanhood (Women, Labour, and Politics 61). In The Beacon, Gandhi's "Sita" ideal is articulated in Greig's memorial essay on Saroj Nalini, whose charitable work combined with her performance of wifely duties made her the embodiment of this ideal. Thus, the triple patriarchal system pressured all Indian women and middle and upper class women of the Euro and Afro-Trinidadian communities to conform to domestic ideals which denied their sexual freedom.

Even women in the working class were being pressed into economic dependence on men -- if not into the institution of marriage. As already noted, in the

---

<sup>140</sup> Reddock asserts that Indian women resisted the new stress on marriage by leaving abusive husbands ("The Indentureship Experience" 45). In contrast, Mohammed emphasizes the fact that many Indian women collaborated in the effort to re-establish patriarchal families because this would improve the status of the community as a whole and because women held an important role in religion and ritual (36-37).

1920s and 1930s, working class women, African and Indian, had been removed from the work force. The impact of the Depression intensified this pattern which domestic rhetoric reinforced. “Indeed, by the end of this period,” Reddock tells us, “the once large scale of female employment was lost to people's collective memory” (Reddock Women, Labour, and Politics 47). As a result, women could find work only in occupations that could not adequately support them – laundering and domestic service. They therefore had to depend on men for money. They were placed in the position of economic dependency on men without the security associated with marriage.

As these economic trends intensified, domestic ideology and male patriarchal power gained a strong voice within the working class. Gordon Rohlehr illustrates how calypsos of the 1937-43 period repudiated women's sexual and economic independence as a moral evil.<sup>141</sup> Calypsonians held to a strict double standard, idealizing marriage and condemning prostitution as a sign of women's immorality (Rohlehr 226; 228). Their songs asserted that independent women, who did not stay home under the protection of their mothers, were bound to become prostitutes. Good women married. Yet, Calypsonians, who defined themselves through their sexual prowess and their many women, saw marriage as a trap and had no sympathy for the plight of single mothers. These calypsos attacked the majority of working class women who lived independently (Rohlehr 223-30). Rohlehr argues that Calypsonians were particularly threatened by the sexual prowess of the increasing number of female prostitutes which resulted from the Depression (Rohlehr 228).

I suggest that we extend Rohlehr's assertion about calypsonians' reaction to prostitution in order to view their attack on sexually independent women as the

---

<sup>141</sup> “Most of the lyrics of the songs from the 1920s and early 30s have been lost, but there are 300 from 1937 to the early 1940's, and these give much information about the life style and gender relations of the barrack yard. Calypso lyrics from the late twenties and early thirties have mostly lost” (Rohlehr 216).

reflection of a broader need among working men to assert the dominant form of masculinity -- the strong, father and provider. Calypsonians' vilification of independent women and their idealization of marriage for women preserved the image of the male dominance in the working class.

Thus, in opposing patriarchy, The Beacon was one of the few institutions to assert women's right to sexual and social independence. Though The Beacon's willingness to champion women's sexual rights may reflect its ambivalence about a strong, male working class, their opposition to patriarchy had far reaching political implications because Trinidad was structured on a competition between racially segregated patriarchies -- "the contest... for a definition of masculinity between men of different races" (Mohammed 35). This patriarchal contest entrenched the division between ethnic groups. The white elite took advantage of this divisiveness between African and Indian Trinidadians and "by playing the role of ethnic neutrals or mediators in the bi-racial politics of the island, [were] able to retain their positions of economic pre-eminence in it"(Singh "Tradition" 246). As a result, The Beacon's support of Mamitz's right to choose between lovers and upper class women's right to have lovers constitutes a stance against colonialism and the white elite's supremacy in Trinidad.

Respectability and The Beacon's willingness to fight it lay at the heart of The Beacon's struggle over national culture. This was perhaps The Beacon's most important and tangible battle against the upper classes and the middle classes who assimilated upper class values. The Beacon strove to create a national literature based on the culture of the majority Trinidadians -- people of African and Indian descent. In its guidelines for submissions to its short story contest, The Beacon solicited for a literature based on local people and places. Gomes attacked writers who imitated English literature, asserting that the

Trinidad writer regards his fellow-countrymen as his inferiors, an uninteresting people who are not worth his while. He genuinely feels (and by this, of course, asserts his own feeling of inferiority) that with his people as characters his stories would be worth nothing. It is for this reason that he peoples them with creatures from other planets, American gangsters and English M.P.'s. (The Beacon I/10:1)

Equally important to developing the quality of Trinidadian literature, Gomes asserted, was the open representation of sexuality. "We have never seen such bad love scenes before," claimed Gomes, "and not until people of Trinidad begin to think more openly and less religiously of sex will local writers attain more artistic restraint and indifference of sex in their stories. As it is, their treatment of the question is by far the ugliest, most unnatural and *civilized*, we have been up against" (The Beacon I/10:1).

In calling on writers to represent the working classes and sexuality, The Beacon confronted mainstream upper and middle class cultural institutions head on. Outraged letters from planters and other elite in response to yard fiction published in Trinidad and in The Beacon made it clear that respectable society saw literature about the yard as an affront to themselves and to Trinidad's national image. One letter expressed the fear that yard fiction's slackness would lead to the further denigration of Trinidad.

Surely Mr. James, scholar and teacher that he is might have found a better way to bring both to Church and state a moral condition of his people....Literary contributions of this kind is only another stick with which Governors, European colonists and exiles will flog us. (The Labour Leader 8 February 1930:13)

Another writer attacked Mendes's commentary in Trinidad and the magazine as a whole for a total lack of morality. Playing on Mendes's claim that his choice of the yard as the subject of literature was as appropriate as an architect's choice of stone

for building, one critic of yard fiction asserted that “it would be interesting to know how Mr. Mendes would describe the architect who, knowing all his lumber to be rotten and worm-eaten, proceeds, nevertheless to erect what he hopes would be a magnificent and enduring edifice” (The Labour Leader 6 April 1930). The yard for such readers constituted a “rotten and worm-eaten” foundation for national literature.

Gomes was no less extreme in his attack on the two rival literary institutions contemporary to The Beacon -- the numerous middle class literary and debating clubs and the government subsidized tourist magazine, The Trinidadian. Always forthright in his opinions, Gomes is particularly vicious in his condemnation of the many local literary groups. “The literary club-idea,” writes Gomes, “is a sort of popular malady in Trinidad – like Typhoid Fever or Influenza .... nothing is so detrimental to the artistic development of the island as the ‘literary-club attitude,’ which is nothing but a puffed chest”(The Beacon II/11:1). These clubs, Gomes asserts, will produce corrupt politicians, but provide no literature, discuss no literary topics, and provide no lending libraries. In short, the literary clubs refuse to take on the project of creating a national literature out of the culture of the majority. In contrast, they define themselves through the project of imitating bourgeois English standards of achievement. Such assimilation, Gomes held, could only prevent a radical redefinition of national culture necessary to an effective opposition to the ruling class. An artist, whose work regularly appeared in The Beacon, Hugh Stollmeyer clarifies that Gomes attacked the literary clubs because of their class division and snobbery. He reports the experience of having been asked to paint a mural for a local literary club, only to be rejected because the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian, presumably middle class, members of the club “would disapprove of a display of ‘what those common Niggers and Coolies do’ upon the walls of their little Palace of Art and Culture”(The Beacon III/3:69). Here, we see the implications of The Beacon’s campaign against respectable domesticity from a different angle. The

criticism of literary clubs expresses the same sentiment as Gomes's essay, "Black Man." In both, he attempts to bring the non-white middle classes to abandon assimilation.

The other main object of Gomes's culture attack was The Trinidadian, the government-subsidized, elite-controlled journal that represented Trinidad as a place of white celebrities and exotic adventure in order to boost Trinidad's trade in tourism. In his protest, we see Gomes's strong allegiance with the working class and his belief in the fundamental necessity of working class culture to national culture. He criticizes The Trinidadian for using tax money the majority of which came from the working class to pay British expatriate writers to produce what was essentially advertising for hotels, the profits from which would benefit effectively only the upper classes. He also rejects the magazine's image of Trinidad as a tourists' wonderland: "The Trinidadian, which is no more Trinidadian than the Woolsworth Building, is an hallucinant for tourists, who become terribly upset when the bright lights of life go out. So the Trinidadian dulls their sense by helping them to indulge in superficial beauties." Gomes particularly objects to the image of Trinidad as a haven of romance: "In the Mid-summer number of the this magazine Trinidad is transmogrified into a land of romance, adventure and eternal sunshine (we are fast going the way of poor Tahiti -- alas!); and there is everything there for a the man who wishes to escape reality..." (The Beacon III/2:29). This image of the Trinidad as an isle of pleasure and sexual availability places it in the feminized position. Narratives of tourism, like those of conquest, construe the Caribbean as feminine. In contrast, The Beacon embraces masculinity. Gomes describes Mendes's shift from writing for The Beacon to The Trinidadian as discarding the masculine "battle-axe" for the "peaceful plough-share" (The Beacon III/2:29). Ironically, The Beacon fights for a masculine image of Trinidad even as it emasculates the working class.

Yard fiction -- with its poor, uneducated, sexually active protagonists -- was The Beacon's most effective vehicle for criticizing the bourgeoisie and the middle classes which imitated it. In contrast to the fiction of white degeneracy which has not been preserved in the Caribbean literary canon, yard fiction has been defined as one of the foundational genres of contemporary anglophone Caribbean literature. With Trinidad and The Beacon, the yard in all its physical and moral dirt became the national image of Trinidad -- in its national literature and abroad with success of C.L.R. James's and Alfred Mendes's fiction in England and the United States.<sup>142</sup>

Yet because the yard was almost exclusively Afro-Trinidadian, yard fiction prevented The Beacon from representing Trinidad as a creolization of African, Asian, and European cultures and peoples. Yard fiction's focus on sexuality encouraged the representation of creolization as an exclusively sexual, rather than a potentially revolutionary and political process.

#### Creolization? The role of Indo-Trinidadians in The Beacon

By deliberately including Indians in its representation of Trinidad, The Beacon broke with the English discourse and Trinidadian tradition of seeing Indo-Trinidadians as foreign rather than as essential members of Trinidad society. The Beacon published a special "India Section" which covered Indian Nationalism and culture; it included essays by Indo-Trinidadians. Sander notes the importance of The Beacon's "India

---

<sup>142</sup> In his autobiography, Mendes lists the many foreign successes of yard fiction. Of the five stories published in the two issues of Trinidad, two were chosen for E.J. O'Brien's Best Short Stories. C.L.R. James's "La Divina Pastora" was the first Trinidadian story published in England, in The Saturday Review (88). Mendes's Pitch Lake was the first novel from the Beacon group published in England in 1934, followed by James's Minty Alley in 1936. Aldous Huxley recommended Pitch Lake for publication; he also wrote its introduction. Mendes continued to publish fiction in both English and U.S. publications including, The Manchester Guardian, The London Mercury, and This Quarter (89). The Beacon recorded the foreign publications of the work of Mendes (The Beacon I/5:3)

Section” because it was the only paper at the time to cover to Indian Nationalism in the early 1930's ( Sander 37). The Beacon's communist perspective gave it the tools of class analysis to enable it to cross the ethnic divide between the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian working classes by seeing the interconnections of their exploitation. Yet in two ways The Beacon replicates the dominant Trinidadian discourse that marginalized and disempowered Indo-Trinidadians into the 1980s. First, The Beacon chose to focus on India rather than Indo-Trinidadians. Second, it evacuated the cultural specificity and potential political power of Indo-Trinidadians by using an essentially colonialist lens to view them, portraying them in an erotic rather than a political register. Indianness was often represented in hybrid figures; the inter-racial figure of the dougla - half-African, half -Indian - was the central means through which The Beacon represented the process of Indian and African interaction. Eroticizing the dougla neutralized the political and cultural potential of cross-ethnic coalition by transforming hybridity into a non-threatening object of sexual desire.

The decision to focus exclusively on Indian nationalism in India rather than on Indo-Trinidadians in Trinidad combined with the fact that Indian issues were covered for only six months of The Beacon's two and a half year run perpetuated the vision of Indo-Trinidadians as a “foreign” community within Trinidad.<sup>143</sup> With the exception of C.L.R. James's review of Gandhi's autobiography in volume I/5, The Beacon began to publish material on India with volume I/11 in March 1932, when it published quite a number of articles on Indian culture including, Greig's biographical article, “Rabindranath Tagore,” C.F. Andrew's “Mahatma Gandhi,” Vivakanandra's “Untouchability and Khuddar,” and Tagore's “Human Life and its Relation to Science.” In the first five numbers of the second volume, The Beacon published a separate “India

---

<sup>143</sup> Of the nearly two and a half years of publication, March 1931-November 1933, “India Sections” were published for a period of six months, March 1932-September 1932.

section,” which Greig explains, “has been inaugurated to afford East Indian residents of the colony an opportunity for expressing their own views on the situation in *their country*”(my italics II/1:31). Greig refers to Indo-Trinidadians as East Indians, who are residents rather than citizens of Trinidad and whose “*country*” is India, not Trinidad. The short but intense presence of India, separated out into an “Indian Section” gave the impression that Indo-Trinidad was a separate, possibly part-time, presence in Trinidad.

This representation of Indo-Trinidad as part of Trinidad and yet foreign reflects Trinidad’s dominant discourse of the early twentieth century. Although Trinidad defined itself as a creolized country and Indo-Trinidadians made up such a large percentage of the population in the pre-Independence period, the term creole referred only to local whites and Afro-Trinidadians -- not Indians, Caribs, Portuguese, Chinese, or Lebanese (Segal 87). Trinidad society organized itself along a spectrum of color, from white to black, but Indian identity had no place in that spectrum. As Segal writes, “In the socially constructed absence of local connections ‘East Indians’ never became ‘Creoles’, and had no place on the Creole scale of colour; they were emphatically ‘East’ and not ‘West Indians’” (97). To be Trinidadian, one had to be creole; thus, “East Indians” remained a foreign community in Trinidad despite the fact that Indo- and Afro- Trinidadian cultures mutually influenced one another; that is, Trinidadian Indian culture was creolized and creolizing (Segal 97).

This “dichotomy” between “East Indians” and “West Indians” originated in the colonial policy of indentureship and the divide and rule policy towards Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian populations ( Reddock “The Indentureship Experience” 30). It was fostered by largely race-based political organizations strongly influenced by African and Indian nationalisms (Singh Race and Class 11-12; 49-57). African and Indian political organizations distrusted each other more than they did the white ruling

class. As a result, the predominantly Afro-Trinidadian TWA and East Indian National association (EINA) and East Indian national Congress (EINC) competed against one another for power. This ethnic divide perpetuated the white minority's hegemony.<sup>144</sup> To be effective against English colonial and local elite power, political or cultural opposition had to challenge this racial dichotomy. Kelvin Singh argues that only a coalition of the African and Indian working classes could have posed an effective challenge to the colonial government in the pre-1945 period, which occurs briefly during the 1937 labor uprisings (Singh Race and Class Struggle 224-25).<sup>145</sup>

Yard fiction mirrors this pattern of seeing Indo-Trinidadians as inherently part of and yet foreign to Trinidadian culture. Their presence in the background seems necessary to mark the literature as authentically Trinidadian, but their further participation is unnecessary. Mendes begins "Five Dollars Worth of Flesh" with a demographic panorama of Trinidad. We first see black stevedores; the focus shifts to the "rich merchants" and "well-to-do lawyers...being speeded to their offices in their closed-in cars" and then to their employees "clerks and clerkesses" traveling in tram cars. Finally, the narrator hones in on the yard where we find our protagonist, Isadora, an multi-racial woman, who watches two stereotypical Indians, an impoverished boy "wearing only a shirt" and food vender -- "Camachie, the young East Indian woman who lived but a stone's throw from her." These two figures literally complete the

---

<sup>144</sup> This divide was particularly strong during the period of The Beacon's publication. The TWA's attempt at including Indo-Trinidadians failed in the 1930s due to "a resurgence of race consciousness, which engulfed the Indian and African middle classes from 1929 to 1937"( Singh Race and Class 147).

<sup>145</sup> One of Singh's underlying arguments is that the primacy of race in political organization prevented such a coalition of Indo- and Afro- Trinidadians. When Indian workers joined strikes -- in 1919 and 1937 -- the working class was able to pose the most significant threat to the government and the Elite. However, the British navy -- the sheer military force of the government could bring to bear -- would ultimately impede even a united working-class direct action (Singh Race and Class 31-2).

frame for the story; the action commences as soon as they walk past the protagonist, but they do not participate actively in her world. She shares her troubles and garners emotional support and food from her “black” neighbors.

When Indians play significant roles, as they do in Mendes’s “Water Piece” and “Boodhoo,” Frank de Souza’s “Nocturne” and W.R.H. Trowbridge’s “The Tare,” they appear either as abject figures of depravity or objects of desire. Set in Port of Spain, Frank de Souza’s “Nocturne” represents the Indian woman as a figure of contamination and repulsion – as the embodiment of almost absolute otherness. “Nocturne” depicts of Port-of-Spain’s Eastern market from 2 am until 4 am might constitutes “Street Fiction.” In contradistinction to the yard, which housed primarily Afro-Caribbeans, the street was home to a large number of Indian vagrants as a result of estate labor policies and the Depression. In making the frame of urban fiction the yard, yard fiction made an almost clean cut which eliminated the Indo-Trinidadians, who lived on the streets (Singh Race and Class 15).<sup>146</sup> Composed of Trinidad’s working under classes, – “all huddled together, Negroes, East Indians, Half breeds,” the market (located on a street) seems to have been a site of Afro-Indo Trinidadian cultural interaction in the early thirties. In the market, the first detailed image is an East Indian woman sitting on the pavement, selling oranges (The Beacon I/8:18). Her body mingles with filth, “her bare feet with ankles encircled by a bracelet of silver, dangling in the water flowing down the canal.” Her failure to remove her feet from the canal’s garbage and sewerage filled-water, reflects that she, like the canal, is filthy and contaminated. The narrator reinforces this impression by describing her body as internally infected: “a racking cough shakes her whole body.” With a total disregard for public health or cleanliness of her produce: “she expectorates over the tray; taking the orange which she has started

---

<sup>146</sup> Indian organizations, the EINC and EINA, lobbied the government to build night shelters, and ultimately built them themselves (Singh Race and Class 147).

to peel and the dirty stub of a knife into one hand, she wipes her lips with the other; replaces the orange with the same hand and unconcernedly resumes her paring”(The Beacon I/8:18). In disseminating her contamination, she becomes a force for contagion. She represents the threat the growing number of Indian vagrants posed to the Port of Spain middle and upper classes in the 1930s. In figuring the impoverished and diseased vendor as a source of contamination, de Souza places the disease in the exploited under-class, not in the planter class whose labor policies produced much of Indian poverty, vagrancy, and ill-health.<sup>147</sup> But he also expresses disgust at the prospect of integrating Indo-Trinidadians into Trinidad national culture.

De Souza expresses this aversion through the image of a contaminated woman’s body. He defines the Indo-Trinidadian woman’s body through its absolute difference from the invisible middle class woman’s body; she refuses all the separations of dirt and cleanliness that define the middle and upper class.<sup>148</sup> Trowbridge’s “The Tare” presents a parallel but sexualized vision of Indo-Caribbean women as

---

<sup>147</sup> In the 20’s and 30’s, planters survived the deflation of crop prices by accepting large subsidies from the government and reducing labor costs and economic risk by shifting planting of cane to small farmers, whom they controlled through mandatory and exploitative contract schemes( Singh Race and Class 80).

<sup>148</sup> Her essential negative otherness, however, is similar to the positive otherness posited, for instance, by C.L.R. James, who celebrates the intrinsic mystical power of Indians. He praises Gandhi’s ability to mobilize poor agricultural workers in India and their ability to “practice so successfully ideals as difficult as non-cooperation and non-violence, all this is something which to me is as miraculous as anything I have ever read”(The Beacon I/5:19). He sees this as a mystical power specific to Indians rather than as model for political action that could be applied in Trinidad; it marks Indians as distinct and superior to him, not as a potentially powerful part of his Trinidad. He expresses this sense of difference in describing a vagrant Indo-Trinidadian: “When I meet the average unwashed scantily-clad East Indian crouching by the side of the street, I see in him much more than I did formerly, for I realise that in that frail and unkempt body move spiritual powers far beyond me.” (The Beacon I/5:19). Both in de Souza’s portrayal of Indian degradation and James’s celebration of their spiritual powers, Indo-Trinidadians are alien, not part of a Trinidadian national community.

contaminated. In it, Indian women function as indices of sexual and moral corruption on the plantation. In telling the story of the corruption of a newly arrived English employee on a Guyanese sugar plantation, "The Tare" rewrites a central theme in English discourse about the West Indies -- the transformation of new employees into prestige-conscious, lazy, drunken lovers of Afro-Caribbean women. In post-emancipation Guyana particularly this theme is reworked to accommodate for the fact that the plantation workers were Indian and therefore sexual partners of white employees were traditionally, Indian women. Competition for women among male workers on plantations could be very violent, as is illustrated in A.R.F. Webber's Those that be in Bondage as well as the not-infrequent newspaper reports of Indian men's wounding or killing their women out of jealousy.<sup>149</sup> In "the Tare," white men's temptation is embodied by an Indian woman -- "a coolie-girl in blue gauze and all a-jingle with silver ornaments bent her head to her heels and picked up three-penny pieces with her eyelids" (The Beacon I/5:12). An older English overseer Danvers attempts to keep a younger English man, Freen from this temptation. Freen is finally corrupted in a lunch tent where "coolie-girls with eyes like gazelles hung round them wantonly" (The Beacon I/5:13). Danvers finds Freen the next morning "in the coolie quarters" -- a sign that he has had sex with an Indian woman. Depicted as "wanton" and always sexually available to white men, Indian women exist then only as a register of the men's moral corruption.

Published just pages before "Nocturne," Mendes's "Water Piece" presents Indian women as the opposite of physical and moral contamination. A heterosexual

---

<sup>149</sup> This idea of Indian men's violent jealousy constituted the English stereotype that was used to define Indians as more passionate and therefore incapable of equality with whites. In "Boodhoo," Henry Lawrence tell Minnie of a case in which six workers are needed to restrain one Indian man who wished to attack his wife for adultery.

male fantasy about the sexual availability of beautiful and innocent Indian women, “Water Piece” is “the Tare” stripped of the dirt and detail of its historical context.<sup>150</sup> It is essentially the description of two naked Indian women with only the slightest hint of a plot. The two women, “Miss Tall” and “Miss Short,” exist only in erotic and sexual terms: “One ... tall and slim, the other short and plump,” their skin “brown like sapodilla,” they are “both scantily dressed, their brown legs bare, and their heads too.” Like the sweet fruit of the sapodillo, the women are sweet beneath their brown skin. Miss Short’s ineffectual modesty sets Miss Tall’s sexual openness in relief. Miss Short covers her body with her hands and cautions her friend not to lie on her back, “suppose a man should come along, how would she see him?” Miss Tall, however, merely “wondered why her friend should make such strange remarks.” When naked, Miss Tall’s posture offers her body for sexual pleasure: she is “bending forward...her small sharp breasts pouting like lips waiting to be kissed.” Miss Tall offers her body yet more explicitly when she kicks “her feet high in the air as she had seen the moving actresses do on the screen,” gesturing toward the sexual display and seduction of the cancan (The Beacon I/8:6). Then she lies on her back, as if waiting for a sexual encounter.

We are, however, led to read the women as innocent, not lascivious. Miss Tall is like nature itself; she chatters like a kiskidee, runs “agile as a deer and as graceful.” When she is finally discovered by the two white men, Miss Tall returns their gaze, “wondering if they had come to bathe” (The Beacon I/8:7). The encounter mirrors the romance of colonial discovery but places the East Indian woman in place of the

---

<sup>150</sup> Two young East Indian women are observed first by the omniscient narrator, then by two white men who come upon them as they bathe naked. The narrator and the white men share the same male, desiring gaze -- suggesting either that the whole story is being narrated by one of the white men who watches the young women before they are aware of his presence or that the story comprises the man’s imagination of what took place before he arrived at the pool.

Amerindian.

These two conflicting images -- the abject and the desirable Indian woman - parallel the ambivalence of colonial discourse towards non-white colonized people which Robert Young maps out in 19th-century European theories of race and which we have seen in 19th-century English writers like Froude toward Afro-Caribbeans. It is a double parallel. Both European and Trinidadian writing eroticize the "other" and express a fundamental ambivalence, seeing that "other" as either extremely repulsive or desirable (Young 19). That The Beacon expresses an ambivalence towards Indo-Trinidadians similar to that which England expressed towards Trinidadians suggests that a parallel political and cultural dynamic pertains to both relationships. Yet The Beacon did not stand in the position of colonizer to Indo-Trinidadians. Almost all sectors of English society benefitted materially from colonialism and slavery but not all Beacon writers or all Trinidadians benefitted from the importation and exploitation of Indian indentured workers. Whites, like Gomes and Mendes, whose families were often in commerce would have, but Afro-Trinidadians like James and Mentor would not have. Rather Afro-Trinidadians had experienced Indians since their arrival as political and economic rivals. Yet with the end of indenture in 1921, both white and Afro-Trinidadians confronted the question of how to integrate these degraded yet numerically powerful "others" into Trinidadian identity without jeopardizing their own positions. English discourse's eroticization had worked well to disempower colonized people and to obfuscate the economic and physical exploitation of colonization. The predominantly white and Afro-Caribbean Beacon employed a parallel rhetoric that disempowered Indians, obfuscating their potential power within Trinidad as well as the threat their integration into the process of creolization posed to both Afro- and Euro-creoles.

