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# Shape-Shifting Creole Identities: Representations of Creole Figures in Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Transatlantic Literature

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

SHAPE-SHIFTING CREOLE IDENTITIES: REPRESENTATIONS OF CREOLE  
FIGURES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ANGLOPHONE TRANSATLANTIC  
LITERATURE

By

Claudia Amadori

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

August 2014

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Shape-Shifting Creole Identities: Representations  
of Creole Figures in Nineteenth-Century Anglophone  
Transatlantic Literature

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This study of nineteenth-century American, British, and Caribbean texts examines the historical and geographical shifts in literary depictions of West Indian Creoles, who were the offspring of colonizers and/or slaves in the Americas, and focuses on the relationship between literature and Creole identity formation in the first half of the nineteenth century. The presence of Creoles in literature demonstrates, on the one hand, the development of a Creole consciousness in texts by West Indian authors written from a Creole point of view. On the other hand, literary Creoles in British and post-Independence American novels attest to the importance of the West Indies within the Atlantic world, although Creoles are often depicted as outsiders and deviant figures. Canonical novels, in which Creole characters appear, also uncover some of the contradictions inherent in stereotypical depictions of West Indian Creoles. These contradictions are the focus of my study. In my reading of American and British novels—whose Creole characters often exemplify literary typecasts associated to the West Indies, rather than real Creoles—I read against the grain to identify ambiguities that open a space, often non-verbal, where the Creole can be re-configured. Although the figure of the West Indian Creole varies according to race, gender, and specific historical, economic

and political realities linked to the location where a novel is set and/or produced, “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” makes connections between diverse literary texts, endeavoring to trace the emergence of a Creole consciousness and analyzing shape-shifting Creole figures who can cross borders and re-define themselves alongside, within, and/or in opposition to stereotypical representations of Creoles. “Shifting Creole Identities” analyzes American texts in which West Indian Creole characters appear, such as Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799) and Leonora Sansay's *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808), alongside British canonical novels, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847). These novels are put in conversation with works by nineteenth-century West Indian writers, some of which have received limited critical attention: works such as Cynric R. Williams' *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827), E.L. Joseph's *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* (1838), J.W. Orderson's *Creoleana* (1842), and Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857).

For my mother, Marilisa Baldassi,  
and my son, Nicholas Amadori

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## Introduction

### WHAT IS A CREOLE?

“Shape-Shifting Creole Identities: Representations of Creole Figures in Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Transatlantic Literature” is a study of American, British, and Caribbean texts, and examines the historical and geographical shifts in literary depictions of West Indian Creoles, who were the offspring of colonizers and/or slaves in the Americas.<sup>1</sup> This project focuses on the relationship between literature and Creole identity formation in the first half of the nineteenth century. The presence of Creoles in literature demonstrates, on the one hand, the development of a Creole consciousness in texts by West Indian authors written from a Creole point of view. On the other hand, literary Creoles in British and American novels attest to the importance of the West Indies within the Atlantic world—as shown in works such as Leonora Sansay’s *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St Domingo* (1808) which I analyze in Chapter 1—although Creoles are often depicted as outsiders and deviant figures, at the margins of British and post-Independence American novels. British and American novels in which Creole characters appear also uncover some of the contradictions inherent in stereotypical depictions of West Indian Creoles. These contradictions are the focus of my study. Creoles were often portrayed as hyper-sexualized, corrupted, lazy, and even insane (like Bertha Mason, the “madwoman in the attic,” in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*), due to the negative influences that hot climates and lack of a proper education were believed to have

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<sup>1</sup> I will discuss at length the etymology of the term Creole, and its modifications over time, in the section of my introduction titled “What is a Creole?” pg. 4.

on morals. This “theory of climatic effects” over English physical (and psychological) traits, which were believed to change in a hostile environment, highlights “the fear that, by venturing abroad as colonizers, the English would cease to be English” (Berman 32). In my reading of canonical British novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*—whose creole characters exemplify literary types associated to the West Indies, rather than real Creoles—I read against the grain to identify contradictions that open up a space—often non-verbal—where the Creole can be re-configured.

Where, and in what ways, do West Indian Creole characters appear within nineteenth-century American and British domestic and sentimental novels? And, conversely, how do nineteenth-century Creole writers respond to these representations? If Creole characters are not always depicted as marginal or deviant, or if we can identify contradictions within portrayals of stereotypical literary Creoles, how do these literary representations affect Creole identity construction? How do white American Creoles redefine their identity after Independence, while remaining mindful of the importance of improving commercial relationships with Britain, its colonies, and the rest of the Western Hemisphere? How did the British Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, and the socio-political and economic uncertainty in the years that immediately preceded and followed it, affect black and white Creoles and their sense of identity? If we can identify a budding Creole consciousness, what does that consciousness look like, in the nineteenth century? How does skin color affect it, and/or drive it? How do white West Indian Creoles ideologically position themselves in relation to black and mixed-raced Creoles, and vice versa? How do black, mixed-race, and white literary Creoles see themselves in relation to the “motherland,” England, and to the neighboring United States? Do literary Creoles, in

works by nineteenth-century West Indian writers, resemble characters in twentieth-century Caribbean literature, who often suffer from a condition of rootlessness, ambivalence, and physical or emotional homelessness? These are some of the questions that drive this enquiry.

The novels I analyze in this book cover a wide span (geographically, thematically and chronologically), but all feature Creole characters and themes—in the context of the growing influence of the middle class, slavery, commerce, and imperialism—and are set in the course of the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. This is a period of revolutions and their aftermath, dominated by the debate on Abolition and by the passing of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and the Slavery Emancipation Act of 1833.<sup>2</sup> Although the figure of the West Indian Creole, in nineteenth-century literature, varies according to race, gender, and specific historical, economic and political realities—linked to the particular geographical location where a novel is set and/or produced—“Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” makes connections between diverse literary texts where Creole characters appear. My project endeavors to trace the emergence of a Creole consciousness by analyzing shape-shifting Creole figures that can cross borders and re-define themselves alongside, within, and/or in opposition to stereotypical representations of Creoles, as in Mary Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures of*

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<sup>2</sup> The period in which the novels I analyze in “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” are set includes a series of ideological shifts that affected definitions of Creoleness during the nineteenth century, in the context of specific historical events that influenced the ways in which Creoles were being depicted in literature. Historical events include: the American War of Independence (1775-1783), the French Revolution (1789-1815), the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the recurrent epidemics of yellow fever and cholera that affected the West Indies and eastern United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the abolition by the Slave Trade Act (1807) of the triangular slave trade between England, Africa and the Americas, religious reform and missionary efforts to end slavery in the British colonies, the 1820s slave revolts in Jamaica and Demerara, the Slave Abolition Act (1833) which abolished slavery in the British Empire, and the Crimean War (1853-1856), as well as economic factors connected to these events. Although some of these events are not directly referenced in the texts I analyze in this project, they all indirectly influenced some of the novels’ themes and concerns.

*Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857). This project expands on existing scholarship on Creoles—such as the works of Sean X. Goudie, Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, Ashli White, Carolyn Vellenga Berman, Barbara Lalla, Evelyn O’Callaghan, Candace Ward, Tim Watson, and Kamau Brathwaite—approaching literary Creoles from a transatlantic (American and British) rather than just from an exclusively British or American perspective. “Shifting Creole Identities” analyzes American texts in which West Indian Creole characters appear, such as Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799) and Leonora Sansay’s *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808), alongside British canonical novels, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847), juxtaposing these novels to works by nineteenth-century West Indian writers, some of which have received limited critical attention; works such as Cynric R. Williams' *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827), E.L. Joseph's *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* (1838), J.W. Orderson’s *Creoleana* (1842), and Mary Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857).

#### WHAT IS A CREOLE?

The etymology of the word Creole suggests a correspondence between the history of New World colonization and the development, over time, of the figure of the Creole, as it became known in the nineteenth century. The origins of the term are obscure; its earlier usages being traced to Blacks in Brazil (a colony of Portugal), although some sources attribute to the word African origins, as Warner-Lewis argues, positing a

Kikoongo root for Creole meaning “outsider” (Allen 49).<sup>3</sup> Other interpretations suggest that the term Creole derives from the Portuguese term “*crioulo*” (first used in the sixteenth century) and the Spanish “*criollo*,” referring to a “Spaniard born in the New World” and also to a “black born in the New World” (Stewart 7). The term *crioulo/criollo*, “home-born”—from the Latin *criar* (*create*) meaning “breed”—therefore stands for someone bred in the colonies by Europeans or Africans; “an intermediate category, defined primarily by its relationship to others, rather than by an essence” (Allen 50). Whether the term was passed from African to European languages, or was first used by the Portuguese, and then passed to the Spanish, the French, and the English, it is clear that the word Creole suggests “cultural contact and transfer across the region, from a colonial enclave to another” (Allen 50). These seemingly contrasting definitions of Creole—which is used to refer to both Whites and Blacks—also reveal that the term, when it first appears in the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, does not describe skin color or racial mixing, as it later comes to define, but designates a distinction based on geography and culture rather than ethnicity.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of Creole confirms the identification of the term with location of birth: “In the West Indies and other parts of America,

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<sup>3</sup> Warner-Lewis argues that African-born slaves referred to slaves born in the New World as outsiders, as they considered themselves to be more honorable than Blacks born in the Americas (qtd. in Allen 49). On the roots of the word Creole see also William Washabaugh and Sydney M. Greenfield’s “The Development of Atlantic Creole Languages” 106-19. In this article, Washabaugh and Greenfield argue that language creolization in the Atlantic region began with the Portuguese colonization of the islands off the coast of West Africa, in conjunction with the development of the plantation system of production, introduced by the Portuguese, and with the requirement of the modern nation-state that subjects “mold [their] behavior and language” according to its requirements (114). Creole languages formed in the friction between this requirement to assimilate and the rejection by slaves of the “cultural world” of those who “restricted [their social participation] in this very world” (116). Washabaugh and Greenfield refer to this phenomenon as “double binding,” meaning that “although required to ‘behave Portuguese,’ the slaves were not accepted as full-fledged Portuguese persons. Their response to this double binding gave birth to what is known today as creole culture and its distinctive linguistic form” (116).

Mauritius, etc. *orig.* A person born and naturalized in the country but of European (usually Spanish or French) or of African Negro race: the name having no connotation of colour, and in its reference to origin being distinguished on the one hand from born in Europe (or Africa), and on the other hand from aboriginal” (OED vol. 2, 1961).<sup>4</sup> A Creole, thus, is someone born in the Americas, as opposed to Europe or Africa, but not an aborigine; a definition that highlights the hybridity of this figure, who “[has] one identity by blood and another by place of birth,” and therefore is “simultaneously the same and different” (Allen 50). When applied to Whites it distinguishes the European-born colonizers from their progeny who are labeled Creoles, as suggested by the definition: “a descendent of European...settlers in the W. Indies, Central or S. America” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 317). When applied to Blacks the term describes “a Negro [sic] born in the W. Indies or America, as distinguished from one freshly imported from Africa...a person of mixed European and black descent” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 317). While initially the term is applied to both Whites and Blacks without distinction, it later becomes associated with white plantation owners born in the Americas (or residents in the New World for a long time), and their (often mixed-race) offspring. The *Oxford English Dictionary* further extends the meaning of the term to also include “a white descendant of French settlers in the southern US, esp. Louisiana,” a definition of Creole applicable to the United States only, in particular after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 317).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The term “race,” to refer to skin color, would not be applicable to the sixteenth century. Race is a modern concept that developed during the nineteenth century, not one understood in the sixteenth century as having socio-political implication and denoting a discourse of purity.

<sup>5</sup> The scope of my study is limited to West Indian Creoles. The term’s usage to refer to ex-French colonists in the United States is beyond the aims of my project. The word Creole as it is used in French and Spanish colonies, and in the Spanish Main, can assume other different meanings. For example, white Creoles in



While the term Creole initially applies equally to black, white or mixed-race descendants of colonialists or slaves, born in the New World, and while its first usage indicates a geographical rather than a racial difference, in later usage the term becomes synonymous both with white planters (especially in British texts), and with the term "Métis," which connotes "mixed race," shifting the focus from location to skin color, in particular in southern United States where French Creoles were always suspected of being racially tainted. In the Caribbean, alongside the introduction of color in the definition of Creole during the eighteenth century, the term progressively assumes negative connotations, associated to the West Indian climate and its effects on the European constitution, as well as to the harmful consequences of daily interaction with "Negro" slaves, who were believed to corrupt the English colonialist's morals. The implications suggested in the connotations of the term Creole as it is used by writers, such as Edward Long and Lady Nugent, are that "Creole Whites were culturally [and morally] inferior to their British-born counterparts," due to their interaction with slaves and to the tropical climate (Allen 51).<sup>6</sup> These negative connotations are also applied to French and Spanish Creoles, as my reading of *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* demonstrates. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Creoles became associated with traits such as indolence, promiscuity, cowardice, but also grace and beauty. Lady Nugent writes: "It is extraordinary to witness the immediate effect that the climate and habit of living in this country have upon the minds and manners of

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Spanish America used the word "criollism" as a synonymous of nationalism (Allen 53). In this sense the word Creole is stripped of its negative connotations, and it is used to signal separation from the motherland and an "embryonic national consciousness, which would develop into the anti-colonial movement towards self-possession and definition," becoming, thus, a synonymous of "native" (Allen 53).