The clearest example of The Beacon's reluctance to represent Indo-Trinidadian

culture as Trinidadian or to accept the social and political implications of Afro/Indo creolization are the many hybrid figures in its fiction. Hybrids are so important to yard fiction that they are the central figures in five of Mendes's twelve stories in The Beacon. Of the twelve to fifteen pieces of yard fiction identified by Sander, douglas or part Indian characters are the protagonists in at least five (55): "Triumph," "Sweetman," "The Dougla," "Five Dollars Worth of Flesh" and Minty Alley. This suggests that Indianness is central to Trinidadian fiction and national identity in this period. However, in each of these cases, the hybrid Indian figure has little or no traceable Indianness and is eroticized, sexualized, and often victimized.

Both douglas, Mamitz of James's "Triumph" and Seppy of Mendes's "Sweetman" are the most extreme examples of disempowered masculinity and femininity in yard fiction. Mamitz not only depends on men to supplement her income, she depends on men for her full income. She is even dependent on another woman, Celestine, to find and manage her keepers. Similarly Seppy is most emasculated example of a sweetman. In "The Sweetman," a whole group of sweetmen gather at the creole cafe: "Cats was there and Shorty and Uncle and Len, all sweetmen and Seppy's boon companions" (The Beacon I/7:3). But only Seppy, the dougla, is unmanned by his woman. Mendes contrasts Seppy with Shorty. Shorty is "a black, squat young man" whose bravery is evidenced by a "scar running from the left eye to the mouth." Though he is Gertrude's sweetman, he maintains his name as a man and his affectionate relationship with his woman. In contrast, Seppy lives in fear of Mamitz's violent rage. When Seppy rebels against Mamitz's desire to fully control him, she proves that she wields the power, in the form of her phallic knife, with which she strips Seppy naked on the dance floor.

In Mamitz and Seppy, the dougla is represented as a combination sexual desirability, weakness, and an absolute lack of industry. All aspects of Indian culture

are evacuated. Mamitz's Indianness is reduced to two physical signs: straight hair and particularly black skin. James describes her as "a black woman, too black to be pure negro, probably with some Madrasi East Indian blood in her, a suspicion which was made a certainty by the long thick plaits of her plentiful hair"(3). In nationalist discourse, Shalini Puri asserts, the dougla always serves to support the status quo (14); in The Beacon's proto-nationalist discourse, the figure of the dougla reinforces the dominant construction of Afro-Trinidadians as indolent and dependent, not worthy of political rights. Although blackness is the color of the negro race in the racial cartography of the West Indies, it is Mamitz's Indianness – her "Madrasi blood" – that makes her blacker than "blacks." Stereotypical Indian character traits similarly intensify the stereotypically Afro-Caribbean traits in each character. In contrast to the stereotype of Afro-Caribbeans as "lazy" and "difficult," Indo-Trinidadians were stereotyped as docile and submissive workers. Mamitz's placid disposition and her reliance on Celestine reflects this stereotypically Indian docility. Mamitz's "Indian" docility intensifies her dependence, which is a characteristic yard fiction as well as English colonial discourse attributes to Afro-Caribbeans. Seppy's lack of courage to stand up as a man to Mamitz may also be an expression of that Indian "docility." If Afro-Trinidadian men are stereotyped as weak, Seppy's "Indian" docility makes him yet weaker. Because the dougla's Indian identity intensifies the stereotype of Afro-Caribbeans as weak and dependent, The Beacon's fiction transforms the potentially oppositional identity of the dougla into a unthreatening figure compatible with local elite and colonial discourse.

With "five bloods in her veins: Spanish, Negro, East Indian, Red Indian and Chinese," Isadora, protagonist of Mendes's "Five Dollars Worth of Flesh" is probably the most thoroughly hybrid and thus most authentically Trinidadian figure in yard fiction (The Beacon I/6:13-15). Yet with all of these cultural heritages, Isadora is

reduced to two facts: (1) that she is the physically abused wife of an unemployed alcoholic and the mother of two sick and starving children, and (2) that she is sexually desirable. In fact, her husband marvels that “she was still handsome, in spite of all the hell she had seen with him”(The Beacon I/6:13). He considers her sexual attraction for some time, focusing on her breast, “luscious, firm, brown”(The Beacon I/6:14). He recalls a “crude fellow stare at her” and the narrator tells us that two other men look her up and down as she walks into town. This sexual desirability defines her and seems to prevent her from getting respectable work in domestic service, laundry, sewing and shop keeping. One woman shopkeeper “looked her up and down before saying, icily that there was no vacancy now; no, there would be no vacancy in a hurry, didn’t she hear?” (The Beacon I/6:15). The woman might be reacting to Isadora’s poverty, but because she is described as looking Isadora up and down in the same way as the men who desire her, it is more likely that store owner reacts against the sexuality that defined Isadora’s body and person. Finally, Isadora agrees to take Mr. Texeira’s five dollars in exchange for sex – an act she describes to her neighbor as a “job.” The only “job” for which Isadora is suitable is as the object of desire. So the quintessentially Trinidadian – the five-type hybrid – is also defined by and confined to sexuality – almost as if she is defined by the sexual act that created her, and is bound to do nothing else but to reenact that sexuality. Thus, hybridity and Indian participation in Trinidadian identity become erased through the sexualization of the Indian hybrid. Creolization as represented in the sexualized inter-racial subject transforms the threat posed by intercultural interaction and political coalition. By containing the threat in a sexual fantasy, the white male (or female as in “Boodhoo”) can easily possess and sexually conquer the sexy, hybrid woman (or man). Sexualization neutralizes creolization.

In the contemporary context, Shalini Puri interrogates hybridity in Trinidad

through the figure of the dougla – the half-Indian, half-African Trinidadian. She holds that nationalism coopted hybridity – invoking hybridity, diversity, and harmony while fostering ethnic division (16-17). For Puri, however, the dougla has great potential as an oppositional identity in both cultural and political contexts. Puri conceives of “dougla poetics” as a form of hybridity that would defy both African and Indian nationalist agendas by combining African and Indian cultures without erasing their differences or the inequalities that form their relationship. She argues that “a dougla poetics could provide a rich symbolic resource for interracial unity” precisely because it “unmask(s) power and symbolically redraw its lines” thus “offer[ing] a vocabulary for a political identity, not a primarily biological one”(32).

Puri’s argument is useful because it points to the significance of The Beacon’s erotization of the dougla. It also provides a means for reading The Beacon’s horrified reaction to the creolized or dougla cultural phenomenon of the festival of La Divina Pastora. By bringing together Afro-Trinidadian, Roman Catholic, and East Indian cultures without subordinating one to another, this festival probably constituted a form of dougla poetics. During it, Indians worshipped La Divina Pastora in the Catholic Church and performed Hindi rituals outside of the church. Surrounding the church was a festival of music and dance as well as a market for food and cloth in which Afro-Trinidadians participated. That this was an important cultural event is reflected in the fact that three authors of the Beacon group published stories about it: James’s “La Divina Pastora,” Percival Maynard’s “His Last Fling,” and Mendes’s “Good Friday at the Church of La Divina Pastora.” Yet curiously none of these stories portrays the inter-cultural aspect of the event: James’s focuses on inter-racial and Venezuelan peasants, Maynard on urban Afro-Trinidadians, and Mendes on Indo-Trinidadians.

Faced with “dougla poetics,” Mendes vacillates between disbelief, rejection,

distortion, and envy. From the moment he arrives on the rainy eve of the fete, he resists the excitement and pleasure of its participants. He sees the Indian “hutments” where food is being prepared as a “dantesque” hell -- the sky “starless,” drizzling. Mendes dwells on the contrariness of the circumstances in order to impress the reader with a sense of the peculiarity of Indo-Trinidadians for energetically exerting themselves despite difficult circumstances for a ritual that Mendes finds at best absurd and at worst a manifestation of the “Indian spirituality” that kept Indo-Trinidadians “content with a lot unworthy of human beings” (The Beacon II/2:10).

For him, this creolized and dougla event is “the most incongruous, most amazing sight I had ever seen.” “There was, I felt, some mistake” he wrote of his first impression, “What I saw I could not believe in what I saw at that moment and all the succeeding moments”(The Beacon II/2:8). He compares the incongruity of the noisy Hindu-filled Catholic church with that of a calm lunatic asylum. His choice of comparison conveys his impression that there is something insane about the mixing of cultures and religions that characterized the fete at Siparia. Mendes explains, “If you entered a lunatic asylum and heard no insane scream, no senseless speech, no battering of head against partition, you would stop and wonder if you were really in a lunatic asylum.” For Mendes finding the Catholic Church not silent but bustling with noisy Hindus is comparable to entering a lunatic asylum. Crowded into pews, the East Indians who “hotly engaged in choruses of conversation” are like the screaming and banging of the lunatics (The Beacon II/2:8). He confirms this reading when he refers to the area around the altar as a “bedlam of contradictory sound” (The Beacon II/2:10). For Mendes and his companions, the busy church is not an example of the cultural hybridity that defines Trinidad but a “foreign scene” in which they are outsiders: Mendes writes, “I felt as Ruth must have felt when she found herself standing amid the alien corn”(The Beacon II/2:8). Not only does he find this hybridity absurd; he claims

it is detrimental to its practitioners. Of Indo-Trinidadians' ecstatic belief and financial contributions to the saint, Mendes writes, "here, in all its stark naked absurdity is seen the Indian 'spirituality'... which admirers of India are so unanimous in praising, the spirituality which is responsible for the dominion and tyranny of prejudice and tradition and which has made so many millions of people content with a lot unworthy of human beings"(The Beacon II/2:10).<sup>151</sup>

When he does accept an Indian cultural difference, he interprets it in terms of his own political agenda. When he sees an Indian woman breast feeding, he sexualizes her, seeing only her "luscious breast." He assumes that the fact that his presence does not disturb her as a sign of Indian straightfowardness about sexuality. As a result, he concludes that "these women...might teach us quite a lot"(The Beacon II/2:7). Mendes enlists the woman in his campaign against bourgeois restraints on sexuality. He expounds: "a proper scientific knowledge of sex is an aim worth fighting for. I thank gods whatever gods there be for Krafft Ebbing and Company"(The Beacon II/2 6). Mendes does not consider what breast feeding means to the woman or her community.<sup>152</sup>

Mendes is, in sum, fully alienated by the experience of a creole/dougla culture.

---

<sup>151</sup> Here, Mendes makes a jibe at Beatrice Greig and the "India Section" which covered the Indian spiritual leaders and issues. Sander notes Mendes's criticism of the Beacon's emphasis on Indian mysticism (38).

<sup>152</sup> On a similarly brief impression of an Indian woman, Mendes reduces the Indian family to the stereotype of the violent patriarchal father and the martyred wife. He tells the story of one particular family that has come to give tribute to La Divina Pastora for having saved their youngest child the previous year. Mendes follows the "strange rites" of their devotion, their donations of oil, candles, and money. From observing the father's face, "his heavy moustache and heavy-drooping eye-lids, his distended nostrils and large sensuous mouth" that the man has a cruel selfishness and that his wife is a martyr. From this he concludes that, "there would have been more justice in canonizing the frail wife of this man than the inartistic effigy .... she , at least, was one of life's martyrs, whereas La Divina Pastora was of earthly manufacture with nothing of the spirit that suffers and the spirit that lives"(10).

At the end of his article, he does mention that Afro-Caribbeans participate in the festival; two black women perform the stations of the cross. Mendes envies their intense spirituality, commenting that

I marveled at her powers of concentration for she took no notice of the noisy confusion around her. She appeared to be in a world of her own, and absolutely alone in it. Her everted purple lips moved in a spirit of ecstasy. I envied her. I have sometimes wished that I could suffer- or enjoy - such a spiritual experience ... (The Beacon II/2:11)

Mendes comforts himself by asserting his difference and defining himself through European culture, "I suppose, however, that the esthetic thrill which pulsates through me while listening to one of the late string quartets of Beethoven is in some way or the other related to the mystic experiences: let that be my consolation" (The Beacon II/2:11). Yet as soon as he admits his envy, he denies it, concluding the essay by reasserting the perversity of the Indo-Trinidadian participation in the creole festival. As Mendes leaves the church he passes, "a black man lying prone beside a pillar of the church with his face in the dust." One of his presumably white companions notes in absolute denial of the two ecstatic women, "'There lies the only Christian in the place to-day'" (The Beacon II/2:11). Mendes's final sentence -- "Could I end on a finer note?" seems almost obsessive in its need to point out yet again that dougla hybridity is absurd. Yet the sentence ends, however rhetorically, with a question mark. Perhaps this question mark can stand as an invitation to question the account he has just given the reader. Perhaps it is not fine to claim that dougla culture is absurd and to cement one's argument by displaying, yet again, the figure of a disempowered, dissolute black male.

It is, however, an effective technique of dismissing the threat an Indo-Afro creole culture posed to the white elite and white intellectuals alike. The festival

embodies a Trinidad in which there is no place for the white bourgeoisie -- the scene is filled with Indians, blacks, and a few Syrians. Mendes can participate only as an observer. His consistent eroticization of hybrid figures in his fiction may represent a strategy of containing the threat dougla culture posed to his position in Trinidadian culture. In his hybrid figures, Seppy, Boodhoo, Isadora he transforms the dougla poetics of *La Divina Pastora* into erotic inter-racial women and men. He has a place in the picture of beautiful women -- as the desirer. It is after all the Portuguese merchant who "gets" Isadora in "Five Dollars of Flesh" -- Mendes was the son of a Portuguese merchant and a man of countless amorous entanglements.

Mendes's discomfort with the Hindi Catholic church makes visible the contradiction underlying The Beacon. In 1931, only a predominantly white group of intellectuals could fund and support an oppositional journal of Trinidadian literature. However, it would be very difficult for these men and women to produce a national image of Trinidad that included all Trinidadian ethnic groups. Yet this inclusion was necessary if The Beacon's image of the emergent nation were to effectively counter the divide and rule politics of colonialism. This failure in representing the creole or dougla nation arises in part from the fact that The Beacon has two incompatible goals in conceiving of its fiction. It sets out both to create a literature in the image of the non-white working classes and to attack bourgeois respectability through a politics of inversion. These are the two goals Gomes outlines in his editorial on local fiction. In combining these two goals, the working class becomes figured as the inverse of respectability, which has several negative consequences. It distorts and weakens the historical working class, and it produces an image of the nation as consummate example of sexual degeneracy, which is exactly how English colonial discourse had constructed Trinidad. In combining the project of critiquing the status quo with the project of imagining the nation, The Beacon reproduces the central principle of race

theories of the late 19th century -- that racial hybridity was a form of degeneracy. The anti-colonial message of fiction like "Boodhoo" and "Brotherly Love" that colonial ideology produces incest and adultery.

Ironically in attacking bourgeois respectability for its irrelevance, double standards, and hypocrisy, The Beacon reenacted one of the oppressive strategies of respectable/imperial domesticity. English domestic rhetoric defined the Caribbean as politically unworthy because it lacked sexual virtue. Yard fiction and the fiction of white degeneracy erased the very conception of an Afro-Asian Trinidadian political movement or identity by conceiving of hybridity solely in sexual terms. Colonial discourse deployed sexual discourse to discount the political power of the Afro- and Asian Caribbean population and to justify English rule. The Beacon deployed sexual discourse to discount the power of Afro- and Asian Caribbeans in order to justify the political leadership of white creoles -- particularly, Portuguese creoles. Gomes's position as editor of The Beacon allowed him to criticize the French creole Cipriani for his leadership of the Afro-Trinidadian working and middle class. In retrospect, we can see that Gomes was competing with Cipriani for the role of oppositional white leader. In the 1950s Gomes would come to occupy a position somewhat parallel to that Cipriani held in the 1920's and 1930's. Like Cipriani, he shifted from an ostensibly strident spokesperson for the working class to a politician who tended to support the interests of the establishment over those of labor.

In this context, The Beacon's choice to attack the elite by attacking respectability and forcefully bringing sex into public discourse can be seen as a strategy to block the Afro-Caribbean and Indian middle classes that were respectable from participating in the fight to wrest power from the allied forces of the colonial bourgeoisie and the colonial government.

**Chapter 7: "The rope, of course, being covered with flowers":  
Metropolitan Discourses and the Construction of Creole Identity in Jean Rhys's  
Black Exercise Book <sup>153</sup>**

The Black Exercise Book is a critical text in Rhys's oeuvre because it illustrates the intertwined nature of Rhys's critique of colonialism and psychoanalysis. The Black Exercise Book is an unpublished personal and writer's journal in which Rhys explores her childhood in Dominica, England's imperial and class hypocrisy, the role of writing in her life, as well as scenes from the novel she was working on, Good Morning Midnight, and the next, Wide Sargasso Sea.<sup>154</sup> In it, Rhys centers her account of her childhood around two experiences: being criticized and beaten primarily by her nurse and her mother, and being seduced into a sado-masochistic relationship with Mr. Howard. Rhys revises these scenes repeatedly, each time changing significant aspects in order to shape her identity as a white creole woman through an identification or comparison of her position as a beaten child and sexual slave with Afro-Caribbeans' historical experiences of floggings and sexual coercion under slavery. In juxtaposing these revised and repeated scenes, the Black Notebook illustrates the process through which Rhys fashions her own identity and that of the white creole woman, the central figure of her "West Indian" work. These accounts of beating and seduction embody a dual critique of English domesticity's definition of womanhood and psychoanalysis's theories of seduction and masochism by constructing strong parallels between key texts

---

<sup>153</sup> I would like to thank the literary estate of Jean Rhys and the Special Collections Department of the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa Library for the permission to cite from Rhys's Black Notebook. The Black Notebook is also called the Black Exercise Book and reflects the color of the exercise book, not its contents. She also had green and orange exercise books. I would like to thank Mary Hanna for her important contributions to this chapter, especially to my analysis of Fanon.

<sup>154</sup> The Exercise book contains drafts or version of material that later appear in a number of Rhys's published work, including "Pioneers, Oh Pioneers," Smile Please, "Tigers are Better Looking."

of these discourses: Brontë's Jane Eyre and Freud's "A Child is Being Beaten" and Dora.

Unlike Rhys's works of fiction, the *Black Notebook* expresses the significance of writing to Rhys's engagement with metropolitan discourses and her self-fashioning. Rhys's fictional protagonists are mostly not writers, and their apparently passive and self-destructive behavior has drawn much criticism. The *Black Notebook* presents us with a similar central figure, a young Rhys, who is addicted to an apparently masochistic relationship with an older man, and who, the moment she successfully defies her mother, sinks into a debilitating sense of loss. But unlike the "Rhys woman" of her novels, the Rhys of the *Black Notebook* is a writer, whom we see actively constructing a self through writing. One of the central interpretive challenges the notebook poses is that Rhys exerts her agency to define a self that appears passive and masochistic. Reading Rhys's masochistic or passive self-portrait as a critique of English colonial and European psychoanalytic discourse reveals that she actively shaped and deployed her masochistic identification with enslaved Afro-Caribbeans as a strategy of resistance through which she both exposed the interconnections between the English construction of white and Afro-Caribbean womanhoods and asserted a racially inclusive conception of creole identity. Embedded as it is in European colonial discourses, Rhys's writing reiterates central aspects of those discourses even as it criticizes and deconstructs their central categories of race, gender, and metropolitan identity.

### The *Black Notebook*'s Critique of Domestic Womanhood

Though the *Black Notebook* does not explicitly refer to Jane Eyre, I read it in relation to Brontë's novel because its representation of the young Rhys has so much in common with Brontë's representation of Jane Eyre's childhood and so closely parallels

Rhys's own explicit critique of Brontë in Wide Sargasso Sea. In relation to Brontë, the Black Notebook has a dual project: first to criticize Brontë's negative representation of the white creole and her participation in the racialization of female virtue and, second, to appropriate that negative portrayal to fashion a Caribbean identity for herself. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason represents the antithesis of the ideal of English womanhood. A victim of hereditary insanity, Brontë's Bertha is ill-educated, promiscuous, dark, violent towards her servants and, finally, animal-like. When Rochester locks Bertha in his attic, he "longed only for what suited me - the Antipodes of the Creole"(Brontë 274). Impoverished, plain Jane, with her education, religion and virtuous passion is that "antipode." To render Bertha the opposite of the proper English wife, Brontë makes Bertha both "halves" of colonial society: the "inferior" dark, enslaved woman and the coarse, sadistic slave owner.<sup>155</sup> Brontë's portrayal of Bertha participates in the 19th-century construction of the West Indies as a place where domesticity -- Christian marriage, masculinity and femininity -- are necessarily transgressed, often inverted.

Bertha's undesirability, her lack of education and her violence reflect the stereotype of the white creole woman, who is faulted for her ignorance, her violence, and her "negro" ways in countless English books from Edward Long's The History of Jamaica (1774) to Charlotte Smith's The Wandering of Warwick (1796). In consistently painting Bertha as "discoloured," dark, and black, Brontë identifies Bertha with "black" Afro-Caribbeans. She makes this link explicit when Rochester asserts that Bertha's family welcomes him because he is "of a good race" with the implication that his "good race" would "secure" their not so "good," not so white race. That Brontë

---

<sup>155</sup> In claiming that Bertha Mason represents both the slave and the master, I am combining two conflicting interpretations; Susan Meyer and Carl Plasa have read Bertha as a resistant slave whereas Sue Thomas asserts that "she stands for the domestic excesses of a recalcitrant despotism" (Thomas "The Tropical extravagance" 10).

describes Bertha as a hyena and as promiscuous further links her to the image of Afro-Caribbean women in English texts, which represented women of color both as animals and as sexually active outside of marriage (Bush "Slave Women" 11-13).<sup>156</sup> Finally, Bertha's promiscuity codes her as black. English discourse defined both the "black" and the "inter-racial" creole woman as sexually transgressive. The pro-slavery writers, like Bryan Edwards, described black women as diseased prostitutes whereas anti-slavery discourse portrayed black women as victims of white male promiscuity. The stereotype of enslaved women reflects the historical reality that neither slave owners nor the law recognized the legal or religious bonds of marriage. In this sense, enslaved women were literally excluded from English domestic marriage; English discourse figured this exclusion as sexual immorality and marital unworthiness.

Both free and enslaved inter-racial women were described almost exclusively as the mistresses of white men – women who chose to be concubines of wealthy white men, rather than to marry men of their own color. Shaped by domestic ideology, this stereotype read the wide-spread practice inter-racial sexual partnerships as a debauched form of marriage. Thus, all Afro-Caribbean women stood outside of domestic womanhood. So strong was the association between non-marital sex and blackness (or not-whiteness) in the European imagination that scientific discourse and artistic representations attributed characteristics defined as typical of African women to white women who engaged in deviant sexual behavior, prostitution and lesbianism. Gilman, in fact, argues that the presence of a black figure, most frequently a servant, coded the scene as sexual. (Gilman 228; McClintock . 22-23; 52-3).

---

<sup>156</sup> Thomas argues that Brontë comparison of Bertha to a hyena reflects the belief that hyenas could change sex ("The Tropical Extravaganza" 7). The hyena may then reflect Bertha's transgression of gender and race lines. In taking the position of slave master, white women took a male position; in sharing cultural practices - language, dress, and food - with Afro-Caribbeans, they trespassed racial lines.

Underlying the description of West Indian women stands what I call the colonial romance, which both bound together the constructions of Afro- and Euro-creole women and set them in opposition to one another. As the mistress of the white woman's husband, the inter-racial woman was the object of the white woman's jealousy, the primary cause of her cruelty; that is, the stereotype of the white creole woman as sadist derives its meaning from the stereotype of inter-racial women as the desired mistress of white men. In *Bertha*, Brontë conflates these images.

Though most English novels and travel narratives did not cast the white creole woman as black in such concrete ways as *Jane Eyre* does, they africanized her culturally by claiming that she had assimilated Afro-creole cultural practices. Book after book, from Lady Nugent's diary to the anonymous novel *Marly* (1828), portrayed white creole women eating "pepperpot" from calabashes or pots with their hands, dressing without stays, wrapping their hair in kerchiefs, and speaking "negroish" language. These negative images defined creole culture as Afro-Caribbean culture and denied creole language, cuisine, and dress as legitimate cultural expressions for white West Indians. In short, to be creole was to be Afro-creole; there was no place for the respectable, white creole woman. Consequently when Rhys "writes back" against Brontë's *Bertha*, she writes back not only against the widespread stereotype of the white creole and the imperialist racialization of femininity, but against the racially ambiguous identity, the placelessness to which English discourse relegated her. Brontë's blackened *Bertha* identified the white creole with Afro-Caribbeans and thus provided Rhys with a foundation for building a Caribbean identity.

The *Black Notebook*, however, does not directly address Brontë's portrayal of *Bertha*. Rather it addresses itself to the contradictions in Brontë's construction of Jane's whiteness and virtue. Rhys ties her text to Brontë's by constructing comparisons between her own young self and Brontë's young English heroine, Jane

Eyre. She will repeat this strategy in Wide Sargasso Sea by presenting young Antoinette's isolation and oppression as parallel to young Jane's. We meet Jane Eyre at the moment she first resists oppression. When her cousin John, who "punished" her "continually," rouses her from reading, hits her, and then strikes her with the book, she fights back(7). She explains, "I resisted all the way; a new thing for me"(9). Jane's rebellion brings her incarceration and a removal to the Lowood School for orphans.

In the Black Notebook, we meet the young Rhys when she rebels against being beaten for the first time. Rhys describes being beaten three times. Each scene revises the previous account. The first description is incomplete because the page is torn. In the section directly following the tear, Rhys's comments indicate that she is discussing being punished: "I'd given in and started to cry[?]. but[?] I cant remember what it was about or what I was supposed to have done. Thats always my trouble I never know what it is I'm supposed to have done"(20).<sup>157</sup> That what Rhys doesn't know is why she's being beaten becomes clear in her next sentences:

Temper in the West Indies being hot and a certain tradition in the air (?)  
 [written above the line: about these matters] [text missing].... I was  
 always reading. I dont mean at all that I was beaten for reading but only  
 that it added to the general irritating effect. My nurse Meta couldn't bear  
 the sight of me with a book she couldn't bear the sight of me anyway,  
 but completely with [a] book it was too much....(19-20)

In not knowing the reason for her beatings and in experiencing a link between reading and beating, Rhys is like Jane Eyre. Although Rhys says she is not beaten directly because she read, she associates being beaten with reading. Rhys's reading is the last

---

<sup>157</sup> In transcribing Rhys's Black Exercise Book, I aim to be accurate although the text has frequent misspellings and leaves out apostrophes and punctuation. When I am unsure of her handwriting and am therefore making a guess, I put a question mark in brackets after the word.

straw that would bring her nurse to beat her.

On the next page, Rhys transforms Meta's beating her into a scene of her mother beating her. The beating scenes are parallel in that neither her mother nor Meta has an apparent cause for punishing her. They are significantly different, however, in that Rhys rebels against her mother, telling her "God curse you if you touch me I'll kill you...instead of my usual stubborn silence"(21). At first, Rhys's rebellion appears successful in that her mother desists from beating her. But Rhys experiences this cessation as a rejection. She reports her mother as saying, "Ah you're growing up are you Well I can't do anything more" (21-22). Rhys interprets her mother's actions as a sign of her own alienation: "I suppose she must see...something alien in me which would make me unhappy + she was trying [?] to beat it out at all costs." She therefore views the cessation of beating as her mother's decision to relinquish her to that alienation and unhappiness. Rhys's rebellion ends like Jane Eyre's in a separation from family, an isolation from the world. Though Rhys associates being beaten with a host of adults criticizing her, Meta, her mother, her teachers, it also signifies being loved by her mother.

In both Wide Sargasso Sea and the Black Exercise Book, Rhys copies Brontë's strategy of comparing her heroine to enslaved people, and in so doing, she inverts the stereotype of the white creole woman as sadist. Brontë likens Jane's oppression to that of enslaved people in order to portray Jane as the victim of injustice at each stage of her development -- in her Aunt's home, at the Lowood school, and as Rochester's penniless fiancé at Thornfield (Meyer 63&76). Jane rails against her cousin's brutality by calling him a "slave driver"(Brontë 8). When her aunt imprisons her in the red room, she describes herself as a "revolted slave"(Brontë 11). When the Reverend Brocklehurst wrongfully punishes Jane at the Lowood School, Helen Burns's encouraging glance gives her courage. As Jane puts it, "it was as if a martyr, a hero,

had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in transit"(Brontë 58).

However, Jane eschews the position of sexual slave. When Rochester wishes to buy Jane richly colored silks and velvet, she views her financial dependence as placing her in the position of slave to her future husband. She comments, "He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched"(Brontë 236). Here, Jane does everything in her power to remove herself from a position of dependence on Rochester and to distance herself from the image of the enslaved mistress. She writes a letter to her wealthy uncle, which will unravel Rochester's dreams by exposing his earlier marriage. Once Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason is exposed, he asks Jane to be his companion, telling her, "You shall go to a place I have in the south of France: a white-washed villa on the shores of the Mediterranean"(Brontë 267).<sup>1</sup> Though Rochester claims the villa would afford her a "happy, and guarded, and most innocent life," Jane can see it only as a demand that she be his mistress, a position he himself claims as akin to slavery. "Hiring a mistress," he tells Jane, "is the next worst thing to buying a slave"(Brontë 274). Jane defines herself as the morally upright English woman largely by virtue of her decision to brave poverty and danger rather than degrade herself as Rochester's mistress. Though Jane misses Rochester sorely when she establishes herself as a schoolmistress of peasant girls, she is proud of her decision, asking rhetorically, "Whether it is better... to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles - fevered with delusive bliss one hour - suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next - or to be a village schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England?"(Brontë 316; see also Meyer 85). In portraying the French dancer, Celine Varens as promiscuous and her daughter as frivolous, Brontë has constructed France as morally inferior to Jamaica, akin to the Caribbean in its lack of morality and sexual license. In the moral and sexual geography

of the novel, Rochester's villa in the south of France is not so far from Mr. Howard's house in the West Indies.

Further, despite Jane's identification with slaves and the fact that the majority of people enslaved in the British empire were black, Brontë separates slavery from blackness, making both literary tropes (Meyer 63). In *Jane Eyre*, slavery signals injustice; the slave righteousness. In contrast, blackness signifies moral flaws. The white aristocrat, Blanche Ingram has dark features because she is haughty and mercenary; Bertha's blackness correlates with her promiscuity and madness.

In contrast to Jane, Rhys identifies her childhood self with slavery and blackness. She places her beating in relation to that of slaves by juxtaposing the scenes of her mother's beating with her feelings of guilt and outrage at the flogging. Whereas Jane defines herself as the woman who refused to be a mistress, Rhys defines herself as the woman who is conditioned to be a mistress -- a position she codes as black and enslaved. In the *Black Exercise Book*, Rhys writes that when she was fourteen years old, an elderly and apparently distinguished British couple, the Howards, visited Rhys's family. Mr. Howard entralls the young Rhys; she is "captivated by this elegant speech"(50). His overt and repeated attention -- "mostly he talked about me me me" -- further intoxicate her (56). Mr. Howard takes Rhys on a walk and tells her she is old enough to have a lover, touches her breasts, and asks if she would like to "belong" to him.

Rhys responds, "I don't know," "breathlessly heart beating looking into the eyes." The older Howard manipulates the young Rhys's desires. He asks her, "What did I want to do...What did I wish[?] and hope." She concludes, "it was irresistible" (56). Rhys, however, feels that Mr. Howard's touch, "cold and dead" on her breast, is

a "mistake" and the next day she refuses to go to town with him.<sup>158</sup> Her mother, shocked at her rudeness, insists that she go. On this trip, Mr. Howard buys Rhys sweets and seduces her "mentally" into the relationship. He then ignores her for several days. The next time he asks her, she agrees immediately and is hooked into a relationship in which Mr. Howard constructs what Rhys called a "serial story." Rhys defines the relationship and "story" as one of discipline, bondage, and submission — "A[I?] only rebel enough to make it for fun to force me to submit cruelty submission utter submission that was the story"(64). She "lived in this dream":

We were living He + I in a large house on one of the other islands -  
 It[?] looked out [on the] sea the hills were at the back a beautiful house.  
 I saw the huge rooms smelt the flowers that decorated them heard the  
 venetian blinds flap saw the moon rise over the hills the bats fly out at  
 sunset. My arms were covered with bracelets my hands with rings I  
 laughed and danced but I was not happy or unhappy I was waiting  
 doomed Sometimes I sat at the long table decorated with flowers My  
 bracelets and tinkled when I moved sometimes quite naked I waited on  
 the guests. The long earring I wore touched my shoulder.(63-64)

By imagining Rhys as a naked servant, dressed only in large jewels, Mr. Howard exoticizes and enslaves her in much the same way that English discourse eroticized Caribbean and African women. Her nakedness in particular links her to Africans, whose habitual nakedness early English travel writers like Richard Ligon (1673) and Hans Sloane (1707) found emblematic of their primitive innocence and difference from Europeans. Howard's vision of her reflects the English construction of white creole women as culturally and sexually "black." Sue Thomas argues that Mr. Howard's

---

<sup>158</sup> The sentence may be either that Mr. Howard's hands are "cold and dead" on her breast or that her breast feels "cold and dead" when he touches her. Either way, it is clear that Mr. Howard does not erotically arouse Rhys.

fantasies are characteristic “brothel fantasies” of the time that participate in England’s pornographic view of its colonies (“Grilled Sole” 71). He is the astute “turn-of-the-century sex tourist, exploiting differences in age of consent legislation” (“Grilled Sole” 68). In 1905, the legal age in England for a woman to consent to “indecent assault” was thirteen and “carnal knowledge” sixteen. In Dominica, Rhys was old enough to consent to a lover at fourteen (Thomas “Grilled Sole” 70).

In the 1990s, however, Mr. Howard’s “relationship” with Rhys constitutes sexual abuse. In “Jean Rhys, ‘grilled sole’ and an experience of ‘mental seduction,’” Thomas reads the narrative as a retrieved memory of sexual trauma and uses textual evidence from the *Exercise Book* to argue that Howard violated Rhys more extensively than she explicitly recounts. Thomas reads the repetitions of scenes and fragmentations as symptoms of the difficult psychological process of uncovering trauma. Yet Rhys’s *Black Exercise Book* catches Rhys in a transition between the raw narrative of the sexual trauma and the transformation of that trauma into literature. Rhys’s painstaking editing -- the crossed out and inserted words, the multiple drafts -- is typical of her editing process in literary manuscripts. Rhys’s transformation of her sexual trauma into literature seems to serve a therapeutic function similar to that Anna Freud attributes to literary writing in “Beating Fantasies and Daydreams.” In this essay, she argues that patients can transcend neuroses associated with trauma by transforming the traumatic event or desire into literary writing (299). In writing the *Black Exercise Book* and later *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys not only works through her pain involving her mother and Howard, she articulates an effective critique of British colonialism and Freudian psychoanalysis.

Rhys presents her submission to Howard’s advances as formed by her experience of colonialism as a child in turn-of-the-century Dominica, where she has two associations with beating, that of slaves being flogged and that of herself being

beaten. As Mr. Howard's sexual slave, Rhys occupies the position of mistress, a position which West Indian society and England's imagination of the West Indies largely reserved for Afro-Caribbean women. By positioning Rhys as Afro-Caribbean and sexually active, Howard makes Rhys ineligible for the other female identities available to her in Dominica: marriage in the racially endogamous, white upper middle class; and the life of the convent, which Rhys had already renounced when she ended her "religious fit" shortly before she met Howard.

Yet, even as she accepts the position of sexual slave and feels overpowered by Mr. Howard's power, charm, and attentions, she resists him. For instance, she asks for an English fish sole for dinner. Her demand forces Mr. Howard to break off his fantasy of sexual domination just as he is tying her up: "One day [when?] the middle of an impassioned speech just at the dramatic moment[?] when my hands were to be tied (the rope of course being covered with flowers) I said Do you think we could have sole sometimes"(76); "he laughed and stopped the serial for that day"(65).<sup>159</sup> Rhys's demand for English fish asserts the failure of Mr. Howard's story to enthrall her, but it also expresses Rhys's claims on English civilization, destroying his vision of her as a sexy primitive.<sup>160</sup>

The account as a whole resists English discourse. Rhys claims that these childhood experiences of beating and seduction "formed me made me as I am"(43). She thus presents the experiences of being placed in the figurative position of slaves as

---

<sup>159</sup> I have put together citations from both versions Rhys tells of the event because only in reading them together does one see the full effect of her request.

<sup>160</sup> In the context of Rhys's Catholic education and constant punishment, Thomas interprets Rhys's demand for sole as "a slip of the tongue, a desire to be souled in this story and to have the fate of the "sinner".... articulated in it"(81). For Thomas the soul would constitute not only the strictly religious function but also grant Rhys a place in the domestic virtuous and missionizing imperial project. I share with Thomas the view that Rhys's demand for sole contains a complex resistance to Howard's sexual objectification constituted by a claim to or demand for a moral identity.

forming her identity. Rather than hide this similarity with Afro-Caribbeans, she aims to expose it; her beating and seduction are “the thing I want to write about” (43).<sup>161</sup> Further, in juxtaposing her experience of being beaten with her feelings about slaves being beaten, she signals the comparison between herself and enslaved women. She did not choose to be beaten, nor did she choose to be seduced by Mr. Howard. But she did choose to write about them and to do so in such a way that she pointed to rather than obscured the comparison between herself and enslaved women. Because the positions she assumes involve physical punishment and sexual coercion, Rhys’s choice to identify with Afro-Caribbean may appear self-destructive or masochistic. Yet it embodies a criticism of English constructions of creole womanhood.<sup>162</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> Teresa O'Connor reads the Notebook as saying that Rhys's relationship with Mr. Howard caused her to write the Notebook. However, Rhys's text is ambiguous. Though her relationship with Mr. Howard is clearly of utmost importance, Rhys explains that reading Richard Hughes's *High Wind in Jamaica* made her remember the story of Mr. Howard which had left "my memory like a stone" (68). She seems also to attribute her writing of the notebook to the incident when she forces her mother to stop beating her: "I was just at this stage when it happened - the thing that formed me made me as I am the thing I want to write about" (43). The next line is crossed out but the following passage is clearly part of the scene in which Rhys for the first time refuses to withstand a beating and refuses to cry: "... One day instead of my usual attitude of stubborn silence. I won't cry I don't care how long she goes on I won't cry..." (43-44). By claiming several inspirations, the text asks us to choose all rather than one: the mother and Mr. Howard are two main reasons Rhys gives for writing the Notebook.

<sup>162</sup> Here I differ from Thomas who argues that Rhys's narrative is a retrieved memory of sexual trauma. It's ambiguities, its postponements, fragmentations are manifestations of the difficulty in articulating that trauma. As such they are can not easily be represented as "choices" but rather as symptoms. Although, I fully agree with Thomas that the narrative constitutes a retrieved memory and that many of its idiosyncrasies are in fact characteristic symptoms of narratives of sexual trauma, I still attribute choice to Rhys's decision to identify herself with the figure of the enslaved mistress because Rhys doesn't make this comparison once. She builds her construction of the white creole -- both Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* -- on similar comparisons. I argue that Rhys's repetitions in the text and her identification with enslaved women form part of her transformation of the experience of sexual abuse into an attack on Freud for, she felt,

That Rhys takes the position of the sexual slave in addition to that of the rebel slave points to the fact Brontë limits Jane Eyre's identification with slavery by excising the aspects of slavery which conflict with the English ideal of domestic womanhood, most notably sex but also dependence. A system of concubinage, in which enslaved women served as the sexual and domestic partners of white employees on plantations, was virtually institutionalized in the West Indies. To claim the position of slave as a woman and limit it to non-sexual oppression was to remove a significant aspect of slavery's burden. In assuming the position of the enslaved Afro-Caribbean mistress of the white man, Rhys thus points to the fact that slavery rather than an essential characteristic of blackness caused enslaved women to lack chastity.<sup>163</sup> In defining the white creole as black and promiscuous, Brontë reveals that whiteness and blackness were cultural constructs which domestic ideology deployed to define the middle-class, English, white woman as the legitimate woman in the British Empire. Rhys's text heightens that revelation by pointing to the limitations of Brontë's identification with slaves. In deploying slavery to protest women's oppression while deploying blackness to mark inferiority, Brontë belongs to a group of late 18th- and 19th-century English women writers, like the popular novelist Charlotte Smith (Ferguson 19 *passim*; Sussman e.g. 261). The middle class based its superiority within England on its domestic virtue and industry; Britain justified its domination of its colonies partially by claiming to be more virtuous in domestic terms. Thus, in showing up Brontë's appropriation of slavery as implicated in the ideological defense of colonization, Rhys engages with the core of colonial ideology.

Yet, Rhys's project is ultimately one of self-fashioning. She appropriates the

---

denying the reality of that abuse and an attack on English colonial discourses, whose pornographic fantasies of the West Indies scripted Mr. Howard's text and actions.

<sup>163</sup> By focusing on sexual exploitation, I do not wish to obscure the fact that Afro-Caribbean women also chose to reject English models of femininity.

English africanization of the white creole in order to “home” her identity as a creole. Rhys writes the Notebook in 1938, during the culmination of strikes and the rise of trade unionism and nationalist politics in the West Indies; that is, during a time when the position of the white minority was threatened. Identifying her childhood abuse and violation with that of Afro-Caribbean women strengthened Rhys’s claim to a Caribbean identity. In the revisions of the beating scenes, the shift from the servant to the white creole mother as the figure of authority serves Rhys’s purpose because it distances her from her plantocratic mother and associates her child self more readily with the Afro-Caribbean population. Meta’s beating would not have lent itself to the comparison between Rhys and enslaved people.

Rhys’s dream of abduction figures her relationship with Mr. Howard and provides the strongest link between her affair with Howard and the relationship of her heroine, Antoinette, to the English man, Rochester in Wide Sargasso Sea. Though Rhys asserts that “it went out of my memory like a stone,” the Howard affair resurfaces in a nightmare, which configures all the key elements of Rhys’s self-definition through identification with Afro-Caribbean women: her sexual violation, which renders her ineligible for marriage, her acceptance of this violation, and the fact that the violation brings her a Caribbean identity and requires the loss of her mother (68). In the dream, an unnamed man leads Rhys into a forest, where she stumbles and dirties her beautiful white dress. At first, she attempts to keep this dress clean. Its whiteness and pristine condition I read as her sexual honor -- her ticket to marriage -- as well as a sign of her racial whiteness. Once she sees the blackness and the hate of the man’s face, however, she abruptly abandons her attempt to keep the dress clean; she wrote, “I walk with difficulty stumbling along after him holding the skirt of my dress up with both hands

out of the dirt It's a beautiful dress and I don't wish it to get soiled..."<sup>164</sup> But once she sees his hate -- "I can see the expression on his face. He looks like a devil. A sly expression. His face is black. [A?] look of hate of loathing"<sup>165</sup> -- she allows the dress to become dirty: "Now I don't try to hold up my dress It trails in the dirt my beautiful dress" (81). Rhys stumbles over the dress. Unable to rise, she follows him "crawling on my hand + knees" and her "face against the earth cringing waiting"(83).

Rhys does not seek an escape from Mr. Howard, and she refuses rescue in the dream: "I follow him sick with fear of what is going to happen but I make no effort to save myself If anyone were to offer to save me I would refuse it must happen it has to be"(82).<sup>166</sup> That Rhys stops trying to keep her dress clean indicates that she stops trying to keep herself white and accepts the position of mistress and her exclusion from marriage. Rhys's later short story, "Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose," based on her relationship with Mr. Howard supports this reading. Directly before she recounts the dream in the Black Notebook, Rhys lists "Horace, Eva, Reginald, Justine, Marcus, & Rose" as names she would give her children once she became a wife and mother. In "Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose," Rhys's persona, Phoebe, also lists Marcus and Rose as names of her future children. In the aftermath of her affair with an elderly Englishman, Phoebe realizes that she has lost her chastity and thus is ineligible for

---

<sup>164</sup> Rhys has written above the phrase "holding my dress up with both hands," holding, "the skirt of the dress away from the dirt," so that she might have wanted the sentence to read: "I walk with difficulty stumbling along after him holding the skirt of the dress away from the dirt."

<sup>165</sup> "His face is black" is written above the line, presumably an addition to the original sentence.

<sup>166</sup> Again, Rhys has inserted a line above the text. If this were included in the sentence, it would read: "If anyone were to offer to save me I would refuse If anyone were to say shall I save you I would [argue?] it must happen it has to [crossed out: happen] be."

marriage and motherhood, hence, the story's title, "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose." In late-19th-century Dominica and in English representations of the Caribbean, relinquishing marriage and acceding to the position of the mistress meant relinquishing the sign of white middle class womanhood.<sup>167</sup>

Rhys's dream does not only reveal the deep consequences of Mr. Howard's violation of her. It constitutes a site of resistance by transforming Mr. Howard into a black man. I suggest that the blackness of the man's face functions as the blackness of servants in late 19th-century paintings Gilman analyses, as a means of coding the scene as sexual. One could argue that the blackness of his face has nothing to do with race and was the contemporary English expression for being enraged -- "black with hatred." Rhys's use of the phrase in her adaptation of the dream for Wide Sargasso Sea would support this. Nevertheless, I think Rhys's definition of blacks as people who hate her because she is white combined with the convention of using black figures to represent whites' sexuality indicates that Mr. Howard also becomes black in her dream because he is sexual; he leads her into sexuality.<sup>168</sup> She is using the colonial logic -- sexuality equals blackness -- to point to the person who is the sexual actor. In turning Mr. Howard into a black man, Rhys's dream inverts his position in racial and colonial hierarchy, leaving him in a position of subordination rather than authority.

Rhys's dirtied honor provides a connection to the place of her birth. Once she "stumbles," she writes, "I am the earth and the core of the earth" and once the man reaches his goal and stops, "It is here I be with my face against the earth cringing

---

<sup>167</sup> That Rhys ends the dream on her hands and knees suggests not only a position of sexual vulnerability, but a transgression of race and class boundaries. Kneeling on hands and knees was a position associated with maid servants, who were in turn associated with blackness as Arthur Munby's papers illustrate (See also Thomas 76).

<sup>168</sup> Thomas links the blackness and hatred of the man's face with Rhys's "earlier cringing at the black Dominican hatred and loathing of white people" ("grilled sole" 77).

waiting sick mad with terror unable to move cringing waiting" (83). Although it is accompanied by terror, her closeness to the earth restores her to the place and to the identity from which her exile and English discourse has alienated her. In claiming to be the earth, she makes a strong claim on Caribbeanness.<sup>169</sup> Just before she tells of her wish to marry and have children, Rhys writes about her rage at an English woman who has bought an estate on Dominica and who claimed that Dominicans "don't even realise that the place is beautiful.... It marvelous to think I am the first person who has seen the beauty and loved it."<sup>170</sup> Rhys, who owned no land, feels violated by the English woman's claim on Dominica. She explains, "there was nothing to be done because she'd bought the land she'd bought the right to sneer at us"(77). Without money one can lose one's land, and, with it, one's country, one's cultural identity and one's respect. I suspect that this triad of cultural identity, homeland, and respect are the primary motivation in Rhys's construction of self.

Her mother's rejection is the final link in the construction of Rhys's identity as sexualized, and racial other.<sup>171</sup> Rhys's sister wakes the screaming Rhys from her

---

<sup>169</sup> Thomas interprets the line as expressing Rhys's "loss of self-boundary... which can be a key symptom of child sexual abuse. The desired loss of self-boundary promises disembodied invisibility at the point of 'it' happening"(76). I view my reading as complimentary. Both Thomas reads the line as a reaction to trauma; I read it as part of the literary and political transformation of the trauma. We both see Rhys using her degradation as a means of survival.

<sup>170</sup> She is probably referring to Elma Napier, an English woman, who purchased Point Baptiste, the Estate next to Hampstead, where Rhys stayed in Dominica on her 1936 visit.

<sup>171</sup> Many scholars have addressed the absent mother in Rhys's work specifically, Deborah Kloepfer (" Voyage in the Dark: Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother" Contemporary Literature 26(4)(1985): 443-59) and Ronnie Sharfman ("Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwarz-Bart's Pluie et Vent sur Tulumée Miracle and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea. Yale French Studies 62(1981): 88-106). Motherlands Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia (ed. Susheila Nasta Rutgers UP 1992) places the question of mothers and the motherland in the context of

nightmare. Her mother briefly comforts Rhys,

She sits on the bed and puts her arms round me. Now everything is forgotten. Oh stay so hold me Protect me Save me Don't ever let me go  
Stay

.... I dreamt I was in hell. I say She says haven't I told you over and over and over again at there is no such place that its all imagination...(84)<sup>172</sup>

Rhys's mother abandons Rhys to the hell of Mr.Howard's violation and betrays her greater love of the next child: "But she takes her arms away from me. She said Really you must nt go on like this you are[?] making Audrey cry. She left me and went over to Minnie[?]"(84).<sup>173</sup> The mother's early rejection is absolutely central to Rhys and her heroines. Similar scenarios, for instance, occur in After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie, and Wide Sargasso Sea. However, in the Black Exercise Book, Rhys does not recede ever further into hopelessness and alienation as do her heroines. Rather, she

---

colonized and postcolonial women writers more generally. In this volume, Laura Niesen de Abruna and Elaine Savory argue that the bond to the mother is essential to the woman writer's ability to establish a vital identity. Though I wholeheartedly agree with them, I am suggesting the opposite in this particular aspect of Rhys's work. Clearly the loss the mother's love causes enormous damage to Rhys and to her heroines. See, for instance, Julia in After Leaving Mr. MacKenzie or Anna in Voyage in the Dark as well as Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea. I am arguing that once Rhys feels her mother's rejection, she attempts to employ that rejection in the service of building another type of link to the motherland. Separating from her mother and the implications of her mother's family, in order to claim an allegiance with oppressed Afro-Caribbeans constitutes that attempt. However, this strategy always is incomplete at best, a complete failure at worst.

<sup>172</sup> Thomas convincingly reads the next line, "the frangipani must be carefully picked if the branch is broken the tree bleeds - huge dropes of thick white blood drip from it" as a reference to Howard's further violation of Rhys (Thomas 78-80).