<sup>6</sup> For Edward Long's *The History of Jamaica* see my section titled "The Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Novels by West Indian Creoles" pg. 42.

Europeans...they have become indolent and inactive, regardless of everything but eating, drinking and indulging themselves” (*Lady Nugent’s Journal* 98).<sup>7</sup> These physical and psychological changes in Creoles—a direct consequence of the tropical climate—were believed to be transmittable to their offspring and, therefore, to permanently alter the bodies and minds of Creoles. In Joseph’s *Warner Arundell*, while Warner is sojourning in London a Londoner asks him:

‘Perceive, Sir, You Are a Foreigner?’

‘Not Exactly, I’m a West Indian’

[To which answer, the stranger remarks] ‘Bless me, sir! You are a West Indian, and yet you are as fair as any Englishman! I thought you natives of the West Indies were *molatoes* (mulattoes)’

‘I smiled at the man’s mistake; which however is common in England, where most persons conceive mulattoes the pure descendants of whites, rendered dark by being born in a torrid climate.’ (Joseph 165-66)

The above exchange between Warner Arundell and the English stranger exemplifies the kind of beliefs that circulated both in print and public opinion about the “un-Englishness” of English Creoles.

As briefly mentioned above, a further distinction that should be made when discussing the usages of the term Creole is between the British and the American understanding of the term; this distinction shows how the meaning of the term changed based on geo-political shifts. For Britain and its West Indian colonies, Creoles are principally white plantation owners who were born in the periphery of the Empire, or had lived in the West Indies for a long time. The term Creole, thus, in nineteenth-century

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<sup>7</sup> *Lady Nugent’s Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805* was written during a sojourn of about four years in Jamaica, where Maria Nugent lived with her husband, the Lt. Governor general of Jamaica, George Nugent. Her diary provides an insight into colonial society in Jamaica, at the beginning of the nineteenth century (See “Introduction” by Phillip Wright xi-xvii).

British representations, becomes a synonym for colonial slave-owning plantocracy and its vices, which include sexual promiscuousness resulting in mixed-race offspring. On the other hand, in the United States after the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the term Creole is no longer used to describe a subject of the ex-British colony, whose inhabitants see themselves as Americans rather than Creoles, but it is applied to either British West Indian Creoles (as in Brown's novel *Arthur Mervyn*) or, following the Louisiana Purchase, to the "offspring of French settlers and slaves in the French-speaking territories of Louisiana" (Berman 3). Ex-French colonialists living in the United States are individuals whose whiteness is continually questioned causing the meaning of the term Creole to shift even more towards an inference of racial mixing. Louisiana, at the time it was purchased by the United States, was a "long-standing French colony with a forty-year-old Spanish administration," whose French and Spanish population identified as "*criollo* or *creole*," in opposition to African slaves and French or Spanish people, and, after the Louisiana purchase, in opposition to the English-speaking Americans, who took possession of their territory (Berman 35). Berman argues that Louisiana, although it became an integral part of the United States, was viewed as an "American colony" by its French-speaking population who identified as Creoles to ideologically separate themselves from the American identity of the invaders (36). This confirms the association of the term Creole with the term colonial. The term Creole as used in the southern United States, thus, mostly referred to French Creoles who, because of the less rigid laws on cross-racial unions during French administration, were suspected of being racially "tainted" even when they looked white. After the Civil War, "the long-standing French-speaking community...made every effort

to define ‘creole’ as ‘white’ in order to maintain both their distinct historical, linguistic, and cultural identity and their full citizen status,” redefining the geographical category Creole as a racial category: “the *creole race* in Louisiana,” meaning white, French descendants of colonists (Berman 43). The example of Louisiana demonstrates the shifts that the term Creole underwent alongside the socio-political and geographical changes in the Atlantic World.

Similarly, in *Creole America*, Sean X. Goudie shows how, after Independence, Creole Americans underwent a process of un-creolization, or “un-becoming Creole,” in which they re-defined their new national identity as distinct from Britain and its colonies and, simultaneously, struggled with the need to maintain commercial relations with the West Indies (11).<sup>8</sup> Goudie defines the United States’ commercial dependence on West Indian British colonies as paracolonialism, where “the prefix ‘para’—meaning ‘alongside,’ ‘near or beside,’ ‘resembling,’ or ‘subsidiary to’—aptly describes the United States’ relationship to European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere”; a relationship in which the United States does not operate as a colonial power, but alongside one, and complicit with Britain’s exploitation of slavery and West Indian economic markets (11-12). This struggle between America’s repudiation of its Creole past (and literary amnesia), its construction of a post-Independence identity based on exceptionalism, and its contrasting need to maintain commercial relations with West Indian colonies by engaging in “paracolonial” activities, also shows the ways in which political events, such as the American War of Independence and the Louisiana Purchase, function to alter the

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<sup>8</sup> For an account of the relationship between North America and British West Indian colonies before and after the American Revolution also see O’Shaughnessy’s *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, which I will discuss at length in the course of my project.

meaning of the word Creole, which shifts both geographically and historically, alongside “shifting borders of oversea empires, where colonial possessions often changed hands” (Berman 4). The above shifting, contrasting and overlapping definitions, show that Creoles escape easy or fixed classifications, and are always-already hybrid figures, who can cross borders by embodying the contradictions of transatlantic economies and political re-shaping of the nineteenth century. However, the fluidity of the identity of the Creole—who is often a shape-shifting figure—also means that Creoles may carry with them a sense of displacement, homelessness, and duality, which shapes some of the Caribbean literature of the twentieth century, such as the work of Jean Rhys, as well as nineteenth-century texts like Mary Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* and, to an extent, *Warner Arundell*, as I will discuss in chapters 2 and 3.