<sup>173</sup> Here, Rhys may have written over the name Audrey with that of her older sister, Minna (Thomas 76).

determines to save herself, concluding, "I knew that no one would save me and that I must do it"(86). Just one paragraph later, Rhys again merges with the earth: "My face was pressed against the earth and my arms held it and I was the earth and the core of the earth"(86). I suggest that this merger with the earth constitutes a means of "saving" herself. In claiming to be the earth, she claims a Dominican, Caribbean identity. To get that close to the earth, she has had to endure an abduction from white middle class womanhood into a hell of sexualized, Afro-Caribbean femininity.<sup>174</sup>

### The Black Exercise Book's Challenge to Psychoanalysis

The dream constitutes the most striking link between the Black Exercise Book and Wide Sargasso Sea, in which Rhys incorporates her dream of abduction "almost verbatim" as Antoinette's first two dreams (O'Connor 24).<sup>175</sup> The parallels between

---

<sup>174</sup> I am not sure whether in claiming to be the earth Rhys is further identifying with Afro-Caribbeans or whether she is asserting an even stronger claim on Caribbean identity than both Afro-Caribbeans and wealthy English expatriates could claim. Although whites owned vast amounts of land in most of the British West Indies, they often did not live on and rarely worked that land. In contrast, Afro-Caribbeans were associated with land and associated themselves with the land although they were always in a struggle to get enough land. In her 1801 novel, Letters of a Solitary Wanderer, Charlotte Smith's white creole heroine returns to her father's plantation in Jamaica to find the great house inhabited by a number of her father's inter-racial, outside children. She explains to her fiancé, Denbigh, that the father's inter-racial children were inalienable from the land. The women lived in the Great House, the men were employed as skilled craftsmen on the estate. But she as a white child was alienable from the land, and in fact saw her only hope of salvation as a complete escape from Jamaica. I think the idea that Afro-Caribbeans belong to the land and whites do not is part and parcel of the English ideology's adherence to an environmental determinism that defined people of African descent as "native" to tropical places and white people as alien to them.

<sup>175</sup> Rhys transposes the details of her dream onto the particulars of her heroine, Antoinette's life. Rhys tells her mother that she has dreamt of hell; Antoinette says the same to Sister Marie Augustine (60). Rhys's mother scolds her for waking her sister Audrey. Antoinette's mother scolds Antoinette for waking her brother, Pierre. The key difference is that the dream allows Rhys to identify with the soil and through it with

the dreams in the Exercise Book and the novel suggest a parallel between Rhys's relationship with Mr. Howard which is reflected in her dream and Antoinette's relationship with the Rochester character which is mirrored in hers. Implicit in the connection between the Black Exercise Book and Wide Sargasso Sea is the connection between Rhys's seduction as an adolescent and Antoinette's sexual and economic exploitation in marriage to an Englishman, which represents English colonial violation and exploitation of the West Indies. The connection I want to make is not that seduction is a metaphor for colonization, but rather that the discourses which legitimated Mr. Howard and English colonialism are imbricated.<sup>176</sup> That Mr. Howard sees Rhys as sexually available and the proper object of fantasies of sexual slavery is a function of English stereotyping of creole women; that Rhys accepts his violation is a function of the colonial and patriarchal hierarchy which placed his word above hers because she was a child, a female, and a colonial.

In placing her seduction in the context of colonialism, Rhys brings into relation Europe's construction and colonization of racial others and its othering of women, so that we see that both processes are integrated and function to classify each subject by a

---

her land. Antoinette is denied this merger with West Indian nature. She attempts to hold on to a tree and feels that the tree flings her away: "The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years"(60). In Rhys's dream the phrase "the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years" refers to her mother: "The door opens and my mother comes in... the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years But she takes her arms away from me"(83-84). In transposing the phrase which originally referred to her mother's attention to the tree, the sign of Dominican nature, Rhys merges the rejection of the mother with the rejection of the island. Antoinette experiences a rejection of both mother and country, whereas Rhys makes a trade off, losing her mother and gaining the country.

<sup>176</sup> It may also function as a metaphor in a way parallel to that in which Rochester's exploitation of Antoinette is read as a metaphor of English exploitation of the Caribbean. I am, however, trying to complicate this figurative reading of the relationship between Rhys's heroines and the Caribbean.

combined racial, gender, and colonial identity. In so doing, she also points to the interrelation of English discourse, which is colonial and domestic, and psychoanalysis, which takes as its prime object of investigation female sexuality.<sup>177</sup> English domesticity defined the nuclear family as the model for sexual and familial relations and racialized it, defining it as white, metropolitan, and middle class. All people who fell outside of its boundaries, mistresses, prostitutes, lesbians, people who simply had other family structures, as was the case for many Caribbeans, were defined as not white, but black and primitive. Psychoanalysis became complicit in that colonial project when it assumed the nuclear family as a natural phenomenon, not a cultural construction and when it denied race and colonialism as factors in the development of the psyche. This is why Rhys's critique of British colonialism simultaneously functions as a critique of Freud.

I read Rhys's *Exercise Book* as a counter-narrative to psychoanalytic theories of the early 20th century much in the same way that I read it as a counter-narrative to *Jane Eyre*, a narrative which parallels the dominant texts and deviates from them in order to correct or critique them. Rhys places her text explicitly in the context of psychoanalysis by mentioning at the end of both accounts of the Howard affair that she went to Sylvia Beach's Bookshop in Paris to look up a book on psychoanalysis, which Rhys paraphrases:<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup> Gilman draws a strong line between colonialism's project of defining the racial other and psychoanalysis's project of defining the sexual other. He concludes his essay, "...It is Freud's intent to explore this hidden "dark continent" and reveal the hidden truths about female sexuality, just as the anthropologist-explorers (such as Lombroso) were revealing the hidden truths about the nature of the black. Freud continues a discourse which relates the images of male discovery to the images of the female as object of discovery. The line from the secrets possessed by the "hottentot Venus" to twentieth-century psychoanalysis runs reasonably straight" (256-7).

<sup>178</sup> Rhys never states which book she read, but she seems to be reacting against Freud's renunciation of his seduction theory. Sue Thomas identifies the text as Freud's

Women of this type will invariably say that they were seduced when very young by an elderly man. In every case,... they will relate a detailed story which in every case is entirely fictitious....

A few pages further this gent[word?] layed[?] down another law about the female attitude and reactions to sex and added I was confirmed and established in this opinion by what case no. 934 told me quoted and by what case no. 192 told me quoted Both it seemed were potty. (58-9)

Rhys clearly feels that the psychoanalytic book she read denied her experience of seduction and defined her as an insane liar. She therefore at first responds with outrage: "No honey it is not fictitious. By no means anyhow how do you know?"(58).

Here Rhys may be protesting Freud's retraction of his "seduction theory" articulated in his 1896 essay, "Aetiology of Hysteria," which asserted that female hysterics are often victims of seduction in early childhood by male relatives or servants they trust. Patients' accounts of men's amorous attempts in adolescence

---

"On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement," which includes a brief paraphrase of his renunciation: "Influenced by Charcot's view of the traumatic origin of hysteria, one was readily inclined accept as true and aetiologically significant the statements made by patients in which they ascribed their symptoms to passive sexual experiences in early childhood – broadly speaking to seduction. When this aetiology broke down under its own improbability and under contradiction in definitely ascertainable circumstances, the result at first was helpless bewilderment" (Freud "On the History" 299). Two other details tie this text to Rhys's: first, Rhys's editing emphasizes the word "on" which occurs in Freud's title: she changes her text from "I wanted a book about pchyco-analysis" to "I wanted a book on pchyco-analysis" (58). Rhys uses the same word as Freud, "fictitious," to describe women's accounts of early childhood sexual trauma. However, there is much that prevents an easy identification of the book. In addition to the fact that Rhys told David Plante that she had never read Freud (40), Rhys gives a great deal of detail not in Freud's text: that it is a certain type of woman who alleges seduction, that she claims specifically to be seduced by an older man, that the women are insane, that they have a particular attitude and reaction to sex. Further, Rhys's reference to case numbers is radically different from Freud's approach to writing case studies.

trigger "unconscious memories" of this earlier trauma. Rhys's account seems to mirror Freud's theory in this respect. She is disturbed by Mr. Howard's "seduction," but it seems to harken back to an earlier experience, as she writes "but I know he was reminding me of something that has happened"(65). By the 1920's or 30's when Rhys walked into Sylvia Beach's Book Shop, Freud had radically altered his account. Having more completely theorized the Oedipus complex, he claimed that young girls' experience the "psychic reality" that they are seduced. These psychic realities or fantasies defend against the guilt that the girls experience in desiring their fathers; they are not memories of past events. Although Freud is fairly clearly referring to seductions that occur at a much younger age than Rhys's, her outrage may be aimed at what she perceived to be the refusal of Freud and his colleagues to accept women's accounts of abuse.

After her initial outrage, the psychoanalytic book ultimately influences Rhys to deny the reality of her own experience. Despite Mr. Howard's physical violation of her, Rhys revises her account of the relationship, claiming that the psychoanalytic book "has nt nothing to do with this story which does nt concern a physical seduction but a mental one"(60).<sup>179</sup> In retelling the story, Rhys attempts to hide its severity, prefacing the new account with: "only thinking of that [book] I have a great wish to be as truthful as possible not to exaggerate"(60).

He was a nice old gentleman who had 'taken a fancy to' a very nice well-behaved little girl gave her sweets + books + at intervals took her for drives or walks. Then quite casually often interrupting a

---

<sup>179</sup> Rhys's double negative may signal her ambivalence. In "standard" English "it hasn't nothing to do with" might in fact mean "it is has everything to do with" while in creole it would mean emphatically that it had no relation. However, Rhys uses creole very rarely in the *Black Exercise Book*, and, though Dominican creole uses double negatives, it is French-based.

conversation about something else the serial story would start. He

[crossed out=had abducted me] never touched me or even... (61)

Rhys fails, however, in editing out the "unorthodox" aspects of Mr. Howard's behavior. Even in this version, in which she downplays Howard's ill intentions, it is clear in the manuscript that she first writes, "He had abducted me," and that she then puts a line through "had abducted me" and continues writing on the same line, "never touched me or even," leaving an ominous and tantalizing blank after "even."

Rhys can neither cover up the affair nor deny it. In the end, she feels the question is not whether the event happened, but who bears responsibility for it. In the following section, Rhys defends herself against an unstated accusation that the relationship is her responsibility, an accusation which seems of a piece with English discourse's assertion that creole women are promiscuous:

I was frightened of all this and wonder what I could do I never even thought of telling my mother [I had my?] that dose of castor oil. I also knew... that if Mr. Howard contradicted anything I said - he would be believed not I... I suppose of course there were several [crossed out:a hundred] ways I could have stopped it by going to Mrs. Howard. That also had I never even thought of I knew she disliked me that was enough.

Oh I agree. I only struggled feebly What he had seen in me was there all right.

Still for that first time I was alarmed and repelled. (62-3)

She defends herself by claiming that the combination of her mother's rejection and Mr. Howard's position of superior power -- as an older, English, wealthy man -- left her powerless to stop the relationship. Rhys's final acceptance of responsibility seems to express that Howard's power over her resulted not only from his position of authority as a white, English, upper class male but also from her experiences of colonial

Dominican culture, which was deeply divided along racialized class lines. The society was so strongly influenced by slavery that beating had permeated social relations between servants and their charges, parents and children.<sup>180</sup> She comments both that she felt guilt about the past cruelty of her planter family and that she was conditioned to being beaten herself — that Mr. Howard “might have made it a lot worse his rare and curious story — after all I’d been whipped a lot I was used to the idea”(64).<sup>181</sup> That is, Rhys’s sexual abuse results from a combination of colonial ideology expressed in texts — the images which informed Mr. Howard’s sexual fantasies about Rhys and Rhys’s own conception of self — and the historical realities of colonialism that permitted Howard an unquestioned position of authority, made beating a significant part of Dominica’s culture, and prepared Rhys to accept Howard’s sexual fantasies as her wishes.

However, even in capitulating, Rhys redefines and challenges the English stereotype of the creole. She claims first that “What he had seen in me was there all right”(62) and later, “Yes, that is true. Pain humiliation submission that is for me. It fitted in with all I knew of life with all I’d ever felt”(65). Mr. Howard sees sexuality in the young Rhys, a sexuality he fantasizes about in terms of sado-masochism. Rhys transforms that sexuality into “pain humiliation submission.” Her rejection of sexual desire and pleasure, in fact, constitutes an effective counter to both English discourse

---

<sup>180</sup> I am not suggesting that children and servants are only beaten in societies which once had slavery. Rather, I am referring to the fact that physical punishment continued to be a central part of West Indian culture and is an inheritance from slavery. I am thinking, for instance, of the beginning of George Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin*, which portrays physical punishment in school and at home as part of the legacy of slavery.

<sup>181</sup> In “the locked heart: the creole family romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” Peter Hulme documents specific acts of cruelty committed by members of Rhys’s family, specifically her grandfather, Edward Lockhart’s participation in the 1844 “guerre nègre”(82-83). Hulme argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* occludes those acts of cruelty.

and to Freud. The two discourses seem to oppose one another, the first arguing that creole women were sexually promiscuous, the second arguing that young girls desire and fantasize rather than actually experience relationships with their fathers. Yet both place sexual desire in the woman or young girl; both see seduction as her creation and responsibility — "real" or "imagined." Rhys responds to both by erasing sexual pleasure from her account entirely.<sup>182</sup>

Rhys's account of the Howard affair parallels Freud's account of seduction, in his most famous case study on the subject, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>182</sup> This omission of sexual pleasure seems to conflict with her willingness place herself in the position of Howard's sexual slave. However, I am suggesting that Rhys's insistence that her sexual slavery did not result from her lasciviousness but from her colonial status and upbringing points to the inaccurate stereotype of Afro-Caribbean women as lascivious. English accounts, particularly those which supported slavery asserted that Afro-Caribbean women seduced white men; these accounts displaced the sexual desire and power to initiate sexual relationships from the white man onto the slave. In portraying Mr. Howard as the initiator of their sexual relationship, Rhys replaces sexual desire and agency in the white male.

<sup>183</sup> I am indebted to Nancy Harrison's argument that two scenes in Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea refute Freud's assertion that sexuality, figured in the jewel case, is Dora's primary motivation in her dreams (186-93). Through a close reading of the scenes in which the Coulibris estate is burned and Antoinette's Aunt Cora challenges her brother's arrangements for her marriage, Harrison illustrates that for the creole mother, Annette, and her daughter, Antoinette, in Wide Sargasso Sea, self-hood and financial independence outweigh sexuality. Annette struggles to return to her burning home, not for her jewel case, but for her parrot and the selfhood it represents. Aunt Cora gives her jewels to Antoinette, not in relation to her sexuality, but to give her financial resources, which her marriage agreement denies her. I would go further than Harrison to suggest that Annette's preference for parrots over jewels privileges her creole identity over wealth — only Annette and the Afro-Caribbean workers on the estate share an understanding of the parrot's significance. Jewels and the financial independence they represent, however, provide the material basis necessary for achieving that cultural selfhood. Harrison's theoretical project, which posits that women's texts respond to each other as well as to dominant and male texts, provides a general framework for Rhys's critique of Brontë and Freud in Wide Sargasso Sea, but it doesn't explain why Rhys merges Freud and Dora in particular with her critique of Brontë's Jane Eyre. I am suggesting that the interconnection between the Black Exercise Book and Wide Sargasso Sea, specifically the shared dream, provide a more

Within these close parallels, Rhys expresses her criticism of Freud. Dora, the daughter of a wealthy family, is violently kissed at the age of fourteen by an older man, Herr K; Rhys is caressed at the age of fourteen by the much older Mr. Howard. Dora responds with disgust; similarly, Rhys feels Mr. Howard's hand on her breasts is a "mistake," "cold and dead." Herr K. is a friend of Dora's father, Mr. Howard is a friend of Rhys's father. Herr K. takes Dora on walks, gives her gifts as Mr. Howard takes Rhys on outings and gives her gifts, albeit much smaller gifts than Herr K. gives Dora. Dora attempts to escape the relationship with Herr K. but her father insists that it continue; Rhys attempts to end her outings with Mr. Howard, but her mother insists they continue.

Freud does not deny Dora's account. Idealizing the older men and identifying with them, he defines Dora's disgust at Herr K.'s advances as hysterical and pathological (Sprengnether 267). He asserts that a normal girl would have enjoyed the kiss and taken the proposal Herr K. makes several years later in stride. He explains Dora's multiple refusals of Herr K. as evidence of her desire for Herr K. which she defends against through an incestuous desire for her father. However, at the root of Dora's sexual knowledge and perversion, Freud ultimately realizes, is her sexual desire for Frau K., her father's mistress, who is also her source of sexual knowledge. For Rhys, the key figure is also that of the mistress, whose identity and sexuality Rhys assumes in order to both to link herself with Afro-Caribbeans and to reveal the links English discourse made between white and Afro-Caribbean women.

If we read the Mr. Howard sequence in the *Black Exercise Book* as a counter-narrative or a rewriting of Freud's *Dora*, then we can see Rhys's rejection of sexual desire and her apparently masochistic identification with Afro-Caribbean women as a

---

concrete explanation for Rhys's apparent criticism of Freud in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

challenge to Freud's assertion that normal fourteen-year-old girls want to have affairs with older men. Rather, Rhys may be vulnerable to the old Englishman's attentions because of her mother's rejection and her alienation within the divided and brutal colonial society of Dominica. In her later representation of the relationship, Rhys chooses to portray herself as masochistic, in order to liken herself to an enslaved mistress. She thereby refashions a position traditionally identified with women of color as a multi-racial and creole identity. She is unlinking the position from its racial marker; she thus destabilizes the correlation of race and social place in the Caribbean.

But is Rhys's behavior masochistic? I've used the word because, in lay terms, her addiction to Mr. Howard's sadistic fantasies and her association of love with her mother's beatings seems to be masochistic; that is, she seems to transform the traditional association of desire and pleasure by desiring unpleasure — "Always in the end punished - that is love"(56) . Yet, Rhys's behavior, of course, both parallels and defies Freud's theory of female masochism as he expresses it in "A Child is Being Beaten."<sup>184</sup> Rhys's account points not towards incestuous sexual desire but to the ambivalence and guilt caused by being a white child from a plantocratic family in a society, divided by a rigid race and class hierarchy inherited from slavery. In Freud's model, the young girl desires to sleep with her father, feels ashamed of that desire, and hides it through a fantasy of being beaten, which both expresses the desire to have her genitals touched and hides that sexual pleasure in physical punishment.

In contrast, Rhys desires to identify with her slave-owning ancestors; ashamed

---

<sup>184</sup> One very important distinction between Rhys's discussion of beating and Freud's model is that the principle figure who beats Rhys is her mother, not her father. In this respect, Rhys's account of her masochism fits Gilles Deleuze's analysis of masochism, in which the cruel figure is the oral mother, who is cold and punishing(55). Equally significant is that Freud's patients were not frequently beaten as children and were not sexually excited by the actual beating of children. Rhys was actually beaten. Perhaps her account asks Freud to consider the role of actual beating in the development of masochism and sexual desire in women.

of this desire, she identifies with the slave who was whipped. Thus, being whipped functions to punish her for her allegiance to her slave-owning family and to hide that allegiance by identifying her with the whipped slaves. Rhys accomplishes this identification in two steps. First, she actively constructs her white creole mother as the person who rejects her as an outcast from her plantocratic family and peers. Second, she juxtaposes her beating with a discussion of slaves being beaten that links her and slaves as victims of whipping.

In the first version of the beating, Rhys writes of her mother, "she gave me such a curious look, a sad look Ah you re growing up are you Well I cant do anything more" (21-22). Rhys interprets her mother's comment and look as prophecy and condemnation: she was "alien" and would be unhappy. In the second version, the mother directly tells the young Rhys that she would always be different from other people, "it's no use you ll never be like other people. You ll never learn to behave [?] like other people"(44). Rhys thus actively constructs the image of her mother's rejection. This rejection separates her more definitively from her mother and, by extension, from the source of her shame, her mother's planter family.<sup>185</sup>

Rhys juxtaposes the scene of her mother's beating with a discussion of her deep ambivalence towards Afro-Caribbeans - a discussion that reveals that she identifies with both the planters and the enslaved. Shortly after the first account of her mother beating her, Rhys explains,

I was curious about black people They stimulated me + I felt akin to them. It added to my sadness that I could nt help but realise that they

---

<sup>185</sup> Here I take a position in opposition to Teresa O'Connor, who sees a strong link between Rhys's mother and blacks because the mother is creole, whereas the father was born in Wales. O'Connor links the mother's sense of dignity with the sense of dignity Rhys sees in the face of black man taking alms in *Smile Please* (33). I suggest that at the same time the mother's creole identity provides a link to blacks and the island, it jeopardizes that link because she comes from the white plantocracy.

did not really like or trust white people...white cockroaches they called us.... One could hardly blame them I would feel sick with shame at some of the stories I heard of the slave days told casually even jokingly the ferocious punishments the salt kept ready to rub into wounds etc etc I became an ardent socialist + champion of the downtrodden.... *Yet all the time knowing that there was another side to it* sometime seeing myself powerful + [?] Sometimes being proud of my great grandfather the estate the good old days etc (my emphasis 28-30)

When Rhys refers to *another side* here, she refers to the planter class, insisting that there must be some way of recuperating their story, their perspective. However, she concludes by rejecting that family: "the end of my thoughts was always revolt. A sick revolt + *I longed to be identified once more and for all with the other side* which of course was impossible I could not change the colour of my skin" (my emphasis 30). Here, enslaved African Caribbeans are *the other side*, she identifies with. Within the space of the one paragraph, *the other side* shifts from referring to the plantocracy to referring to enslaved people, and with it, Rhys's identification shifts. Rhys's shift may be an illustration that, as Diana Fuss argues "our most fervent disidentifications may already harbor the very identity they seek to deny"(10). Rhys's first identification appears to be with her great grandfather; her shame at his and other slave owners' brutality forces her to hide that identification by identifying with "the other side."

Rhys's identification with the mistress is significant, for it is through her great grandfather's alleged good treatment of his mistresses that Rhys attempts to salvage him as someone she can revere and identify with. Rhys ends this section of the *Black Exercise Book* with a defense of her great grandfather; he was "good to some of his mistresses [~~crossed out: always~~] presenting them with freedom money + land..."(31). As a result, Rhys surmises, a descendent of one of the mistresses offered the family

loans when the death of Rhys's father left her mother in relative poverty. The identification with the planter's mistress is in itself multiple because it allows Rhys to maintain a relation to the planter, and potentially -- using her logic -- a more positive vision of the planter himself. Rhys's ambivalence and the multiple nature of her identification reflects the psychological reality that identification is always multiple and expresses ambivalence.<sup>186</sup> In emphasizing that her masochism is shaped through the racial and colonial politics of late nineteenth-century Dominica, Rhys's account indicates that masochism needs to be re-placed in the cultural and political contexts which produce it; she is asserting that in her case, not only Freud's "family romance," but also the "colonial romance" must be considered.

Rhys's "masochistic" identification with Afro-Caribbean women departs from two critical trends in psychoanalytic theory, that of her fellow Caribbean intellectual, Frantz Fanon and that of women psychoanalysts challenging Freud. Fanon, who is one of the first to address race within psychoanalysis fails to look adequately at gender. Women analysts, like Joan Riviere and Melanie Klein, who challenged Freud and Helene Deutsch on women's sexuality, however, did not adequately address race (Walton 782-83). In formulating white women's masochism, Fanon combined Deutsch's theory with his analysis of European racism. In Black Skin White Masks, he claims that white women frequently fantasize about being raped by black men. This fantasy, Fanon argues, results from both the fact that "the desexualization of aggression

---

<sup>186</sup> Ruth Leys argues that identification is multiple and involves an expression of hate. She writes that "mimesis always produces a sadistic, paranoid desire to annihilate the 'other' who is also myself" and cites Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen who argues that identification expresses a "(mimetic, rivalrous) desire to oust the incommensurable other from the place the pseudo-subject already occupies in fantasy"(172). Leys is specifically discussing identification under hypnosis, but in discussing the matter with me, she asserted that the same dynamic would be at work in Rhys's identification with African Caribbeans. Leys and Fuss would see their respective views of identification as conflicting, but I think they might work together to explain Rhys's need to disidentify with the planter and yet identify with him through his slave.

in a girl is less complete than in a boy" and from the colonialist trope of the black man as sexuality personified (Fanon 178-79). If we read the abductor in Rhys's nightmare as black and we read dreams as expressions of wishes, Rhys's dream potentially complies with Fanon's claim that white women want to be raped by black men. Previously I argued that Mr. Howard becomes figured as black because he is sexual; in such a reading, his blackness is not a cultural identity so much as a marker of sexuality. However, if one were to accept Mr. Howard's blackness or, more accurately, the blackness of the man in the dream, then Rhys's acceptance of him might be read as an acceptance of Afro-Caribbean womanhood.<sup>187</sup>

In her foundational article, "Womanliness as a Masquerade" (1929), Riviere assumes that when her white female patient dreams of seducing black men, the men stand in for the patient's white, wealthy father. In Rhys's childhood, black men were denied positions of authority as they were in the U.S. South, where Riviere's patient was raised. A well-to-do white girl's desire to be seduced by a black man might well express her desire to sleep with her father's subordinate, not the father himself. Further, according to the Freudian model, a little girl's desire to sleep with her father was inseparable from her desire to take her mother's place in her father's bed. But during Rhys's childhood, well-to-do white women were barred by custom from having sex with or marrying black men. The desire for a black man thus suggests a desire to take the place of a black woman, who in the context of turn-of-the-century Dominica

---

<sup>187</sup> There seems to be a contradiction in my argument. I have been claiming that Rhys identified herself with the brown or inter-racial mistress. The dream uses the word, "black" – not brown, or mulatto, or inter-racial. Though English discourse and West Indian white society made certain distinctions in their portrayals of brown and black creole women, both categories of women were placed in the same overall category of sexually immoral, as outside of domestic ideology. As a result, I think blackness in the dream functions as a catchall for all Afro-Caribbeans. It is also true that the inter-racial or brown class had a particular history of political power and wealth in Dominica, but I don't think that would prevent Rhys's reference to blackness in the dream from encompassing Afro-Caribbeans, regardless of the nuances of shade.

or the U.S. South would have been the black man's most likely sex partner.<sup>188</sup> This desire is consistent with Rhys's desire for the position of the white man's mistress or the enslaved mistress of the planter.

Like Riviere, Fanon did not consider the possibility that the white woman's dream or fantasy of being abducted (and presumably raped) by a black man might express her desire to be a black woman. Though Fanon argues that European culture and imagination figure the black man as sexuality personified, he pays little or no attention to the fact that European (and US) imagination also viewed the black woman as more sexually active, attractive, and free than the ideal of the white, domestic woman. In Smile Please, for instance, Rhys expresses her desire to have the freedom of black women, whom she views as liberated from the necessity of marrying (40). Many white women writers in the 1920's and 1930's -- such as Gertrude Stein, H.D., and Willa Cather -- write white female characters who are dependent upon black femininity, particularly black female sexuality to form their own identities and sexuality.<sup>189</sup> This apparent appropriation of black femininity stemmed in large part from the sexual constraints the middle class placed on middle class women.<sup>190</sup> Thus, the fantasy of being abducted or raped by a black man expresses the desire to take the place of the

---

<sup>188</sup> Barbara Mennel similarly reads Riviere's patient as desiring to take the black woman's position; in her dream, the patient has murdered her parents and tries to hide this by washing clothes; a black man arrives at her home, whom she then means to seduce. Mennel argues that she places herself in the position of the female servant in the household, who most likely would have been an African American woman (177-181).

<sup>189</sup> Cather's Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940) is a strong example of this.

<sup>190</sup> What I am suggesting is actually that the desire for the escape of black femininity has as much to do with class as it does with blackness per se. In her play, "Pocomania," Una Marson's middle class Afro-Caribbean heroine envies the sexual and spiritual freedom of peasants in rural Jamaica but must distance herself from their sexual and spiritual excess in order to marry and remain part of the middle class.

black woman and is partially influenced by white visions of black women as more sexual than white women.<sup>191</sup>

We might read Rhys's nightmare and illustration of her own masochism alongside Fanon's theory as two critiques written by Caribbean intellectuals and shaped in response to colonial discourse. In the final chapter of *Identification Papers*, Fuss reads Fanon's theory of white women's fantasy of rape as a response to the colonial myth of the black man's rape of white women. Rhys and Fanon each write against the colonial stereotype of their respective identity; their difference in orientation explains the difference in their "writing back" against metropolitan discourse. Colonial images of the white creole as sadistic and promiscuous influence Rhys in her production of a masochistic white creole woman who has no sexual pleasure. In contrast, Fanon places sexual desire in the white woman as a reaction against the sexualization of the Afro-Caribbean or black man. The contrast between their visions indicate that, in addition to considering the construction of colonial and metropolitan subjectivities as an interdependent process, we must at the same time consider the interrelations of colonial subjectivities.

This racialized nature of promiscuity reflects the instability and contingency of whiteness in metropolitan discourses. Fanon asserts that in so far as whites desire to be black, they are desiring and mimicking not actual blacks but the idea of blackness their own culture has produced. Rhys's work does engage with "blackness" on the level of English imagination because she addresses herself to the stereotypes of 19th-century

---

<sup>191</sup> An appropriation of blackness or sexuality may, however, signify also a desire to transgress other aspects of the narrowly defined role for white, middle class women. Walton writes, for instance, that white European women who identified themselves with black womanhood did so as a means of signaling their participation in traditionally male arenas and their competition with men in their artistic and intellectual careers. Like the figures Walton analyses in the work of Riviere and Melanie Klein, Rhys is an intellectual and an artist; she did compete with men in her career. In the *Black Exercise Book*, she discusses the discrimination against women writers in England.

English discourse. However, Rhys's mimicry and identification of black femininity is not only an identification with white ideas of black female sexuality. In emphasizing that white creoles were excluded from the class of respectable women under the same rubric as women of color, Rhys reveals that creole whiteness is not absolute. Hers is a whiteness, as the whiteness of women mine workers and other manual laborers, that existed explicitly in relationship to blackness within metropolitan discourses.<sup>192</sup> We see Rhys's concern with illustrating this particularly in Voyage in the Dark in which fellow chorus girls call the creole Anna Morgan a "hottentot," and in Wide Sargasso Sea, in which Rochester claims of Antoinette that, "creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (67) and Christophine explains to Rochester that Antoinette is "not *béké* like you, but she is *béké*, and not like us either"(155).<sup>193</sup>

Thus far I have treated Rhys's masochism as a voluntary, individual strategy of self-representation. Yet how can we evaluate masochism as a means of self-representation? Vis-à-vis metropolitan discourse Rhys's masochism has proven productive. Through it, the Black Exercise Book reveals the colonialist and racialized nature of domestic ideology and criticizes psychoanalysis for its disregard of historical context. In so doing, the Exercise Book provides the basis for theorizing in a more complex, and perhaps less violating fashion the similarities and inter-relation of the oppression of Euro- and Afro-Caribbean women within metropolitan ideology.

---

<sup>192</sup> Rhys's identification with African Caribbeans points to Anne McClintock's and Ann Stoler's work on the development of metropolitan and colonial identities as a relational and imbricated process. Similar language was used, Anne McClintock argues, to define blacks, Irish, and the white English working class, particularly its women (e.g. 52-56 and 103-112).

<sup>193</sup> Class status is also a key component in the comparison of Anna Morgan to blacks. Had Anna been very wealthy, she would have escaped both the working class women's appellation as a "hottentot" and the English police man's treatment of her and her friend as "white baboons" because they appeared to be prostitutes.

In the dream, Rhys engages with colonialism and claims a Caribbean identity through the problematic means of identifying herself with Afro-Caribbeans. This identification with black women has been the focus of a recent debate in Rhys scholarship as to whether Rhys's self-definition through identification with Afro-Caribbean women appropriates and erases their historical experience.<sup>194</sup> Rather than condemn Rhys for identifying with Afro-Caribbeans, I view identification — “the detour through the other that defines a self” — as a necessary part of self definition.<sup>195</sup>

Yet in challenging English literary tradition and psychoanalysis from within its own terms, Rhys has reinscribed some of the colonialist aspects of those discourses. While Rhys exposes the racialized hierarchy of womanhood Brontë presents as natural law, Rhys's identification with Afro-Caribbean women functions primarily to highlight her own oppression; it thus copies the English women's use of Caribbean women's enslavement to protest their own oppression. Although she writes the *Black Exercise Book* in 1938, her identification with enslaved Afro-Caribbean women and with the experience of being whipped largely limits her representation of Afro-Caribbeans to positions associated with slavery. This may indicate a reluctance to envision Dominica and Afro-Caribbeans in a state of independence, in which she as a plantocratic, if

---

<sup>194</sup> The critique launched originally against scholars who saw Rhys's heroines' identification as unproblematic and successful, asked if Rhys didn't appropriate and violate African Caribbean women's experience and history by using it to represent white creole women. For a positive vision of Rhys's relation to African Caribbeans, see Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell, "The Paradoxes of Belonging: the White West Indian Woman in Fiction," (*Modern Fiction Studies* 31:2(1985):281-293) and Mary Lou Emery's *Jean Rhys at 'World's End'*. Austin: U of Texas Press, 1990. For a more critical view, see Maria Olausson's "Jean Rhys's Construction of Blackness as Escape from White Femininity in 'Wide Sargasso Sea'" (*Ariel* 24:2(1993):65-81. I agree with Veronica Gregg's analysis that Rhys's work is both anti-colonialist and colonialist; see her *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1995

<sup>195</sup> As Diana Fuss writes, it is “the detour through the other that defines a self” -- a detour which “names the entry of history and culture into the subject” (Fuss 2).

impoverished woman, would have no place.<sup>196</sup> Rhys's writing of her childhood seems motivated by the loss of the earlier society: she writes, "it seems like remembering a hundred years ago really...I think sometimes its now completely vanished that life + there's not a trace of it left. The white people in the West Indies are good + down"(42).

But Rhys's identification is not a totalizing appropriation of Afro-Caribbean women's historical experience. As Rhys's own writing indicates, identification is never complete. She never becomes Afro-Caribbean; she occupies a figurative relation to two specific images of Afro-Caribbeans. Thus, Rhys's masochistic identification with African Caribbeans must be seen as vexed.<sup>197</sup> Yet by focusing on the constructed nature of race -- that whiteness is really an artifact of English colonialism -- and on the connections between disparate groups of people -- those without means, the deviant, the not-white, the colonial -- she lays the foundations for a multi-racial or non-racially defined creole identity. In so doing, she counteracts the tendency in English and Caribbean discourses to limit creole to Afro-creole identity. By exposing that English domestic ideology created a racialized hierarchy of womanhood in which English middle class domestic women signified the pinnacle of human cultural achievement and all non-white and all colonial women signified blackness and sexual immorality, Rhys points out that white creole women have always been, from an English perspective, not only part of the Caribbean but part of the Afro-Caribbean.

---

<sup>196</sup> In both "Jean Rhys, 'grilled Sole,'" and "Jean Rhys and Dominican Autoethnography," Sue Thomas illustrates how Rhys's work addresses Dominica of the turn-of-the-century, in content by treating the period of expansion into the interior under Hesketh Bell and in terms of discourse by positioning herself vis-a-vis the discourse of coloured newspaper writers.

<sup>197</sup> It supports Veronica Gregg's assertion that Rhys reiterates racist stereotypes and attitudes of colonialist discourse, but she also deconstructs the very categories of race and class and in so doing, "her fiction shows an understanding of the discrete but interconnected character of all forms of oppression"(39).

Rhys formulated her multi-racial creole identity in the context of political and literary movements that threatened her identity as a white creole. The 1938 Exercise Book coincided with labor unrest and political resistance in the British West Indies, which signaled the beginning of a clear movement towards self-government. These political and social upheavals threatened the world of Rhys's childhood because her mother's family formed part of the established white plantocracy and her father belonged to the elite group of British government employees. Rhys responds to this threat to her identity as a white creole woman by articulating a creole identity that deconstructs race as an essential category and emphasizes the common ground created by intersections of gender, race, and class.<sup>198</sup> Rhys's 1938 formulation of a multi-racial and gender-conscious conception of creole identity provides an important counter to emergent nationalist discourses which focused on Afro-Caribbean identity, often to the exclusion of gender and ethnic diversity.<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> In arguing that Rhys asserts a multi-racial creole identity, I am making a claim similar to Judith Raiskin's that, "in her fiction, Rhys is beginning to identify creolization as a cultural, racial, and psychological phenomenon. In these terms, the concept of "Creole" moves from a colonial claim of European presence in the colonies to an understanding of cultural influence, racial mixing, and "border crossing" that contemporary writers such as Michelle Cliff, Gloria Anzaldúa, Edouard Glissant, and Guillermo Gómez-Pena are exploring today"(112).

<sup>199</sup> In "Representing the Nation: Gender, Culture, and the State in Anglophone Caribbean Society," Natasha Barnes' central argument is that women disappear from national iconography with independence and that gender was rarely placed on the nationalist agenda. Rhys writes at least a decade before the period of strongly racialized nationalist discourse Barnes addresses.

## Epilogue

In tracing the function of the West Indies in the construction of English domesticity and the deployment of domestic ideology deployment in proto-national literature, “Creolizing Womanhood,” provides a historical foundation for understanding the critical role domesticity played in shaping unequal gender relations and in maintaining divisive social hierarchies in the final years of colonialism and the Independence era.

The region-wide labor uprisings of 1934-1938 sent a clear message that the West Indian working class could challenge colonial authority. The British Government responded by sending a Royal Commission, whose investigation found that promiscuity – personified in the single woman head of household -- was the cause of the poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, and venereal disease that were seen as ultimate causes of the unrest. The West India Royal Commission Report of 1939 therefore recommended domesticity as a solution and laid out legislation to impose a bourgeois family structure on the West Indian majority. The Church was to be the main institution to enforce domesticity, aided by the state. To transform West Indian men into breadwinners and women into housewives, society shifted women out of wage labor in the public sphere and into unpaid and underpaid domestic labor. Men filled the positions women’s egress opened in agriculture and industry. The percentage of women listed as agricultural workers fell from 219,000 in 1921 and to 45,600 in 1943. Although this dramatic shift reflects some changes in census categories, it also reflects a significant shift of women out of the labor force (French and Smith 317 ).<sup>200</sup> Middle class women were enlisted – mostly as unpaid labor to implement domesticity through Welfare organization -- in exchange they were given more political rights and career possibilities

---

<sup>200</sup> French and Smith give the statistics for the entire female labor force: “according to the 1943 Census, between 1921 and 1943 the entire female labor force declined from 219,000 to 163,000, the percentage decline between 1911 and 1943 is from 59.6% to 34%” (317).

were enlisted -- mostly as unpaid labor to implement domesticity through Welfare organization -- in exchange they were given more political rights and career possibilities -- all of course in caring industries -- nursing, teaching, social work (French and Smith 308-314). In the 1940's, campaigns for mass marriages were launched in Jamaica (Brereton and Yelvington 21-22).<sup>201</sup> The school curriculum was restructured along gender lines. Young women received training in domestic service, young men in agriculture. This despite the fact that women had comprised 50% of the agricultural work force in many West Indian colonies into the 1920s.

Joan French and Honor Ford Smith argue that the new colonial policy placed working class men and women in competition with one another for work. It was "the divide and rule principle of imperialist policy... applied to divide the interests of the men and women of the labouring classes" (French and Smith 330). This dynamic had been at work before the 1939 report -- Froude's 1888 strategy of emphasizing black women's strength as a means of undercutting male strength had already exploited this principle. But now it took the form of an organized campaign of state, church, and charity organizations.

Yet despite the new curriculum, the absence of public sector jobs, the welfare system, all designed to convert Jamaicans to matrimony, there was neither a significant increase in marriages nor nuclear families. Sixty to seventy percent of the population remained unmarried in much of the anglophone Caribbean. Women continued to be heads of household, only now they had fewer career options and became increasingly

---

<sup>201</sup> Lady Huggins, wife of the governor launched one such campaign in 1944, an earlier one was organized by Jamaican, Miss Knibbs. Huggins "worked closely with miss Marry Knibbs, but it was Knibbs in 1939 and not Huggins later, who started the mass marriage campaign, though Huggins claims credit. Between 1939-50, roughly 3,000 women were married under the scheme which provided the rings and a reception. Knibbs claimed that she wanted women to have more security, and married women would inherit husbands' property; common law wives did not. However, she was perceived as trying to get poor women to fit into the middle class model" (Vassell 95).

economically dependent on men. French and Ford Smith see the Royal Commission Report as a central cause for the contemporary pattern of women's economic dependence on men -- an economic dependence that has no security, not even that provided married women under law. It was a policy designed not to bolster the family, but to destroy the figure that had so troubled English men and English discourse -- the sexually and economically independent black women.

In these last years of colonialism, national literatures appear to reflect the trend in society to move women from the public to the private sphere, from independence to subordination. As Cobham argues, starting in the late 1940's, with canonical nationalist novels, Vic Reid's *New Day* (1949) and Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*, men become the protagonists of national history, while women play subordinate roles. Reid's novel suggests an opposition between women and nationalism, Lamming represents women as complicit in colonialism because they accept respectability and with it the status quo. Women then are figures that the nation must overcome or replace. Barnes argues that women are excluded from nationalist culture due to their perceived collusion in colonialism and that this exclusion continues into contemporary popular culture.

If the conclusion of George Lamming's brilliant first novel maps women as dubious figures for the celebration of a modern Caribbean subjectivity, the culmination of independence rendered invisible women's participation in the anti-colonial struggle. In Jamaica, the anglophone Caribbean island perhaps most preoccupied with constructing and popularizing a revisionist cultural code, the exhilaration of independence witnessed a flurried campaign to create symbols of national identification and belonging in which women were markedly

absent. (124)

The absence of women in the iconography of nationalism in the region, the fact that they play bit parts and anti-nationalist characters in many nationalist novels, reflects the importance of women, not their insignificance. Natasha Barnes argues Trinidadian nationalist, Eric Williams, found Afro-Caribbean women responsible for the absence of patriarchy in the anglophone Caribbean. He saw in Afro-Caribbean women's sexual history with white men evidence of their complicity in colonialism — they benefitted from the system and weakened the nation at the same time by depriving it of strong patriarchal men.

West Indian society has inherited a tradition of immorality from the slave system. The housing system and particularly the barrack room combined with the general struggle for survival to perpetuate this tradition. Of the adults in the community, 73 out of every 100 males and 64 out of every 100 females were unmarried; of the children, two out of every three were illegitimate. (Williams Inward Hunger 17)

But in Williams's analysis the nation's trouble, its concern for color, its lack of marriage and of "real" men result from Afro-Caribbean women. The first trouble seems to be their very large numbers -- that the capital city of the nation was overrun with sexual women and white men — not Afro-Caribbean men.

The excess of females over males in Port-of-Spain combined with the excess of males over females among its non-Trinidadian inhabitants aggravated this general situation. What song the sirens sang is not beyond all conjecture. Two out of five of all the seamstresses and domestic servants in the island, half of the washerwomen and female domestic servant in the island, half of the washerwomen and female cooks lived in Port-of-Spain. One-seventh of the unmarried males, one

fifth of the unmarried females, one-third of the widows lived in the capital. Port-of-Spain was the city of the gay Caballero, the bachelor girl, and the merry widow. To make matters worse, the female of the species was increasing more rapidly than the male. (18)

Women's sexuality and their false passion to whiten their offspring through illegitimate liaisons with lighter men.

The Negro woman concerned with lighter skinned children with good hair ... had a wide range of racial and colour types which with which to experiment. The Portuguese rumshop keeper or the Chinese shopkeeper with his black partner was as familiar and notorious in Port-of-Spain as the sun at noonday. (18)

Although Williams explicitly mentions male promiscuity -- "the staid married man could have his de jure wife and defacto woman," it is black women's defection and infidelity, which injure the nation in his argument. This is made clear by the fact that in the calypso lyrics he chooses cite, the sexual pairing is between the Afro-Caribbean woman and a lighter man, Portuguese, Chinese, or white, to whom she is not married. Often it is the voice of the cuckolded man, lamenting.

'It(the child) isn't for me it is for stinking Potegee(Portuguese)";  
 'Chinee children calling me daddy', 'Sly mongoose ... mongoose went in de madam kitchen run out with she big fat chicken' ( relations of the white man with the Negro cook); "the blacker the woman, the sweeter she be' - the Trinidad calypso has immortalised the efficiency of the permutations and the fecundity of the combinations which swelled the island's illegitimacy statistics and bequeathed to later generations that exasperating colour complex which become for so long one of the most powerful centrifugal forces in the life of the island. (18)

It is this illicitness of female sexuality that rendered the nation, “ill-fed, ill-housed, and ill-clothed, the population was exposed to all the ravages of tropical diseases”

(Williams 18).

Williams’s logic is steeped in English domestic ideology, particularly the tenet that the patriarchal family, the complementary division of gender roles – is an indication of a nation’s political competence. Rather than looking to the economic crises of the early 20th century and the endemic poverty that might encourage poorer, darker women to have liaisons with lighter, wealthier men, Williams blames early 20th-century urban sexual practices on the rural plantation system of almost a century previous, one that had been superseded by the indentureship system. This, I suspect, is an indication that his conception of Trinidadian identity continues to be shaped by the great house model. His scapegoating of women turns a blind eye to the complicated history of English colonialism that at once produced Afro-Caribbean women as transgressors of domesticity and deployed them to undercut the masculinity and thus agency of Afro-Caribbeans as a whole. “Creolizing Womanhood” lays the ground work for an analysis of how English domesticity was transformed and redeployed in anglophone Caribbean nationalisms in such a way that it continued to divide men and women, to invest female sexuality with enormous political significance, to undermine women’s autonomy, and last but by no means least, to undercut the power of the working class, long after most countries in the anglophone Caribbean became independent nations.

Mirroring the logic of Williams’s narrative, nationalist legal policy was characterized by a black male effort to assert legitimacy, which resulted women’s loss of power and status.<sup>202</sup> Thus, nationalism continued the colonial policy on women after

---

<sup>202</sup> This is true at a level of representation, not of grass roots organization. While condemning Afro-Caribbean women’s historical actions as immoral in much the terms of 19th century English colonial had, Politicians like Eric Williams

1938. As part of the process of becoming “real” nations governed by “real men,” anglophone Caribbean countries in which the majority did not marry, took European models for their laws, legislating inheritance and maintenance laws for legitimate heirs and spouses only. These laws maintained a clear hierarchy in the new nations between the respectable and not respectable, the entitled and the unentitled. Only in 1975 did the *First Workshop on Social Legislation Relating to the Family and Child in Caribbean* make a resolution that all children stood in regardless of the marital status of their parents. Slightly before the *First Workshop*, in 1974, Michael Manley’s administration passed the law of the Status of Children which erased illegitimacy as a category in Jamaica. Similar laws followed in other anglophone Caribbean countries, Barbados, for instance, in 1979. Laws also gave common-law wives right to inheritance and maintenance (Barrow 432-4).

Yet these laws did not change the social conception of illegitimate children or of the working class, both of which continue to be seen as “cultural outsiders” by the middle class. Domesticity continues to block progress to a more egalitarian society by bolstering class divisions. The terms “outside” and “inside” are significant. If a married man has children outside of his marriage, they are outside children; together with their mother, they are an outside family. Yet outside is also the category for the working class as whole as “inside” is for the middle class as a whole. In an anthropological comparison of a working class and middle class neighborhood in Kingston, Urban Life in Kingston Jamaica, Diane Austin explains,

workers perceive themselves as outsiders to economic and political power. However, many in the middle class perceive workers as cultural outsiders, inadequately socialized and poorly qualified to assume positions of power.... It is not only neighborhood environments, which

---

depended on women’s political action and their vote.

are described as 'inside' and 'outside.' So too are the archetypes of employment, clerical and manual work. Moreover, children born out of wedlock, a situation typical for the working class are described as 'outside' children. In short, the status of outsider is enshrined in the idiom of everyday speech. (149)

Austin explains that the Jamaican middle class understands its superior economic and educational position not as a function of material circumstances but as function of the inherent cultural inferiority of the working class. Thus, it is much like the English middle class of the 19th century in understanding its superiority to working class and colonized people. Illegitimacy is thus seen as an inherited, essential characteristic of the working class. Illegitimacy has been erased as a legal category, but "the distinction between outside children and others still prevails" (Austin 151). The middle and working class continue to conceive of their relative social positions as results of the plantation even though working class women, for instance, often have illegitimate children with wealthier men as a result of the specific class relations of the 20th century, not as a result of slavery. "It is the present which is projected onto the past" Austin explains, and I might add another instance of the idea of the Great House, with its history in English domestic discourse, exerting its power West Indian society (154).

The power of domesticity survived the Status of Children legislation in part because English colonial policy had made the Church the institution of first importance in implementing respectability. Despite the radical change in the legal status of children and spouses, the nation could not free itself of the shackles of domesticity until it decolonized the church -- a process which has been slow in coming. Women in common-law marriages or with illegitimate children continued to be barred from membership in many churches. Illegitimate children could be baptized but on week days only -- Sundays were reserved for legitimate children (Barrow 435). Many

women continue to suffer from this church policy. Church membership conveys social status, its refusal dishonor (Barrow 436).