The word Creole is never a stable sign, incorporating multiple meanings, or signified. Its connotations have changed, alongside the shifts in the history of colonization and slavery in the Americas, starting from the usages of the term by the first Portuguese and Spanish colonizers, in the sixteenth century, to the ensuing French, English, American, and Caribbean understandings of the terms Creole, Creoleness, and later Creolization, and *Créolité*.<sup>9</sup> The term’s multiple meanings, as I have shown, shifted diachronically from definitions focusing primarily on the New World as geographical site of birth and socialization for the Creole, to definitions progressively incorporating concepts of identity associated to skin color that accomplished a change in the meaning

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<sup>9</sup> The French world *Créolité*, coined by Edouard Glissant in the twentieth century, highlights the importance of the hybridity of the figure of the Creole, as it develops diachronically and assumes new meanings. The term *Créolité* refers to the theories of Edouard Glissant, expressed in *Caribbean Discourse*, in which Glissant describes the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the French Caribbean, as being a unique combination not only of African heritages, but also of the influence of European colonization and indigenous Caribbean peoples (See Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*). I will discuss theories of creolization in my section titled “Areas of Enquiry and Scholarship” pg. 26.

of the term Creole—which came to suggest mixed-race, miscegenation, physical and moral inferiority or deficiency—during the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, and ultimately to definitions shifting again towards a new poetics of creolization and *Créolité*, in the mid-twentieth century, closely linked to emerging discourses on national identity, as I will show in the course of this study. Literary representations of Creole characters in British, American and Anglophone Caribbean literatures should therefore always be read in the context of shifting political boundaries, and of the corresponding variations in notions of identity, self-representation and citizenship within the context of Atlantic world slavery, Spanish, French and British imperialism, and emerging nations, such as the American and Haitian Republics, in the Western Hemisphere.

#### DEPICTIONS OF WEST INDIAN CREOLES IN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The novels I analyze in “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” cover an historical period spanning from the aftermath of the American War of Independence (1780s-90s) to the Crimean War (1853-1856), with the West Indian novels I discuss in chapter 3 focusing on the debate around Emancipation, culminating in the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. My research highlights the presence of contradictions in depictions of Creoles in canonical novels, while considering the impact these depictions have on the responses articulated by nineteenth-century West Indian writers. For these writers the West Indies becomes the center of the narrative while England remains a place of dislocation, as shown in *Warner Arundell*, or an antagonist presence meddling with West Indian affairs, as in *Hamel, the Obeah Man*. By focusing on the inherent contradictions in

representations of Creoles in canonical British and American novels, I suggest that many British and American texts unconsciously demonstrate their authors'—and the nation's—struggle between two poles. On the one hand, novels such as *Arthur Mervyn* and *Jane Eyre* testify to the ideological necessity to relegate Creoles to a position of marginality by upholding their sexual and/or moral deviancy, whereby this marginality functions, simultaneously, to dispel fears connected to racial miscegenation, and to construct acceptable mainstream identities vis-à-vis the Creole. On the other hand, American and British novels also recognize, albeit often unintentionally, that identity is always permeable, and cannot be sustained in isolation from entanglements in transatlantic commercial and political relations.

As Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), “nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between the two” (xiii). Within these attempts to stereotype, or “block” (as Said would put it) the Creole—both white and black—what transpires, often unintentionally on the part of the author, is the very impossibility to deny the West Indies’ political, ideological and financial importance for the nation. This happens in novels such as *Arthur Mervyn* and *Jane Eyre*, which try to bring about a discourse of American exceptionalism or English superiority, constructing these privileged identities as separate from the traits associated to the Creole and thus engendering contradictions between the authors’ intentions and the texts they write.<sup>10</sup> Although West Indian Creoles,

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<sup>10</sup> In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said reads a series of nineteenth-century novels, among which Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and argues for the centrality

appearing in British and American novels, are depicted in antithetical terms to mainstream values and morals, against which they are generally cast, it is in the contradictions these texts present to us—often through omissions and silences—that we can see how marginal literary Creoles were not marginal at all in the Atlantic world's societies the novels describe.

So for example, in *Jane Eyre* the myth of Creole deviance and degeneracy is used to construct selfhood and national identity *vis-à-vis* the figure of the Creole, against whom the self is measured and defined, as is the case for the figure of the socially mobile Jane Eyre. Brontë, by means of the juxtaposition of Jane to the mad Creole Bertha Mason Rochester, allows a widening of the parameters of national identity, proper Englishness, and citizenship to include the rising interests of the middle-class woman and, in particular, of the governess who, although poor, is white and educated. Moreover, the mad female Creole, Bertha Mason, represents a cathartic enactment of the fears of slave revolts, and of the growing dread of the influx, into the mainland, of people from the colonies, whether they are white Creoles or emancipated slaves. Bertha is sacrificed to endorse the novel's agenda of class and gender leveling, through the marriage of Mr. Rochester and Jane Eyre. However, through her immolation in the fire that burns the English estate maintained with capital earned in the colonies by means of the exploitation of both slaves and Creole women, Bertha engenders a speech act. I read this speech act as an indictment of both patriarchy and imperialism, of which Mr. Rochester—but also Jane—are guilty, as they are both the beneficiaries of wealth earned in the colonies.

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of the British Empire in the development of the novel as a nineteenth-century genre (and vice versa), and for the importance of imperialism not only as a source of economic and political power, but also as determinant in the process of identity formation of the expanding British middle class.



Bertha's image, as she stands on the roof of Thornton Hall surrounded by flames, majestic and accusatory, contradicts the novel's overt depiction of her insanity and confers Bertha a political voice through actions that function as a punishment of those who, like Rochester, have taken advantage of her. Her actions are also as an indictment of West Indian colonialism, as Bertha is simultaneously a victim and a member of Creole plantocracy, and demonstrates the impossibility of isolating the colonies from the motherland.

The importance of migration across the Atlantic (in both directions) and the global span of political forces and economic interests shared by Europe and the New World are also evident in representations of Creole characters in canonical novels set in England. This is the case for rich West Indian Creoles such as Miss Swartz, the female Jewish-mulatto from St. Kitts in Thackeray's satire *Vanity Fair*, who, in spite of the stereotypical and satirical ways in which she is depicted and cast against the English heroine, Amelia Sedley, gains access to metropolitan circles because of her West Indian fortune (notwithstanding her race), and marries within the Scottish upper classes, becoming Rhoda McMull, a "sprig of Scottish nobility" and an integral part of British society (Thackeray 493). In spite of Thackeray's obvious satire and attack against Scottish upper-classes' money-grabbing attitudes, the absorption of the "wooly headed" Rhoda Swartz into the folds of British society as Rhoda McMull—notwithstanding her paternal Jewish heritage and her African blood—indirectly acknowledges her agency and historical relevance, and with it the importance of the West Indies to domestic constructions of identity (Thackeray 12). As O'Shaughnessy argues in *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, the ties between England

and West Indian Creoles were very strong—stronger than the ties between the West Indies and their American neighbors—and marriages often united West Indian and British families, as “West Indians successfully intermarried with the nobility and gentry” (15).<sup>11</sup> Although white and mixed-race Creoles were often criticized or caricatured (as in the case of Miss Swartz), “the West Indian elite successfully entered British society,” as portrayed in the apotheosis of Miss Swartz in *Vanity Fair* (O’Shaughnessy 15).