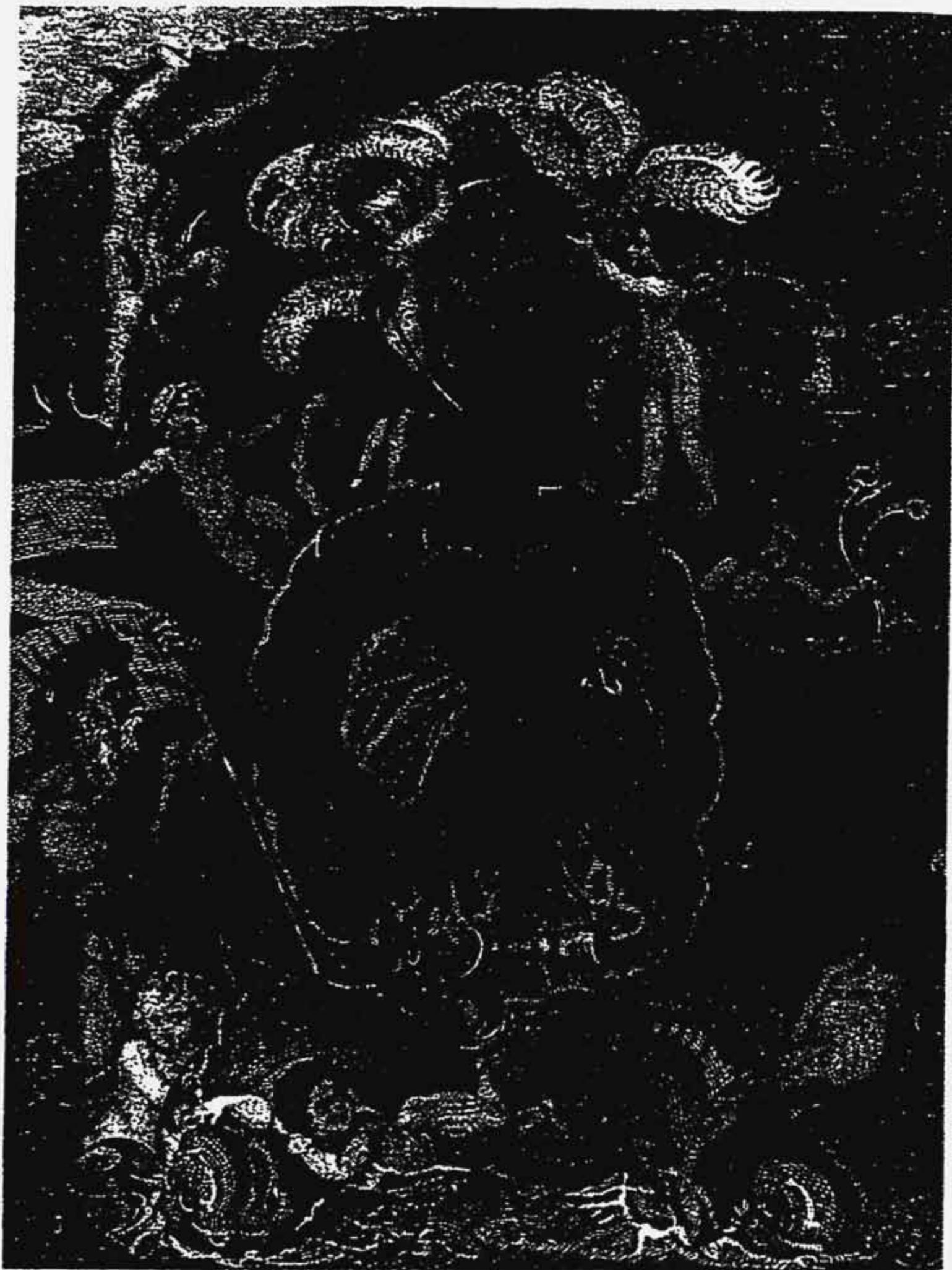
The attitudes in debates about the Church policy towards common-law marriages between the 1970s and 1990s resemble only too closely debates at the turn of the century on the same topic. In 1902 a Reverend Webb recommended that the stable domestic partnership, “faithful concubinage” considered legitimate by the Church and the State, calling “to amend the marriage law, legalising the union of such persons without publication of banns and under well-defined conditions, and legitimising their children”(Bryan The Jamaican People 92). His opinion did not prevail. Seventy years later, at a 1972 church consultation in Barbados, Dr. E.A. Allen was making a similar recommendation that “faithful concubinage... instead of conveying the sense of ‘living in sin’ the Church try to find some means of through the Church and through the law of the land of accepting that type” (Allen 1972:101 cited in Barrow 437). The case for the legitimacy of common-law marriages and their issue continued at least into the early 1990s. In his 1990 theological thesis, L. Dundas is still arguing for the church to acknowledge common-law marriage. In his 1992 The Church and Common-Law Union, Vivian Panton called for a “decolonization of Caribbean theology” – a recognizing peasant domestic partnerships as an important aspect of Jamaican culture, that the failure to recognize these unions as legitimate constitutes a continuation of the colonialist missionary approach (Barrow 438). The continuity between church policy under colonialism and during independence is strong testimony to the fact that domesticity continued to function as a means of maintaining a social hierarchy into the independence era. Though the base of the elite has now broadened to include more black and Asian Caribbeans, domesticity continues to divide by oppressing the black working class population, particularly women, in a way parallel to colonial policy.

In the past three decades literature has often taken the role of challenging class

divisions and the beliefs in respectability or domesticity that support them. Many recent novels like Merle Collins's Angel and The Colour of Forgetting, Michelle Cliff's Abeng, Dionne Brand's In Another Place, Not Here, have challenged the masculinist representation of the nation and national history dominant in novels in the 1950s and 1960s.

Perhaps of most direct interest to "Creolizing Womanhood" is the question of how working class culture negotiates respectability. Contemporary scholars, like Carolyn Cooper and Belinda Edmondson, have taken up this question in studies of Jamaican Dancehall. What are the political implications, for instance, of Jamaican dancehall D.J.s, who flaunt their lack of respectability? How in particular are we to read the seemingly contradictory lyrics of women D.J.s like Tanya Stephenson and Lady Saw, who assume a masculine posture of sexual aggressors, seeking sex without commitment, but who also loudly criticize men for their exploitation of women? Are they fighting against bourgeois standards of femininity or fulfilling middle class stereotypes of working women lack of respectability or something else entirely?

## APPENDIX



**Illustration 1: The Sable Venus**  
(Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections,  
Carl A. Kroch Library)



Illustration 2: Coaling a mail Packet (J. Valdes circa 1890)  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)



Illustration 3: A Market Scene (J. Valdes circa 1890) (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)

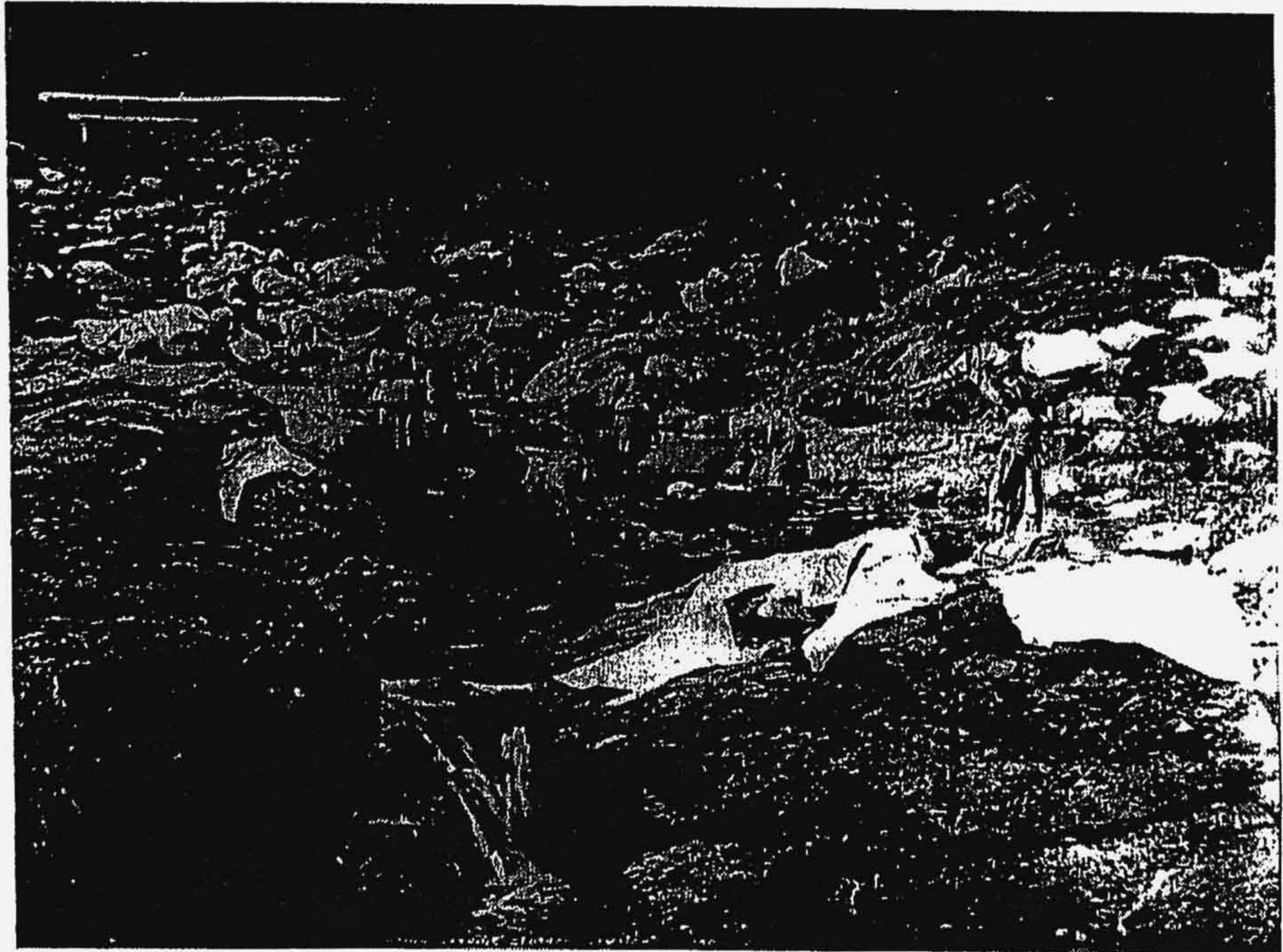


Illustration 4: Women Washing Clothes (J. Valdes circa 1890) (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)

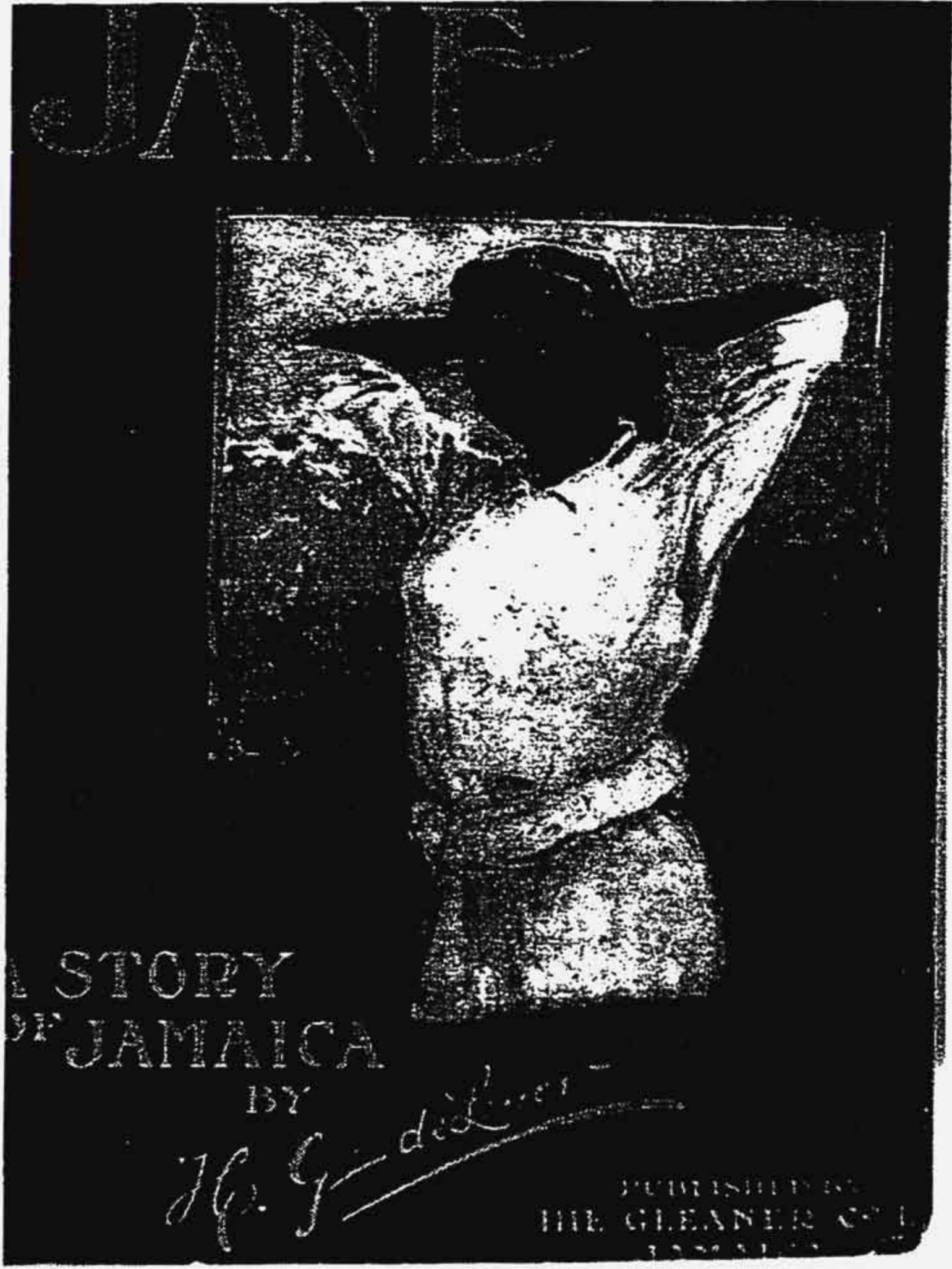


Illustration 5: Cover illustration of the first edition of Jane's Career (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)



# PLANTERS' PUNCH

Vol. II. No. 3

MIXED BY  
HERBERT G. DE LISSER, C.M.G.

For the Year 1929

## Duchess and Jamaica Ladies

WE have great pleasure in publishing in this issue a Message which Her Grace the Duchess of Atholl has specially written to the lady readers of *Planters' Punch*. The Duchess gives advice, and she is in the happy position of having done what she advises: it is not except only that she indulges in the practice of her doctrine has marked her active and useful life.

Her Grace believes that no woman as well as no man depends the maintenance and greatness of the British Empire, and she is convinced that the women of Jamaica can do their share in upholding the British Empire. She has certainly done hers. Today she is head of the public education of England; when quite young she was engaged in the organizing of nursing for the Empire's soldiers; and as a successful woman statesman she fully illustrates the part which women can play in politics and administration without losing their distinctive characteristic of feminine charm.

She stands among the twelve most prominent living women in the Empire. That is a great distinction. It is a wonderful position for any woman to occupy. Her energy is magnificent. During the three weeks she spent in Jamaica, in March 1929, she found time to visit any number of public institutions, meet many people representing all sorts of interests, and address several meetings. She had but little leisure, but she never suggested that she wanted any. She regards herself, it is quite obvious, as at the service of others, wherever she may be. Her life is spent in service. Creditable work for the Empire's people is ardently one of her hobbies, and she lives up to it. Altogether her career has been highly beneficial and a stimulus to others.

Her Message to the Women of Jamaica will be read with the deepest interest. The readers of *Planters' Punch* will thank her for it. We are proud to have her as a contributor to this magazine, and we hope that this will not be the last writing from her pen which we shall have the privilege of publishing. We hope too that Jamaica will have the pleasure of welcoming her again. A distinguished woman like the Duchess of Atholl can never visit an office enough.



HER GRACE THE DUCHESS OF ATHOLL, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION IN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

### The Message.

ON my way home from Jamaica I responded to the invitation of the Editor to send a message to the women readers of *Planters' Punch*.

It is not easy to do this after so short a stay in the island, where, with the best will in the world, I have not had the opportunity of meeting many planters' wives, but I think that even the little I have seen of Jamaica, combined with my experience of other parts of the Empire, helps me to understand a little of your lives—of the lack of many things that we in the Old Country have in plenty—liberation, amuse, art, the company of relatives and friends. Again, difficulties of house-keeping which are proving more hardly on us than formerly, press anxiously upon you. Worst of all, the education of your children may mean their prolonged absence from home at that stage in their lives when you are most anxious to retain

close contact with them. These are obvious disadvantages, but they are a reminder to us that the burden of Empire-building does not rest on men alone—that were there no women to cheerfully endure these drawbacks for the sake of husbands and children, the Empire would fall to pieces.

### The Woman's Share.

BUT in your case it seems to me that a share in Empire-building is open to you, more direct than that which usually falls to British women in the Tropical Dependencies. No such gulf of religion or language separates you from the native Jamaican women as that which separates the Englishwoman overseas from, say, the woman of India or of Africa. A sphere of influence, therefore, and a personal contact are open to you which many an Englishwoman in those countries might envy.

To you Jamaica must chiefly look to set those standards of home life without which no state can be successfully built. You also can do much to promote a better understanding of health and hygiene in the homes of the people, not only by your own word and practice, but by co-operation with all effect, official and unofficial, for the improvement of health—and many endeavours in this great cause are radiating from the Central Bureau of Health in Kingston.

Further, as it seems to me, you can do much to help towards a solution of another of Jamaica's problems, that of finding employ ment for the girls now passing out of her schools. In a country where industrial and commercial openings are few, there can be few opportunities for women except in domestic work. The advantages of such work to the girls themselves are obvious—they should go far to ensure better health and comfort in their own homes, but cost, misunderstanding and imperfect conditions may be necessary to bring many of the younger women to realize this, and to recognize the dignity of all labour.

If the women readers of *Planters' Punch* can help to bring about this desired end, they will not only be adding to the comfort of their own surroundings, but will be rendering a great service to Jamaica and her people, and, through them, to the Empire.

Illustration 7: "Her Grace the Duchess of Atholl, *Planters' Punch* 1929 (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.)

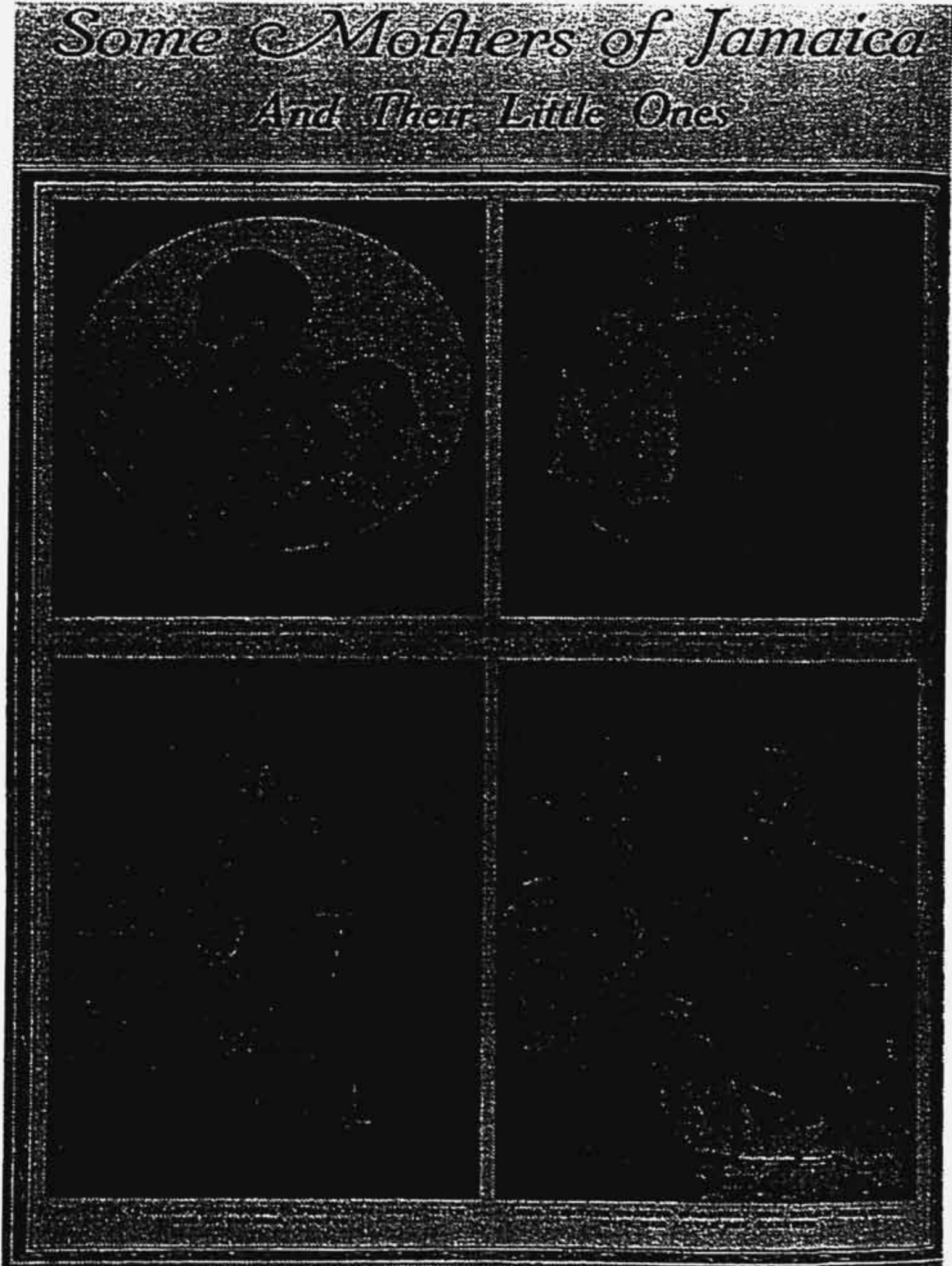


Illustration 8: "Some Mothers of Jamaica and their Little Ones"  
(Courtesy of National Library of Jamaica.)

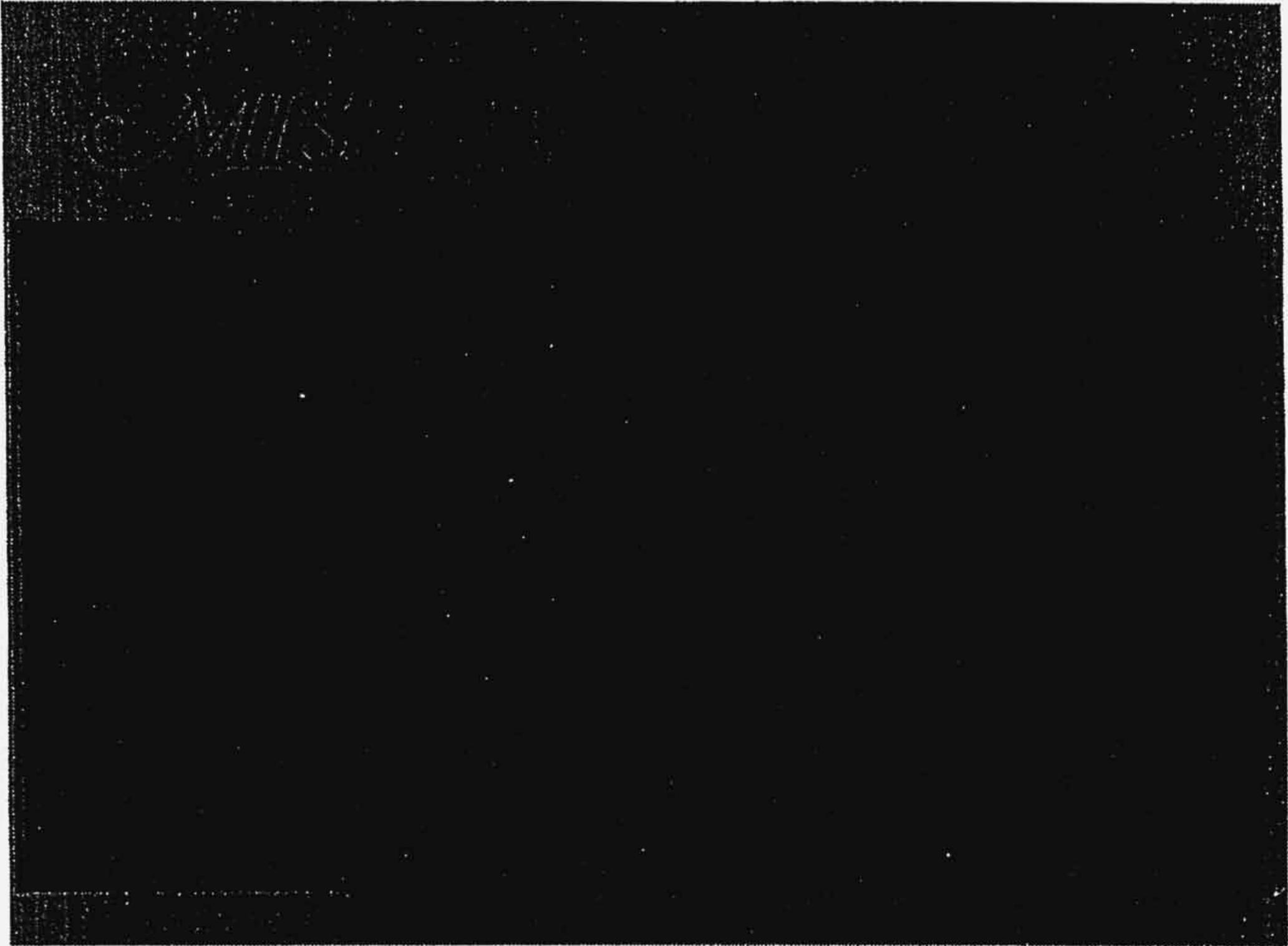


Illustration 9: "Miss Jamaica (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)

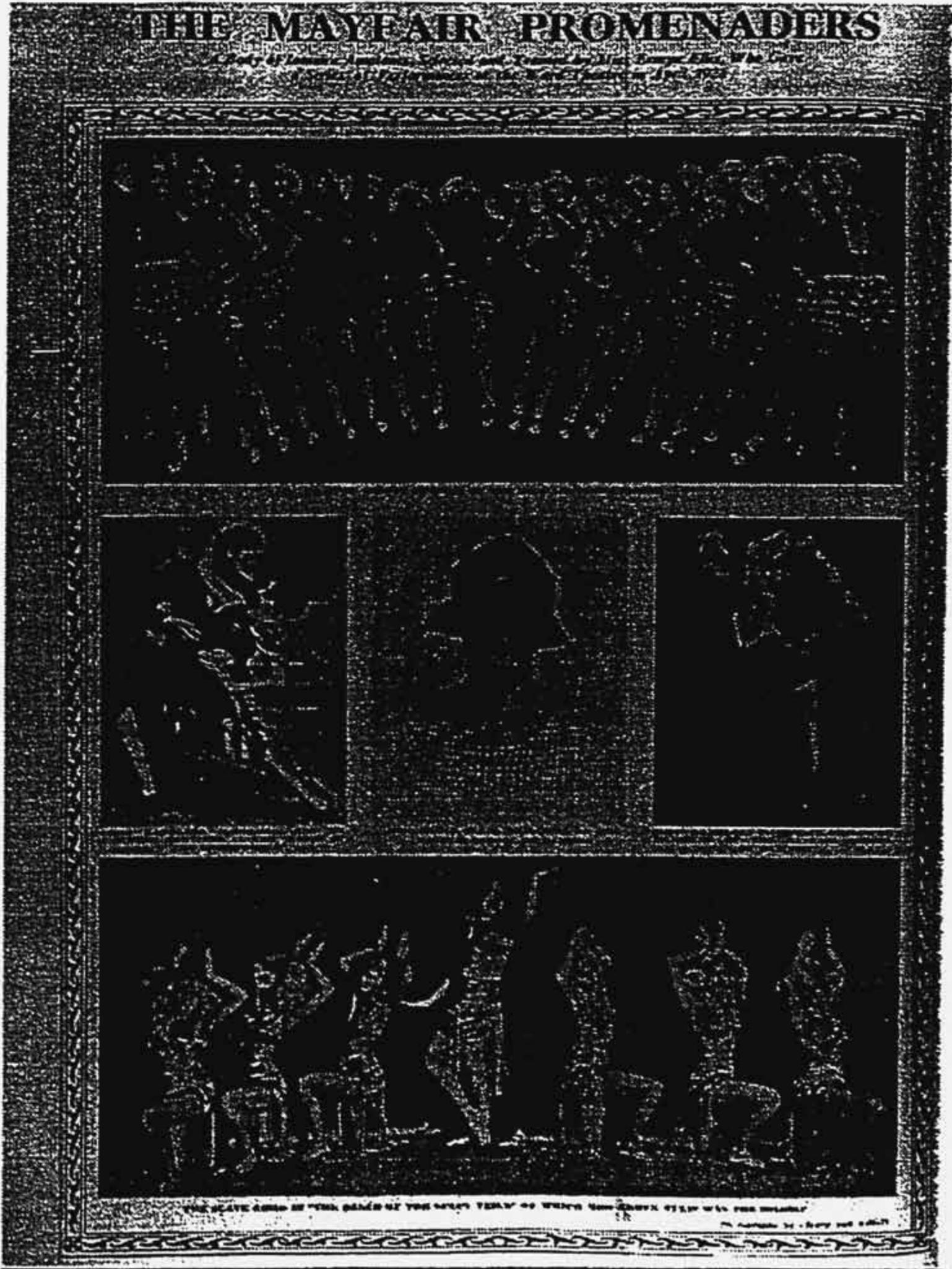


Illustration 10: The Mayfair Promenaders  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)

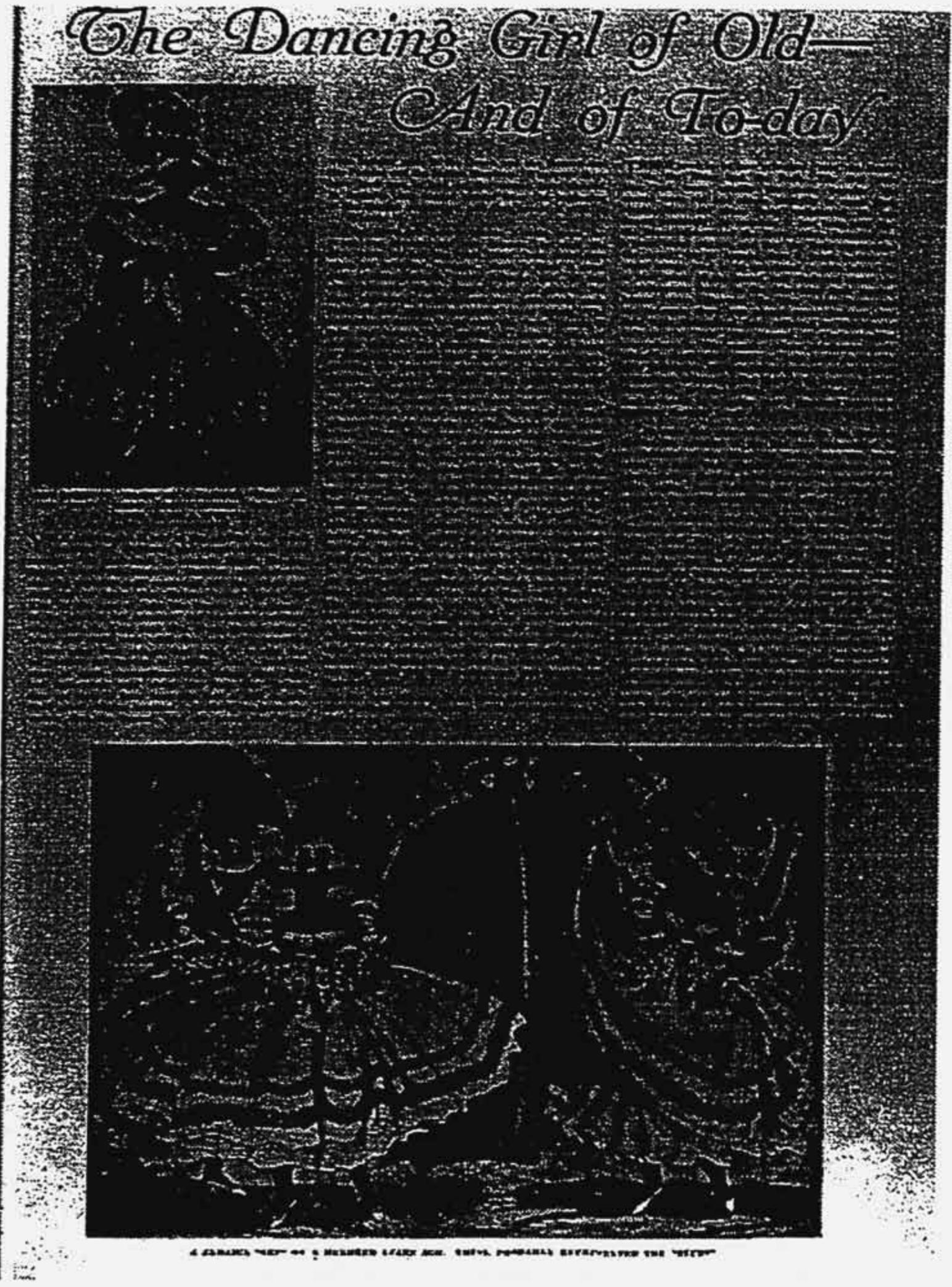
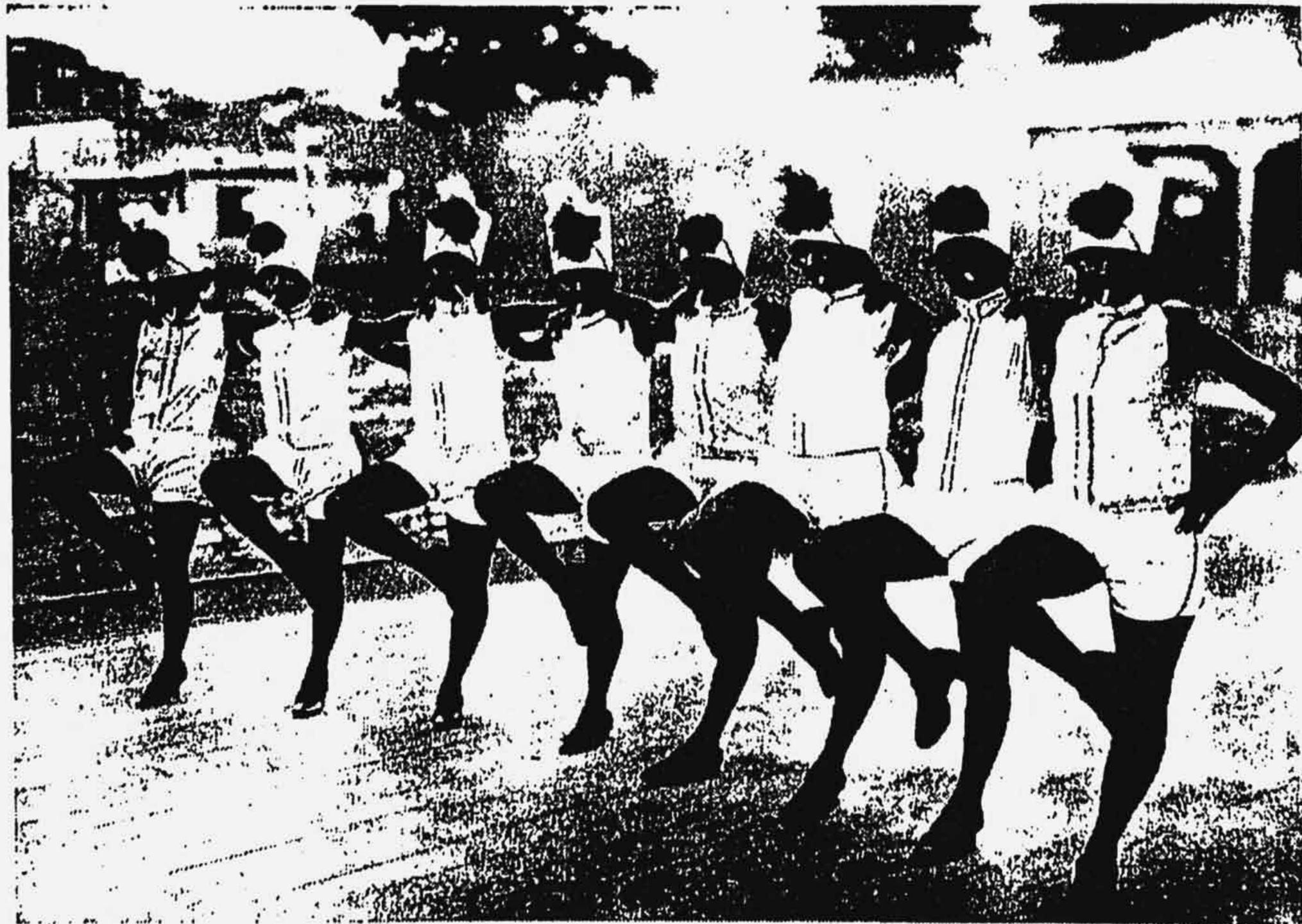


Illustration 11: "The Dancing Girl of Old – And of To-day"  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.)



THE BUTTERFLY TROUPE, A BRIGHT BODY OF GIRLS WHO MADE THEIR DEBUT AS DANCERS AT THE PALACE THEATRE OF KINGSTON

Illustration 12: The Butterfly Troupe (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)

# Our Jamaica Chinese Ladies

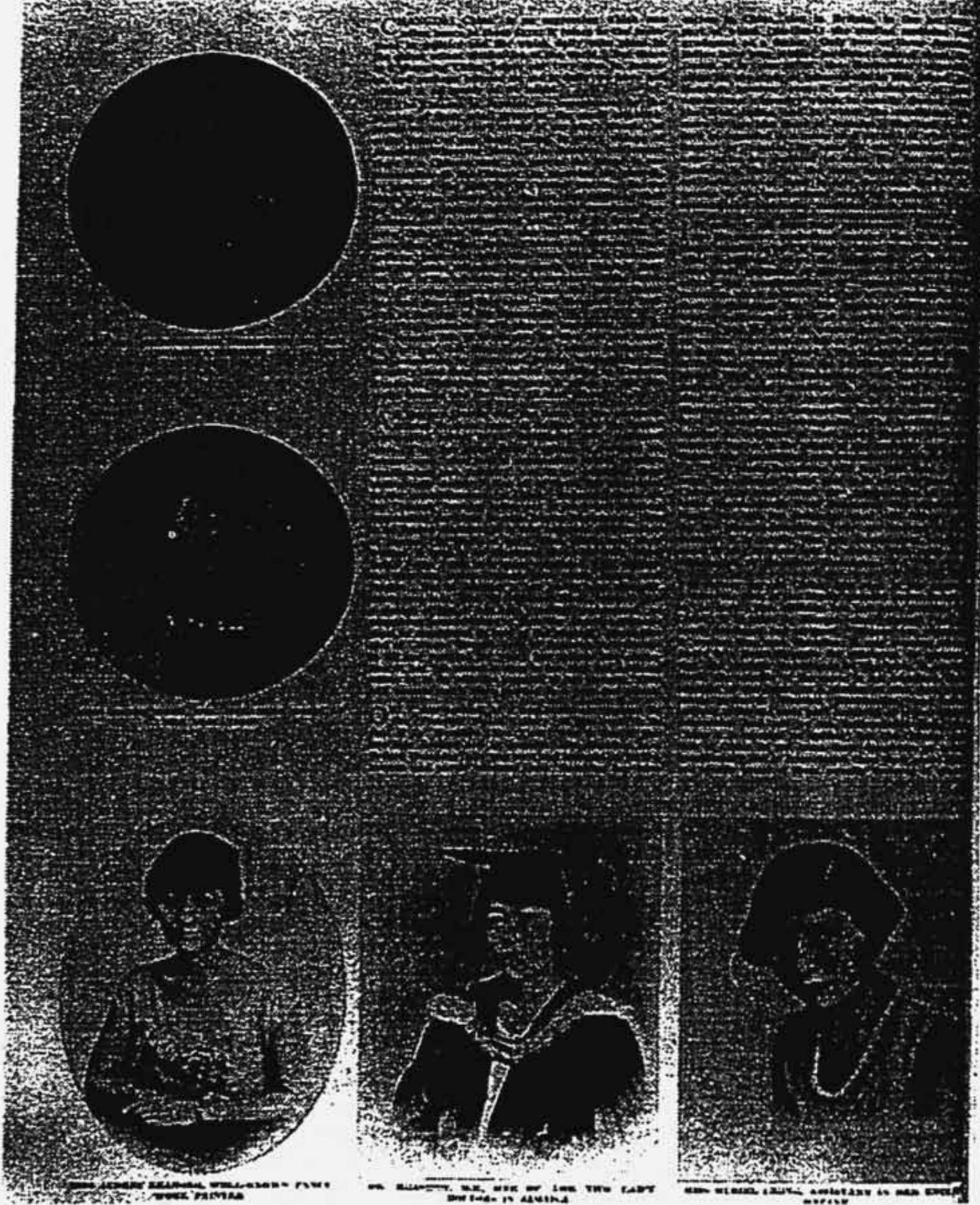


Illustration 13: Our Jamaica Chinese Ladies. Planters' Punch 1930  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.)

130

PLANTERS' PUNCH

# Ladies—An Influence

For the past few years the ladies of the island have been making a name for themselves in the social and domestic circles. Many of them have been active in the various societies and clubs, and have done much to improve the social and domestic life of the island.

**R**...  
**W**...  
**T**...



Mrs. MARY-JANE, A WELL-KNOWN SOCIETY AT

Mrs. MARY FINE, WHO IS HER FATHER'S

Mrs. MARY FINE, WHO IS NOW STUDYING

Illustration 14: Our Jamaica Chinese Ladies. Planters' Punch 1930  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.)

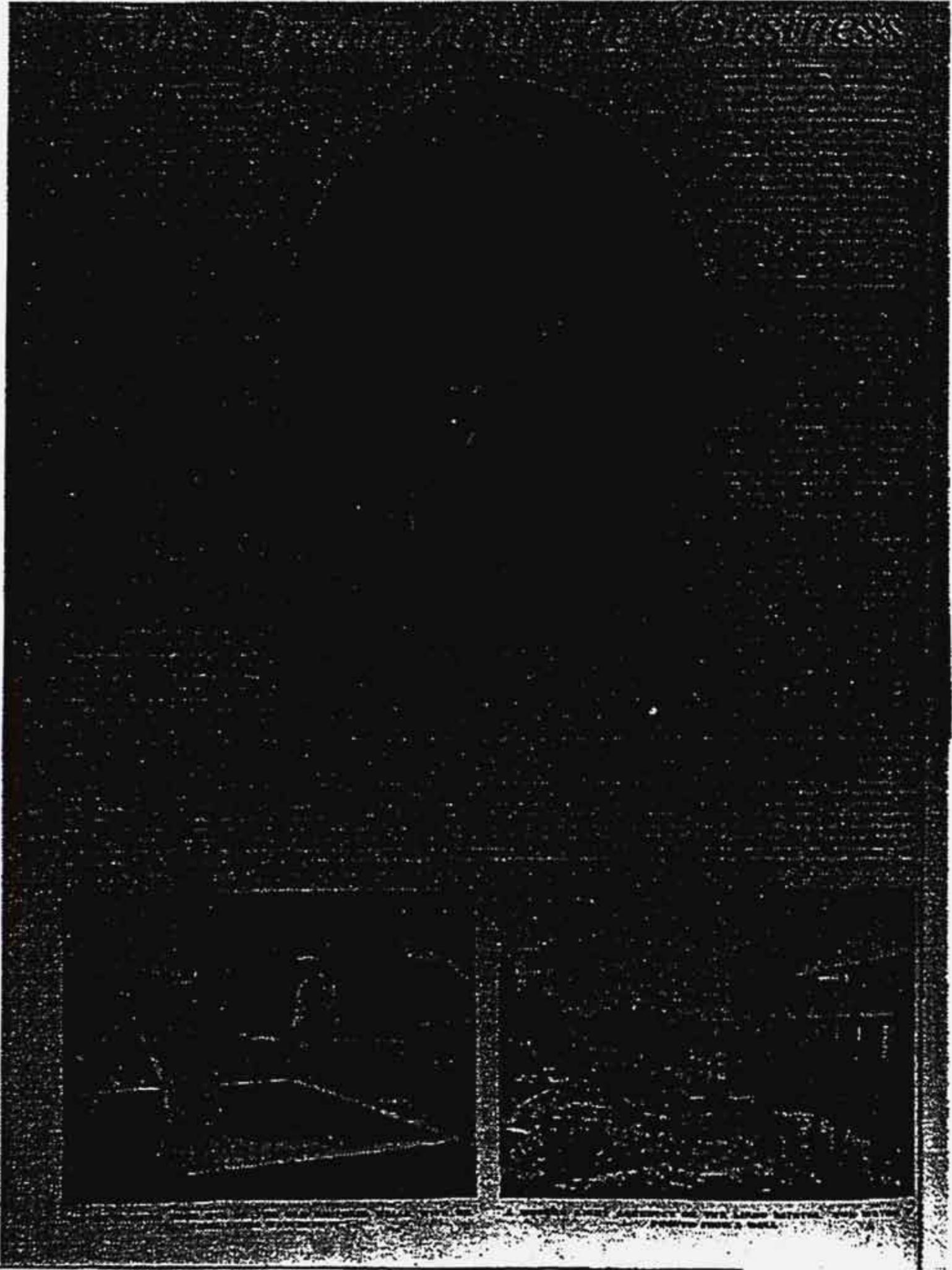
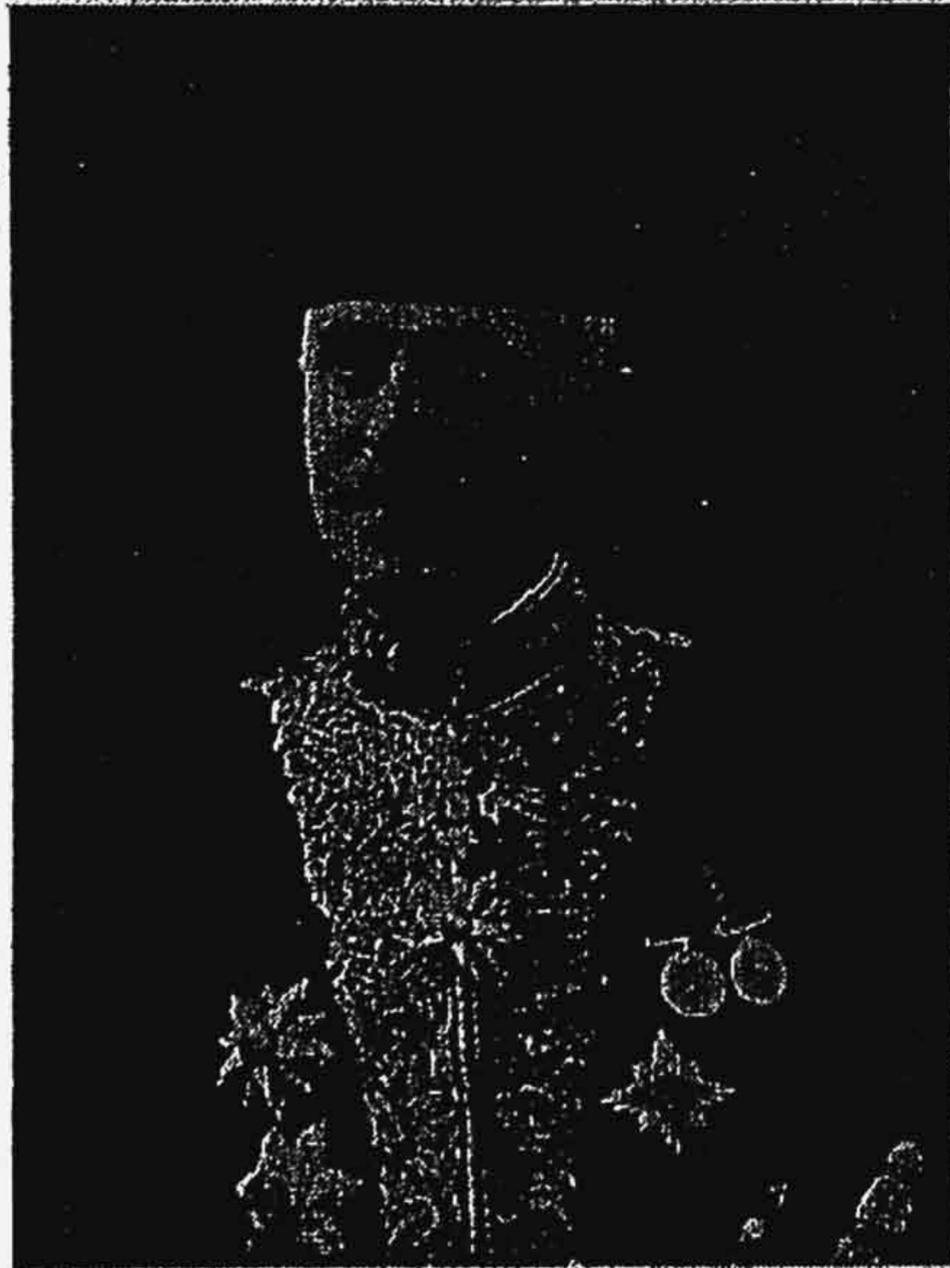


Illustration 15: Cecil Lindo in Planters' Punch 1929.  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.)

A NOTED SYRIAN NAME



SIR SAID PASHA SHOUCAIR



MR. S. N. SHOUCAIR

Illustration 16: Sir Said Pasha Shoucair and Mr. S. N. Shoucair in Planters' Punch 1929. (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica).