Intermarriages, alongside West Indian wealth, gave Creoles a strong position in politics, especially before 1833. By maintaining a physical presence in the mother country, as West Indians often owned estates in England or were absentee planters residing in Britain, Creoles could exercise their influence in Parliament, as they were often members of the powerful West Indian Lobby, as I will show in my reading of *Vanity Fair*.

Ashli White, in *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*, argues that “the Atlantic world evolved throughout the early modern era, as peoples on all four continents cultivated networks of trade, migration, and information that knit them even more tightly together” (5). The “intricate web of connections” that continually formed and changed, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the result of revolutions, shifting of geopolitical borders, trade and migrations—especially of refugees from France, and Saint Domingue—renders the divisions between England or the New Republic and the British West Indian colonies harder to maintain (White 6). So for example, American independence deeply affected the Atlantic world, as both the New Republic and the British West Indian colonies lost important trade routes

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<sup>11</sup> O’Shaughnessy’s research covers the period before and after the American Revolution, however his argument on the close ties between West Indian Creoles and England is applicable to the entire nineteenth century. *Vanity Fair* is set at the turn of the century (1810-1820), during the Napoleonic wars (Napoleon’s loss at Waterloo, dramatized in the novel, dates to 1815).

due to British sanctions against the United States. This rendered British West Indian colonies more isolated and dependent on their motherland for imports and, at the same time, increased the New Republic's need to forge new trade relations with the revolutionary Saint Domingue, as, after Britain blocked legal commerce between her West Indian colonies and North America, Saint Domingue became "central to initial U.S. attempts to stake out a place as a sovereign nation in the thriving Atlantic system," demonstrating the interconnectedness of the Atlantic world and the global repercussions of political re-shaping forces, such as the American Revolution (White 6).<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, although the loss of Saint Domingue by the French bolstered British West Indian colonies' sugar production, which had been in decline, proving to be, in a sense, a positive event for British colonies like Jamaica—as France, with the loss of its richest colony, abdicated its position of preeminence in the Caribbean—Haiti also had damaging long-term political, social and ideological consequences for England. In fact, the Haitian Revolution, on the long run, contributed to the abolition of slavery in the British colonies, as it played a crucial role in the passing of both the Slave Trade Act in 1807 and The Slavery Abolition Act 1833, as I will discuss in the course of this study.

The Haitian Revolution's effects extended well into the nineteenth and twentieth century, in terms of the ways in which whiteness, Englishness, and American identity are constructed in the respective national imaginations, vis-à-vis the figures of the black rebel and of the French colonialist, but also of the West Indian Creole. The political and socio-economic upheavals that transformed the Caribbean region in the nineteenth century,

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<sup>12</sup> The Adams administration was in favor of formalizing United States' trade relations with Toussaint Louverture, as this would "protect the United States from slave uprising," however this did not last long and, in 1800, Jefferson rescinded the ties with the ex-French colony, and opted for "a complete quarantine of the second republic in the Americas" (White 125).

such as slave revolts not limited to Saint Domingue but also encompassing other Caribbean colonies such as Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823), and Jamaica (1820s and 1831), created a domino effect extending its repercussions not only to North America but also to England and Europe. This engendered a corresponding shifting sense of self “at home,” as England felt uncomfortable about its overseas Empire and felt threatened by the ghost of its colonial self, which is reflected in domestic literature, as I demonstrate in my reading of *Jane Eyre*.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the effects of revolts, not only in Saint Domingue but also in other islands, affected the consciousness of white Creoles, as dramatized in Williams' novel, *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, which is set in Jamaica in 1822, at the height of missionary and abolitionist efforts to end slavery, and depicts a slave revolt modeled on the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823, and the growing fears of white planters who saw their world as coming to an end.

As Ashli White argues, in *Encountering Revolutions*, the Haitian Revolution has the paradoxical effect to reinforce slavery in the southern slaveholding states of the New Republic, as Americans, by coming into contact with refugees from Saint Domingue, had to renegotiate the ideals of the American constitution with the reality of Saint Domingue, where black rebels were seeking the same rights and liberties that Americans obtained in 1776. White argues that the Haitian Revolution forced Americans to “confront the paradox of being a slaveholding republic” (2). By positing that the brand of slavery practiced in the United States was very different from the cruelty of French colonialists in Saint Domingue, the New Republic was able, on the one hand, to reduce the Haitian

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<sup>13</sup> This study focuses on Anglophone literatures only. “Home” is generally intended to be England (as in this case), or the United States, depending on the context. For the purposes of this project, I will not extend my research to Francophone and Hispanophone texts depicting Creole characters, although the transatlantic nature of the figure of the Creole allows for similarities across languages and cultures.

Revolution to “an event born out of singular circumstances” and therefore confined to the French colony, on the other hand, Americans convinced themselves that the same would never happen in the United States as the conditions that brought to slaves’ uprisings in Saint Domingue “had little similarity to slavery as practiced in the United States” (130).

By blaming the slave trade and the inhumane practices of French slaveholders for the onset of the Haitian Revolution, white Americans persuaded themselves that they “could prevent a similar fate in the United States,” and this resulted in “a bolstering of the slaveholding republic, as white Americans used the exiles as a foil in arguing for their national exceptionalism” (White 204). The fact that black slaves and *gens de couleur*, in Saint Domingue, were fighting for the same liberties as the American colonists had fought for, was never acknowledged by white Americans (not even by American abolitionists), who refused to “embrace the universalist vision that the Haitian Revolution advocated, namely that all men were free, and entitled to the right of citizens”; instead the example of Haiti served to consolidate and rationalize the New Republic’s own slavery and racism (White 130). The work of Ashli White gives background to my reading of *Arthur Mervyn*, in which the protagonist Mervyn is confronted by the influx of refugees from Saint Domingue, who flooded the streets of Philadelphia and were looked upon with suspicion by Mervyn and his contemporaries, being considered responsible for the spread of the yellow-fever epidemic of 1793. The climate of fear described by Brown in his depiction, in gothic tones, of the pestilence-stricken Philadelphia dramatizes the effects of the Haitian Revolution upon the minds of Americans, who—like Arthur shows—try to distance themselves from this foreign invasion by promoting a discourse of moral purity,

which is translated into racial purity, a discourse that, however, ultimately Mervyn cannot sustain.

Sibylle Fisher, in *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Culture of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, argues that the importance of Haiti was systematically downplayed, both during and in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, as “a cordon sanitaire was drawn around the island to interrupt the flow of information and people” (4). Moreover, Fisher argues that historians, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, also erased the significance of Haiti, refusing to give to the Haitian Revolution the same status as the other great revolutions of the age, such as the American and French Revolutions, and reducing “colonialism and slavery to mere disturbances on the margins of history: an anomaly, a more or less bothersome irregularity, in the march of progress and the unfolding of individual liberties” (10). In spite of the ways in which Saint Domingue is downplayed—often out of fear—or blocked from entering other colonies, by the suppression of information and even by new immigration laws prohibiting the importation of slaves from the ex-French colony, it becomes a “phantasma [sic] and nightmare” that has long-lasting effects on the psyche of Europeans as well as colonialists in the years that precede emancipation, as I will show in my reading of *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (White 5). The Haitian Revolution—alongside plantation slavery, which is one of the contributors to the rise of the middle class and capitalism—forges a path towards modernity, no less than the other great uprisings of the Age of Revolutions (1789-1848), demonstrating the interconnectedness of events happening in Europe and in the New World.

While Americans, as Ashli White argues, used the example of Saint Domingue, and their interaction with refugees from the former French colony, to solve the paradox between the practice of slavery in the southern States and their republican principles, for British West Indian colonies the Haitian Revolution had serious negative repercussions. The events in Haiti greatly affected the sense of identity and stability of white Creole planters, who, after Haiti, lived in even greater fear of slave revolts, and became even more dependent on the British government for military support, as they believed they needed to protect themselves from the large number of slaves (greatly outnumbering Whites) working on the plantations, and also from the threat of foreign attack to which islands were especially vulnerable. White Creole planters “looked to the army as a vital instrument of white control over the majority black slave population” as they thought that the colonial militia would not be able to guarantee their safety (O’Shaughnessy 34). In fact, the success of the Haitian Revolution resulted in a series of revolts in many West Indian colonies, reinforcing the ties of dependence of white colonialists to the British Army, as “there were as many as seventy-five aborted and actual rebellions in the British West Indies before 1837 [while] there was no comparable history of slave revolts in North America” (O’Shaughnessy 38). The Haitian Revolution intensified the debates on the *Negro Question* that resulted in the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which abolished the importation of slaves from Africa in all British colonies, but did not solve the “problem” of slavery and slave insurrections. After the passing of the Slave Trade Act—which caused further tension between white Creole planters and their motherland over mercantile trading privileges and, simultaneously, resulted in an intensification of slave

discontent, as the slaves erroneously believed they had been emancipated by the English Parliament—the debate around slavery rekindled.

The emancipation debate intensified in the 1820s, focusing on the question of abolition versus amelioration (which I discuss in chapter 3) argued, in and outside Parliament, between those who believed that slavery should end immediately, and those who advocated for a slow process of amelioration of the conditions of slaves in the British colonies. This process (amelioration) would eventually culminate in emancipation only when slaves became ready to take on the role of citizens and wage laborers, in the distant future. White Creole planters, while constantly fearing rebellions like the Saint Domingue Revolution, believed that emancipation was to be delayed as long as possible; therefore, they publicly favored a slow process of amelioration as a solution to the *Negro Question*. However, they felt that their world, as they knew it, and their privileges were about to come to an end, and often reacted to their fears with a tougher management of their slaves, although they portrayed themselves to British public opinion as kind and caring masters, and argued that their slaves were far happier and better treated than factory workers in Britain's northern industrial towns. West Indian novels such as *Hamel, the Obeah Man* I analyze in chapter 3, *Montgomery; or, the West Indian Adventure* (1812-13), and *Marly; or, A Planter's Life in Jamaica* (1828), which I discuss in the section of this introduction titled "The Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Novels by West Indian Creoles," illustrate the position of planters in the debate on emancipation versus amelioration.

Notwithstanding their financial dependence on West Indian trade and slave economy, British and American citizens build their sense of self in terms that are often



oppositional to the Creoles who appear in their literature, which engenders contradictions in literary texts between the reality of the interdependence of transatlantic commerce and the attempt to insulate the homeland from the West Indian sites of production and exchange. On the other hand, texts such as *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827), *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* (1838), *Creoleana* (1842), and *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), which I analyze in the course of this enquiry as written by Creoles and from a Creole point of view, present a different perspective in which the center is not the motherland but the colony—as in the case of *Hamel*, *Creoleana*, and *Warner Arundell*—or in which Creoleness (and race) are re-defined within and, simultaneously, in opposition to the standards of white Victorian womanhood, as in the case of Mary Seacole’s autobiography. These texts attempt to re-write the figure of the literary Creole, not as marginal or deviant but as central to the novel’s plot and to the socio-political context in which the aforementioned texts are set, even though they perpetuate some of the contradictions and stereotypes associated with mixed-race and black Creoles. In my analysis of *Hamel*, *Warner Arundell*, and *Creoleana*, I apply Kamau Brathwaite’s theories of creolization to show that these novels demonstrate the development of a Creole society, in which racial relations remain fluid in spite of the rigid race scale that regulates West Indian communities in the nineteenth century. In my reading of *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* I use the concept of the “contact zone”—as exemplified by Mary Louse Pratt in *Arts of the Contact Zone*—to describe how Seacole re-writes her identity as Crimean nurse and mother of British soldiers, but also as a brown Jamaican-Creole woman, in the contact zones of Panama and Crimea.

In my study of the above-mentioned texts, I demonstrate that these novels are also riddled with contradictions that represent their authors' struggle to define their identity as Creoles, and simultaneously as English subjects. Texts written by white Creoles, such as *Hamel* and *Creoleana*, dramatize the fears that the end of plantation slavery will bring the end of the Creole planter's way of life, as in *Hamel*, or the nostalgia for the "days of yore," as in the case of *Creoleana*.<sup>14</sup> I argue that Creole characters at the center of *Hamel*, *Warner Arundell*, and *Creoleana* are shape-shifting individuals who demonstrate that a process of creolization, as described by Brathwaite in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, is underway in the nineteenth century, but also that the white, male Creole protagonists (Oliver Fairfax, Warner Arundell, and Jack Goldacre) embody a white Creole consciousness, often in opposition to England's interference with its West Indian colonies. These novels, in fact, depict English and European characters as foreigners and outsiders, and England as a place of dislocation, as in *Warner Arundell*, or as marginal to the novel's emotional center.