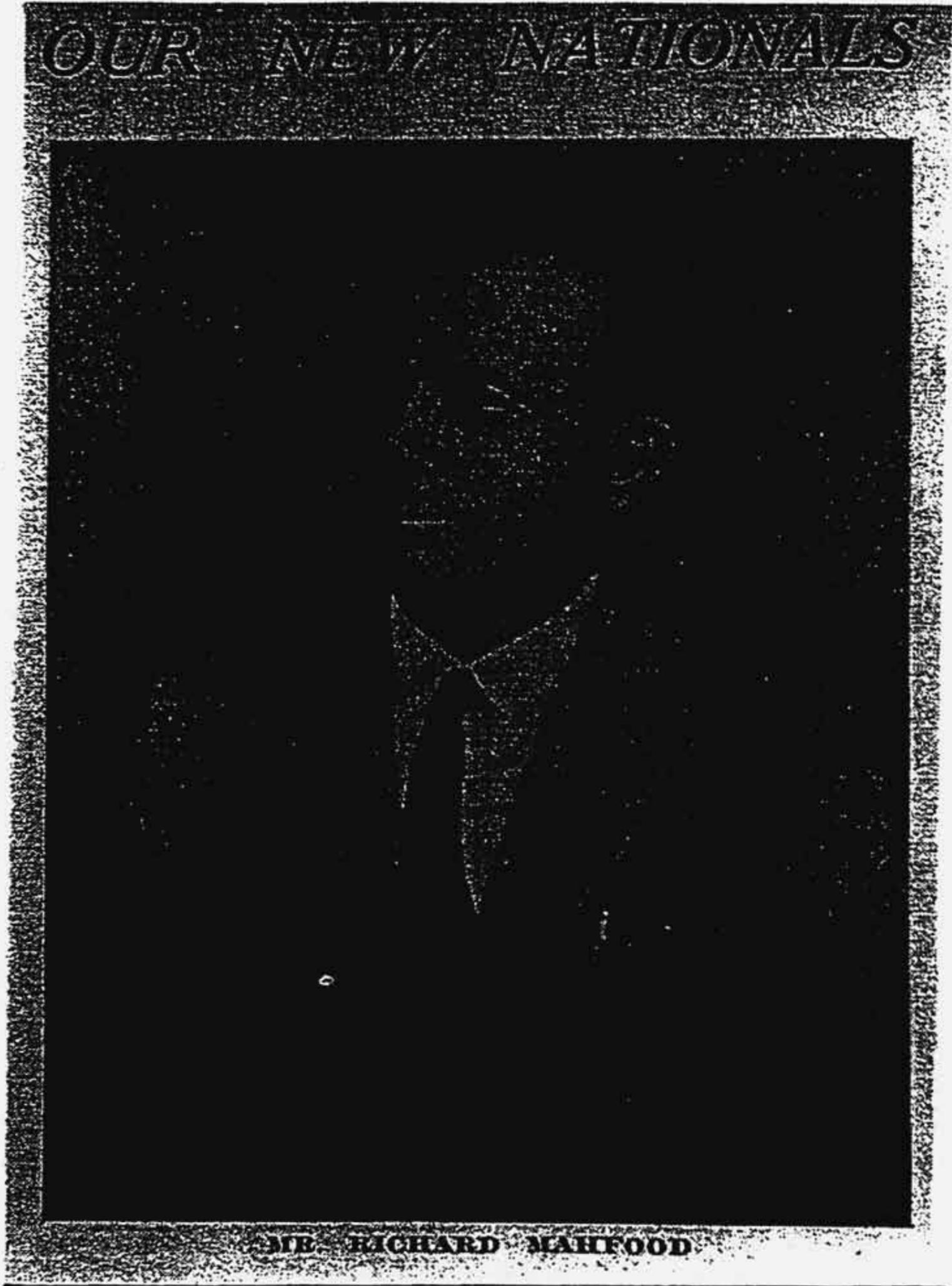


Illustration 17: Mr. Richard Mahfood in Planters' Punch 1929  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica.)



Illustration 18: The red set girls (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)



THE NINE GIRLS IN "THE DANCE OF THE SEVEN VEILS" OF WILD MISS BRIMLEY WAS THE SUBJECT

Illustration 19: The Mayfair Promenaders (Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aldrich, Robert. The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art, and Homosexual Fantasy. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Alleyne, F.M. "A Legend of Jamaica." Daily Gleaner 7 December 1898.
- Angier, Carole. Jean Rhys. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Archibald, Kathleen. "Clipped Wings." From Trinidad: an Anthology of Early West Indian Writing. eds. Reinhard Sander and Peter Ayer. New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1978: 79-86.
- Austin, Diane. Urban Life in Kingston: the Culture and Class Ideology of Two Neighborhoods. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1984.
- Bakan, Abigail. Ideology and Class in Conflict in Jamaica: Politics of Rebellion. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.
- Balutansky, Kathleen and Marie-Agnes Sourieau. Caribbean Creolization: Reflections on the Cultural Dynamics of Language, Literature, and Identity. Gainesville: University Press of Florida and Barbados: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998.
- Barnes, Natasha Bernadine. Representing the Nation: Gender, Culture, and the State in Anglophone Caribbean Society. PhD diss. University of Michigan, 1995.
- Barrow, Christine, ed. Family in the Caribbean. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers and Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1996.
- Beckles, Hilary McD. "White Women and a West India fortune: Gender and Wealth during slavery." The White Minority in the Caribbean. Eds. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson. Princeton: Markus Wiener, Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, and Oxford: James Currey Publishers 1998: 1-16.
- Birbalsingh, F.M. "The Novels of H.G. de Lisser." The International Fiction Review 9.1 (1982):41-6.
- Boxhill, Anthony. "The beginnings to 1929." West Indian Literature 2nd ed. Ed. Bruce King. London: MacMillan Education, 1995: 27-37.
- Brathwaite, Edward. The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

- Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean. (1974) Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1985 reprint.
- Brereton Bridget and Kevin Yelvington. "Introduction." The Colonial Caribbean In Transition eds. Bridget Brereton and Kevin Yelvington. Kingston: UWI Press, 1991.
- Brereton, Bridget, "The White Elite of Trinidad, 1838-1950." Eds. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, Kingston: Ian Randle and Oxford: James Currey, 1998:32-70.
- Bridges, Yseult. Child of the Tropics: Victorian Memoirs. ed. Nicholas Guppy. London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1980.
- Questing Heart. [pseud. Tristram Hill]. London: Eldon Press, 1934,
- Creole Enchantment. [pseud. Tristram Hill]. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1936.
- Brontë, Charlotte. Jane Eyre. Norton Critical Edition. 2nd Ed. New York: W. & W. Norton, 1987.
- Bryan, Patrick. The Jamaican People 1880-1902. Warwick University Caribbean Studies. London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991.
- "The White Minority in Jamaica at the end of the Nineteenth Century." Eds. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson. Princeton, Kingston, Oxford: Markus Wiener, Ian Randle, 1998:116-132.
- Burton, Richard. Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition and Play in the Caribbean. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Bush, Barbara. Slave Women in Caribbean Society:1650-1838. Oxford: James Currey and Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1990.
- "White 'Ladies', Coloured 'Favourites' and Black 'Wenches'; Some Considerations on Sex, Race, and Class Factors in Social Relations in White Creole Society in the British Caribbean." Slavery and Abolition 2:3 (1981):245-262.
- Carby, Hazel. "Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature: C.L.R. James and the Politics of the Trinidadian Renaissance." The South Atlantic Quarterly 87:1 (Winter 1988): 39-52.
- Carlyle, Thomas. "The Nigger Question." Critical and Miscellaneous Essays vol.4. New York: Charles Scribner, 1901: 348-83.

- Carmichael, Mrs. Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies 2 vols. London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Co. 1833.
- Carnegie, James. Some Aspects of Jamaica's Politics: 1918-1938. Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1973.
- Castello, James. "The Legend of Rose Hall." Falmouth: Falmouth Post, 1868.
- Chang, Victor. "The Historical Novels of H.G. de Lisser." West Indian Literature and its Social Context: Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference on West Indian Literature. ed. Mark McWatt. Department of English, Cave Hill UWI., 1985.
- Chauncey, George. Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Christian, Sheldon. "Stuff such as Dreams are Made of." The Beacon II/4 (August 1932):24-26.
- Cobham-Sander, Rhonda. "The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950." Diss. University of St. Andrews, 1982.
- "The Literary Side of H.G. de Lisser (1878-1944)." Jamaica Journal 17.4 (1984-85):2-9.
- Colloms, Brenda. Charles Kingsley: the Lion of Eversley. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975.
- Cooper, Carolyn. Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Cowley, John. Carnival, Canboulay, and Calypso: traditions in the making. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Crowley, Daniel J. "The Traditional Masques of Carnival." Caribbean Quarterly Double Issue vol. 4. nos. 3 & 4 (March & June 1956): 175-194.
- Cummings, James. "Barrack Rooms." The Beacon I/7(October 1931):21-22.
- de Boissiere, Jean. "The Albergo Bengazi." The Beacon III/3( October 1933):56-7.
- "Fascist Florence." The Beacon II/8 (February 1933):12-4.

- "Germany: As I Saw It in 1931" (Part I). The Beacon II/1 (May 1932):22-3.
- "Germany: As I Saw It in 1931" (Part II). The Beacon II/2 (June 1932):28-9.
- "Impressions and Experiences in the Austrian and Italian Tyrol." The Beacon II/6 (October-November 1932):29-30.
- "Napoli." The Beacon III/2 (September 1933):36-7.
- "To Rome." The Beacon II/10 (April 1933): 7-8.
- "Via Appia." The Beacon II/11 (May 1933): 11-2.
- de Boissiere, R.A.C. "The Woman on the Pavement." The Beacon I/8:4-5.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Masochism. New York: Zone Books, 1989.
- de Lisser, Herbert George. "The Story of the Maroons." 11-25 March 1899 Jamaica Times: 13 (in all issues).
- "Marriage" series: 30 June 1900; "Influence of Religion," 7 July 1900; "The Influences of Property," 25 August 1900; "The Influences of Property," 8 September 1900; "Social Influences," 22 September 1900. Jamaica Times.
- "How Kingston Lives and Moves and has its Being." 17 August 1899 Jamaica Times.
- "Ann Palmer" Daily Telegraph 17 February 1912:5.
- Jane Kingston: the Gleaner, 1913.
- "Worthiness in Business: the Firm of Lascelles de Mercado and Co." Planters' Punch 1.5 (1924-5): 22-5.
- Jamaica Nobility. Planters' Punch 1.6 (1925-6).
- "The Ideal Democrat." Planters' Punch 1.6 (1925-6):10.
- The White Witch of Rose Hall. London: Ernest Benn, 1929 and Planters' Punch 2.3 (1929).
- "The Dancing Girl of Old and of Today." Planters' Punch 2.3 (1929): 11-12.

- "The Dream and the Business." Planters' Punch 2.3 (1929):18.
- "Duchess and Jamaica Ladies." Planters' Punch 2.3 (1929):1.
- "A Noted Syrian Name." Planters' Punch 2.3 (1929):90.
- "Our New Nationals." Planters' Punch 2.3 (1929):71.
- "Our Jamaica Chinese Ladies - An Influence." Planters' Punch (1930):8-9.
- Haunted. Planters' Punch 4.2 (1939-40).
- Myrtle and Money. Planters' Punch 4.4 (1941-42).
- de Souza, Frank. "Nocturne." The Beacon 1/8 (November 1931):18-9.
- Deutsch, Helene. "The Significance of Masochism in the Mental Life of Women." International Journal of Psycho-Analysis. 11(1930):48-60.
- Dunnett, R.F. "The Editor Says Goodbye: An Interview with Mr. W.P. Livingstone." The Gleaner 23 February 1935. (From the National Library of Jamaica biography files).
- Edmondson, Belinda. Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.
- Edwards, Bryan. The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies. 3 vols. London: Stockdale, 1794-1801.
- Edgeworth, Maria. Belinda(1801). New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Emery, Mary Lou. Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile. Austin: University of Texas, 1990.
- Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967.
- Ferguson, Moira. Subject to Others: British Women Writers Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- French, Joan and Honor Ford-Smith. Women, Work and Organization in Jamaica 1900-1944. Sistren Research 1986.

- French, Joan. "Colonial Policy Towards women after the 1938 Uprising: The Case of Jamaica." Unpublished paper presented to the Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association, Caracas, Venezuela, May, 1986.
- Freud, Anna. "Beating Fantasies and Daydreams." Essential Papers on Masochism. eds. Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick Hanly. New York: NYU Press, 1995: 286-299
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Aetiology of Hysteria." Collected Papers vol. 1. trans. Joan Riviere. London: The Hogarth Press, 1953: 183-219.
- "A Child is Being Beaten." Collected Papers vol.2 trans. Joan Riviere. London: The Hogarth Press, 1953: 172-201.
- Dora: an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria. New York: Collier, 1963.
- "On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement." Collected Papers. vol. 1 trans. Joan Riviere. ed. Ernest Jones. New York: Basic Books, 1959:287-359.
- Froude, James Anthony. The English in the West Indies. New York: Charles Scribner, 1888.
- Fuss, Diana. Identification Papers. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Gikandi, Simon. Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Gilman, Sander L. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." "Race, Writing, and Difference." eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Gilkes, Michael. The West Indian Novel. Boston: Twayne, 1981.
- Gomes, Albert. "Black Man." The Beacon (July 1931) I/4:1-2.
- "Cipriani and Utopia." (Editorial) The Beacon (Jan.-Feb. 1932) I/10:3.
- "Federation." (Editorial) The Beacon (July 1932) II/3:7
- "The Literary Club Nuisance."(Editorial) The Beacon (May 1933) II/11:1.
- "Literary Clubs"(Editorial) The Beacon (June 1933) II/12:3.
- "Local Fiction"(Editorial) The Beacon (Jan.-Feb. 1932) I/10:1

- “The Trinidadian.” (Editorial) The Beacon (April 1933) II/10:3.
- “The Trinidadian. (Editorial) The Beacon (September 1933) III/2:29.
- ““a West Indian Literature””(Editorial) The Beacon (June 1933) II/12:3.
- Gregg, Veronica. Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Greig, Beatrice, “The Progress of Women in the Island.” Trinidad Discovery Day Celebration 1927 ed. Alfred Richards. Franklin's Electric Printery: Port of Spain (The Andrew Pearse Collection, University of West Indies Library, St. Augustine, Trinidad).
- Griffith, Glyne A. Deconstruction Imperialism and the West Indian Novel. Kingston: The Press of the University of the West Indies, 1996.
- Guha, Ranajit. “The Prose of Counter Insurgency.” Selected Subaltern Studies. eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak New York: Oxford University Press, 1988:45-84.
- Hall, Catherine. White, male, and middle-class: explorations in feminism and history. New York : Routledge, 1992.
- Harrison, Nancy. Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Haweis, Stephen. “Black Man.” The Beacon III/3 (October 1933):67.
- “Why Should Black Be White?” The Beacon II/9 (March 1933): 4-6.
- Holt, Thomas C. The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Honychurch, Lennox. The Dominica Story: a History of the Island. London: Macmillan Education, 1995.
- Hulme, Peter. Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- James, C.L.R. “Discovering Literature in Trinidad: Two Experiences C.L.R. James and Michael Anthony.” The Journal of Commonwealth Literature 7 (July 1969):73-87.

- Minty Alley. (1936) Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1981.
- "Triumph." The Penguin Book of Caribbean Short Stories. ed. E.A. Markham. New York: Penguin, 1996:108-25.
- James, Winifred. The Mulberry Tree. London: Chapman and Hall, 1913.
- Jarrett-Macauley, Delia. The Life of Una Marson 1905-65. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998.
- Kerr, Paulette A. "Victims or Strategists? Female Lodging-house keepers in Jamaica." Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective. ed. Verene Shepherd et al. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995:197-212.
- Kingsley, Charles. At Last a Christmas in the West Indies. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871.
- Lanagan, Mrs. Antigua and the Antiguans. 2 vols. London, 1844.
- Levy, Michele. "'witness to the early morning': Alfred Mendes's 'Boodhoo.'" (Unpublished manuscript 1996).
- Lewis, Matthew Gregory. Journal of a West India Proprietor kept during a Residence in the Island of Jamaica. London: John Murray, (1834).
- Leys, Ruth. "The Real Miss Beauchamp." Feminists Theorize the Political. eds. Judith Butler and Joan Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992: 172.
- "Libel Action Against The "Beacon" To continue Today." Trinidadian Guardian (21 October 32):1.
- Ligon, Richard. A True and Extact History of the Island of Barbadoes. London, 1673.
- Livingstone, W.P. (William Pringle). Black Jamaica. London: William Clowes and Sons, 1899.
- Lomas, Laura. "Mystifying Mystery: Inscriptions of the Oral in the Legend of Rose Hall." Journal of West Indian Literature 6.2 (1994):70-87.
- Long, Edward. The History of Jamaica 3 vols. London, T. Lowndes, 1774.
- Lynch, Mrs. Henry. The Cotton Tree: or, Emily, the little West Indian, a Tale for Young people. London: 1847.

- McClintock, Anne. Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest. New York: Routledge, 1995
- Mair, Lucille Mathurin. A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica from 1655-1844. PhD Diss. University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, 1974.
- Mendes, Alfred. "Afternoon in Trinidad." Caribbean Rhythms: The Emerging English Literature of the West Indies. ed. James T. Livingstone. New York: Washington Square Press, 1974.
- Black Fauns. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1970.
- "Boodhoo." The Beacon I/11 (March 1932) 18-25; I/12 (April 1932):23-7; II/1 (May 1932):9-11.
- "Commentary." From Trinidad: an Anthology of Early West Indian Writing. eds. Reinhard Sander and Peter Ayer. New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1978: 21-26.
- "Five Dollars worth of Flesh." The Beacon I/6 (September 1932):13-15.
- "Good Friday at the Church of La Divina Pastora." The Beacon II/2 (June 1932):7-11.
- "Lulu Gets Married." The West Indian Review 3/4:15-20; 3/5: 39-44.
- "Snapshots." The Beacon II/7 (December 1932):11-17.
- "Sweetman." The Beacon I/7 (October 1931):1-6.
- "The Turbulent Thirties." World Literature Written in English. 12/1 (April 1973): 66-79.
- "Water Piece." The Beacon I/8 (November 1931):6-7.
- "Writing -- Trinidad 1931-33." Unpublished Manuscript. Alfred Mendes Papers.
- Mennel, Barbara, "Seduction, Sacrifice, and Submission: Masochism in Postwar German Film and Literature." PhD Diss. Cornell University, 1998.
- Meyer, Susan. Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

- Middleditch, Thomas. The Youthful Female Missionary: A Memoir of Mary Ann Hutchins, Wife of the Rev. John Hutchins, Baptist Missionary, Savanna-la-Mar, and Daughter of the Rev. T. Middleditch of Ipswich compiled chiefly from her own correspondence by her Father. 2nd Edition. London and Ipswich: 1840.
- Mintz, Sidney and Richard Price. The Birth of African-American Culture: an Anthopological Perspective. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Mohammed, Patricia. "Writing Gender into History: The Negotiation of Gender Relations among Indian Men and Women in Post-Indenture Trinidad Society, 1917-47." Engendering History Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey, eds. Kingston: Ian Randle and Oxford: James Currey, 1995: 20-47.
- Morris, Mervyn. "H.G. DeLisser: The first Competent Caribbean Novelist in English." Carib 1(1979):18-26.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Literary Theory: an Anthology eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Maldon, Mass: Blackwell publishers: 585-95.
- Naipaul, Seepersad . The Adventures of Gurudeva. London, Heinemann, 1995.
- Nugent, Maria. Lady Nugent's Journal. ed. Frank Cundall. London, 1907.
- Plante, David. Difficult Women: a Memoir of Three. New York: Athenaeum, 1983.
- O'Connor, Teresa. Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels. New York: New York University Press, 1986.
- Olivier, Sydney. White Capital and Coloured Labour. London: Independent Labour Party, 1906.
- Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth. "The White Witch of Rosehall and the Legitimacy of Female Power in the Caribbean ." Journal of West Indian Literature 4.2 (1990):25-45.
- Phyllis Shand Allfrey: a Caribbean Life. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Pearse, Andrew. "Carnival in Nineteenth Century Trinidad." Caribbean Quarterly 4/3&4(1956): 175-93.

- Pigou-Dennis, Elizabeth. "The Myrtle Bank Hotel and Jamaica's Upper Class 1914-1945." The Jamaican Historical Review v.20 (1998).
- Prince, Mary. The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself. Ed. Moira Ferguson. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987.
- Puri, Shalini. "Canonized Hybridities, Resistant Hybridities: Chutney Soca, Carnival, and the Politics of Nationalism." Caribbean Romances: the Politics of Regional Representation ed. Belinda J. Edmondson. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia: 12-38.
- Ramchand, Kenneth. "Introduction." Jane's Career. 1914 New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, (reprint)1971.
- The West Indian Novel and its Background. London: Faber and Faber, 1970.
- Reddock, Rhoda. "The Indentureship Experience: Indian Women in Trinidad." Women Plantation Workers: International Experiences. Shobita Jain and Rhoda Reddock, eds. New York: Berg, 1998. 29-48.
- Women, Labour, and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994.
- Reinhard, Sander W. From Trinidad: An Anthology of Early West Indian Writing. New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1978.
- Raiskin, Judith. Snow on the Canefields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Rhys, Jean. "The Black Notebook." The Special Collections Department. The University of Tulsa Library, Tulsa.
- "Good-bye Marcus, Good-bye Rose." The Collected Stories. New York: Norton, 1992:285-290.
- Voyage in the Dark. New York: Norton, 1982.
- Wide Sargasso Sea. New York: Norton, 1966.
- Riland, George. Memoirs of a West India Planter (1837).
- Riviere, Joan. "Womanliness as a Masquerade." Formulations of Fantasy. eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan. New York: Routledge, 1986:35-44.

- Roberts, W. Adolphe. Six Great Jamaicans. Kingston: The Pioneer Press, 1951.
- Robertson, Glory. "In Defense of Annie Palmer." Jamaica Library Association Bulletin January 1971: 29-31.
- Sander, Reinhard. The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen - Thirties. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Scott, Alistair. "Brotherly Love." The Beacon II/4 (August 1932):10-12.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. Between men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Segal, Daniel. "'Race' and 'colour' in pre-independence Trinidad and Tobago." Trinidad Ethnicity. Kevin Yelvington, ed. Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1993:81-115.
- Sherlock, Philip and Hazel Bennett. The Story of the Jamaican People. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers and Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998.
- Singh, Kelvin. Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State Trinidad 1917-1945. Calgary, CA: The University of Calgary Press and Kingston, JA: The Press University of the West Indies, 1994.
- "Conflict and Collaboration: Tradition and Modernizing Indo-Trinidadian Elites (1917 -56)." New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids 70/3&4 (1996):229-53.
- Sloane, Hans. A Voyage to the Islands, Madera, Barbados, Nieves, St.Christopher, and Jamaica. 2 vols. London, 1707.
- Smith, Charlotte. The Wanderings of Warwick. London, 1796.
- The Story of Henrietta. Vol 2 The Letters of a Solitary Wanderer. London: Sampson Low, 1800.
- Sprengnether, Madelon. "Enforcing Oedipus: Freud and Dora." In Dora's Case: Freud - Hysteria - Feminism. eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985: 254-275.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. The Politics and Poetics of Transgression. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

- Stepan, Nancy. "Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places." Degeneration: the Dark Side of Progress. eds. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman New York: Columbia U P, 1985: 97-120.
- Stewart, J. An Account of Jamaica and its Inhabitants (1808). London, 1844.
- A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica. 1823.
- Stitt, Jocelyn. "Gender in the Contact Zone: Imagining the Caribbean in Romantic Era British Women's Writing." Unpublished manuscript.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Stollmeyer, Hugh. "Literary Clubs and Art." The Beacon III/3 (October 1933): 69.
- Sturtz, Linda. "The Eighteenth-Century 'Bokcorah Woman' in Jamaica." Unpublished paper, 1999.
- Sussman, Charlotte. "Colonial Production, Domestic Consumption: Narrative and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain." PhD Diss. Cornell University, 1992.
- Sypher, Wylie. "The West-Indian as a 'Character' in the eighteenth Century." Studies in Philology 36(1939): 503-520.
- Thomas, Sue. "The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason." Victorian Literature and Culture 27:1 (1999): 1-17.
- "Jean Rhys, 'grilled sole', and an experience of 'mental seduction.'" New Literature Review 28/29(Winter 1994/Summer 1995):65-84.
- "Jean Rhys and Dominican Autoethnography." Victorian Journalism: Exotic and Domestic. Eds. Margaret Harris and Barbara Garlick. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1998:171-196.
- Trollope, Anthony. The West Indies and the Spanish Main. (first edition 1859) London: Cass Reprint, 1968.
- Trowbridge, WRH. "The Tare." The Beacon I/5 (August 1931): 11-14.
- "Twenty Pounds Damages Awarded in Short Story Libel Action." Trinidad Guardian (22 Sept. 1932):1.

- Vassell, Linnette Silvera. "Voluntary Women's Associations in Jamaica: the Jamaica Federation of Women, 1944-1962." M.A. Thesis, UWI Mona, 1993.
- Vreeland, Elizabeth. "Jean Rhys: The Art of Fiction LXIV." Paris Review 76 (1979): 219-237.
- Walton, Jean. "De-Placing Race in (White) Psychoanalytic Discourse: Founding Narratives of Feminism." Critical Inquiry 21(Summer 1995): 775-804.
- W.P. The Jamaica Lady, or, The Life of Bavia. Four Before Richardson: Selected English Novels, 1720-1727. Ed. William H. McBurney. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1963: 83-152.
- Waby, Eleanor. "Trinidad: Then and Now." The Beacon II/2 (June 1932):21-23; II/4 (1932):21-23; II/5 (1932) :21-24; II/6 (October-November 1932):20-23.
- Webber, ARF Those that be in Bondage: a tale of Indian indentures and sunlit Western waters. Wellesley, Mass. : Calaloux, 1988.
- Williams, Cynric R. A Tour Through the Island of Jamaica, from the Western to the Eastern End in the Year 1823. London: Hunt and Clarke, 1826.
- Wilson, Peter Crab Antics: the social anthropology of English-speaking Negro societies of the Caribbean. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973.
- Yates, Geoffrey S. "The Death of Legend: the True Tale of the 'White Witch of Rose Hall.'" The Gleaner 21 November, 1965.
- "The Rose Hall Legend: Was it Really Annie?" Daily Gleaner 5 December 1965.
- Young, Robert. Colonial Desire. New York: Routledge, 1995.







DATE DUE

DUE	RETURNED
OCT 30 2003	NOV 03 2003
OCT 29 2004	
OCT 29 2004	
DEC 14 2004	DEC 10 2004
APR 12 2005	DEC 08 2005
NOV 12 2007	JUL 16 2012
MAY 18 2011	

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



3 1262 07792 513 8

PR

9210.5

,R68

2000

EATIN  
AMERICA