However, the authors simultaneously demonstrate their cultural affinity with the motherland, in their efforts to prove their erudition and familiarity with English genres and with the English canon, as demonstrated by their stylistic choices and by the abundance of allusions to seventeenth and eighteenth century literary masters, such as Shakespeare and Milton. They also demonstrate their desire to be recognized by their mother country in their declarations that they write primarily for a metropolitan audience, with whom they share strong cultural bonds. These authors' concerns to prove their

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<sup>14</sup> *Hamel* uses the genre of the imperial romance to simultaneously celebrate white Creole culture and to mourn the end of a class (the planter class) and a world based on feudal notions of honor, chivalry and hospitality, as I discuss in chapter 3.

cultural and moral affinity with the motherland, or in other words their Englishness, while simultaneously distancing themselves from the economic policies and political control of the English Parliament, constitute an attempt to re-write the figure of the white Creole, and to counter the negative stereotypes about West Indian planters that circulated in English public opinion and anti-slavery debates. However, at the same times, other stylistic choices, such as the use of Creole dialects (often left un-translated) in novels such as *Warner Arundell* and *Creoleana*, or a concern with the welfare of the communities in which the novels are set, which demonstrates an ethics of social activism in colonial affairs and a focus on race relations, show that these novels anticipate some of the stylistic and thematic choices of twentieth-century Caribbean literature. Some of these texts, such as *Warner Arundell* and *Wonderful Adventurers*, present the Creole subject as a cosmopolitan individual (as Warner who travels from island to island) who, however, runs the risk of becoming a rootless individual (as Mary Seacole, who at the end of the Crimean War admits she “had no home”), anticipating the theme of homelessness of later Caribbean writers, such as Jean Rhys (Seacole 164).

Mary Seacole writes after emancipation, from a different subject position, as she is a mixed-race Jamaican Creole woman; however, she also struggles to reconcile her hybrid identity as a brown Jamaican woman with her literary persona as a British subject. I argue that in her autobiography, *Wonderful Adventures*, Seacole uses the ethics of bourgeois capitalism and her entrepreneurial spirit to counter the stereotypes of the lazy Creole and to construct a new space for herself—through the act of re-writing her life—as a British-Creole female subject, but also as a woman of color. As I conclude in chapter 3, *Warner Arundell*, out of the four West Indian novels I discuss in my project is the one

that best exemplifies the possibility of future racial collaboration, through mixed-race marriages and the development of a class of wealthy free colored people, who share economic interests and a Creole consciousness with white Creoles.

#### AREAS OF INQUIRY AND SCHOLARSHIP

As a starting point to this enquiry into nineteenth-century Creole characters in transatlantic literature, “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” begins from a body of established scholarship on literary Creoles, which influenced my research, and attempts to answer the overarching issue of the relation between the ways in which Creoles are depicted in fiction and the transatlantic exchanges that characterize the nineteenth century. These are not limited to commerce and movements of peoples across the Atlantic, such as slavery and immigration, but also encompassing revolutions and social reproduction in the Western Hemisphere. In this section of my introduction I briefly review some of the scholarship written about Creoles that has informed this project; and in particular, the works of Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, Sean X. Goudie, Carolyn Vellenga Berman, and Edward [Kamau] Brathwaite, from which I borrow to discuss the relation between Creole characters and identity formation in England, the United States, and the Caribbean.

In his work *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (2000), Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy argues that the British West Indian colonies, at the time of the American War of Independence, lacked the conditions to follow the example of their neighbors, the North American British colonies. In his influential study, O’Shaughnessy argues that at the end of the eighteenth century white

Creoles who resided in the British West Indies had not developed a Creole consciousness that would prompt a real desire for independence, and were far more reliant on Britain than the American colonists, who saw North America as their permanent home rather than as a temporary place of residence in which to earn a fortune and then return to England. O'Shaughnessy covers many of the conditions that made the economic and socio-political situation in the West Indies substantially different from that which resulted in the American War of Independence. Foremost, among these conditions is the fact that "British Sojourners"—as O'Shaughnessy calls white West Indian Creoles—wanted to go back home (American colonialists did not), and "the strength of the social and cultural ties with Britain restrained the development of a nationalistic Creole consciousness among whites and was a contributory factor in the failure of the British Caribbean to support the American Revolution," even though many white Creoles were dissatisfied with English colonial control (4).

O'Shaughnessy argues that, among the many reasons for West Indian Creoles' loyalty to their motherland—notwithstanding their many complaints about England's treatment of its colonies—we find a lack of pressing religious motives, which motivated New England settlers, and an underlying difference in socio-political background. North American colonists came from the "middle and nonconformist class" and upheld democratic and republican principles, while West Indian planters identified with aristocratic ideals, although they were mostly traders and merchants (7). However, ultimately, it is because of practical and economic reasons that the British West Indies remained loyal to the motherland, while North American colonies did not. Among these reasons are the high mortality rate among Whites in the West Indies, which resulted in a

slower white population growth than in North America; a “demographic failure” linked to diseases, such as malaria and yellow fever, to which Whites were more susceptible than Blacks (7). The lack, compared to North America, of adequate infrastructures, such as schools and universities, that prompted white West Indian Creoles to send their children to be educated in England, also resulted in closer connections with the motherland (O’Shaughnessy 7-10). O’Shaughnessy argues that while North American settlers educated their children in the colonies, West Indian Creoles believed that a British education was superior to an education in North American schools. The practice of sending children to study in England (especially male heirs) reinforced already strong cultural ties between West Indian Creoles and their mother country, as young West Indians formed early alliances, friendships, and tastes in England. Moreover, as briefly mentioned earlier, the West Indian Lobby had great power in the British Parliament, because of the close family ties between English and Creole landowners. In fact, the English upper classes often married wealthy Creoles, and many Creole planters owned estates in England or were absentee planters who lived permanently in England, forming large Creole communities in London (O’Shaughnessy 11-27). As my reading of *Warner Arundell* shows, many West Indian Creoles studied law or medicine in England, as “medical graduates were generally British-trained because there were no medical schools in the British West Indies, unlike North America” (O’Shaughnessy 26).

Other factors that contributed to West Indians’ reliance on Britain relate to the geographical isolation of the Caribbean colonies (separated by the sea) and, in the case of colonies such as Jamaica, their mountainous terrain, which facilitated slave revolts. Due to the development of a labor-intensive sugar plantation economy, the ratio of Blacks to

Whites was much higher than in the tobacco-producing American colonies (with the exception of Barbados), as tobacco did not require such high numbers of slaves. A few Whites controlled most of the land in the West Indies, where large plantations employed hundreds of slaves, many of whom were imported from West-Africa and were skilled in combat, posing a threat to their masters. Because of the predominant majority of Blacks, planters were afraid of slave revolts, often led by “an emerging black creole elite of drivers, coopers, and carpenters, who took increasing initiative in conspiracies”; therefore, they welcomed the presence of British troops to defend them, as they deemed the colonial militia to be an insufficient deterrent against slave revolts and maroon wars, since “the white population was simply too small to effectively police the slaves” (O’Shaughnessy 34-35). Unlike North American colonists who resented the presence of British troops and were not happy to pay for their maintenance, white West Indian Creoles welcomed the support of the British military and contributed to the cost of maintaining these battalions. Beside the internal threat of slave revolts, white Creoles feared foreign invasion by French and Spain armies, although their fear of slave insurrection was foremost in their minds, resulting in a closer bond with Britain as “slavery made the white colonialists militarily dependent on Britain and was a crucial factor in ensuing the loyalty of whites during the American Revolution” (34).

Unlike the North American colonies, where a white yeoman class had prospered, the development of large plantation economy in the Caribbean slowly incorporated small planters creating a class of poor whites and an economy that depended largely on export. In the West Indies, the white yeoman class never developed sufficiently to foster an economy independent from British and American imports. Although the white elite

protected poor whites and favored them over free coloreds, entrenching a hierarchical society in which social stratification was based on race, as shown in *Hamel*, there was never a substantial middle class of independent small farmers, as they could not compete with the great plantations. However, as “the white elites needed the support of the poor whites as functionaries on the plantations but also to serve in the militia,” they protected poor whites over free coloreds, and “the poor whites derived satisfaction from their relative status to the blacks, which caused ‘every white man’ to think ‘himself a man of first consequence’,” accepting their total subjection to the elite landowners, whose large plantations remained intact (as planters practiced primogeniture), and became more and more powerful, like the monopolies controlling modern capitalist societies (O’Shaughnessy 29).

As Brathwaite also argues, in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, the American War of Independence negatively affected the West Indian economy, as it isolated the British Caribbean colonies from their mainland neighbors, strengthening even more their economic and military dependence on the motherland. The decision of the West Indian colonies to support Britain against the American colonies during the War of Independence ultimately proved detrimental to white West Indian Creoles. The acquirement of independence by the North American colonies contributed to the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, as Britain progressively embraced the position of upholder of humanitarianism against the “less civilized” Americans, who still supported a system based on plantation slavery in their southern colonies. This position led first to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and then to the abolition of slavery in



all British colonies in 1833.<sup>15</sup> If, as O’Shaughnessy argues, West Indian Creoles had not sufficiently developed a Creole consciousness and an autonomous political agenda at the end of the eighteenth century, to encourage them to follow a similar path to independence as the mainland colonies of North America, and if at the onset of the American Revolution they prioritized economic interest over political ideals, “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” demonstrates that the white elite plantocracy in the West Indies became more vocal against their motherland in the decades that follow the birth of the American Republic.

After American independence and following the Haitian Revolution, the debate on slavery intensified, in particular during the 1820s and 1830s, a period of social instability and unrest in the West Indies, which culminated in the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833. Yet white Creole opposition to British involvement in colonial affairs—voiced in the West Indian novels I analyze in chapter 3—was never strong enough to suggest the possibility of independence, even in literary texts written by Creoles, let alone to seek to openly oppose Britain on the battlefield as the North American colonies did. The reasons for this are to be found, partly, in the class divisions that characterized the Caribbean colonies—in particular the divisions between Whites and free colored people—alongside the physical obstacles, due to the geographical morphology of the region which fostered a mentality of insularity that rendered a coalition of British West Indian colonies impossible, in spite of their closeness and common circumstances. In my reading of *Warner Arundell*, however, I suggest the possibility that Joseph, through his

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<sup>15</sup> The United States also abolished the slave trade in 1807. Congress passed “An Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves into any Port or Place Within the Jurisdiction of the United States.” This was signed into law by Thomas Jefferson and went into effect on January 1, 1808 (See Mason’s “Slavery Overshadowed: Congress Debates Prohibiting Slave Trade to the United States, 1806-1807” 59-81).

protagonist's participation in Latin America's struggle for independence from Spain, under the leadership of General Bolivar, might imply that British colonies should also seek independence from England.

Sean X. Goudie's *Creole America: The West Indies and the Formation of Literature and Culture in the New Republic* (2006) is part of a body of scholarship that approaches American literature written in the early years of the Republic (1780s-1790s) from a transatlantic, or circum-Atlantic, perspective, and not as a monolithic narrative of exceptionalism and separation of the United States from the rest of the Western Hemisphere. Goudie argues for the preeminence of European powers—such as England and France—in the Western Hemisphere, and for the proximity of their West Indian colonies as influential factors in the process of American identity formation. European and, in particular, British colonialism controls not only the United States' commercial relations with the rest of the Atlantic World, and specifically with the neighboring British West Indian colonies—relations which the New Republic must develop to maintain financial independence—but also the ways in which the New Republic sees itself. Goudie examines the multiple anxieties and the ambivalence that characterize the New Republic in the 1790s, after Independence from its former colonial status, and the ways in which the United States must grapple, not only with the uncertainties associated with a new autonomous government, but also with the question of balancing the need for profitable commercial relations with British and French West Indian colonies, and the desire of undergoing a “process of un-becoming creole,” or the forging of a renewed American identity based on whiteness, and separate from the discourse about Creole inferiority and degeneracy of the last part of the eighteenth century (Goudie 7).

Goudie formulates a new definition of the type of commercial relation in which the United States participates with Britain and its colonies (as well as with other European nations engaged in colonial practices, such as France), which he names “paracolonialism” (12). As briefly mentioned before, the term refers to the United States as a “para[-]site on the scene of European colonialism in the Caribbean, a complicit client nation state that aims to benefit economically from the scene of European colonialism without ever having to corrupt itself—or its foundational principles—with overt political sponsorship of those colonies” (13). The U.S. mercantile presence in the Caribbean, therefore, is indicative of the type of triangular relationship between the United States, Britain (or France) and its colonies, in which the United States operates alongside colonialism, instead of as a colonial power. Goudie argues that, because of the New Republic’s financial need to maintain commercial relations with Britain, which created an economic dependence from Britain, the United States develops a “creole complex,” or a desire to distance itself from the stereotypes that circulated in Europe, associated with the figure of the Creole, and from “the ‘debased’ European Empires and West Indian colonies that [the New Republic] relied on for its economic well-being” (13-14). Goudie analyzes a varied selection of texts—autobiographies, poetry, plays and novels—written in the period of the Early Republic, and demonstrates the presence, across these works, of a tension and ambivalence between the paracolonial role the United States must maintain to ensure its economic independence, on the one hand, and on the other, hand its attempt to detach itself ideologically from the very colonies and European nations with whom it must maintain commercial relations.<sup>16</sup> This reading of early American texts forms the

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<sup>16</sup> The main texts Goudie focuses on are: Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1791), Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative* (1789), Alexander Hamilton’s *The Federalist: a Collection of Essays* (1788),

premises of my first chapter, in which I extend the argument of Sean X. Goudie's influential work in my analysis of two early American novels, *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo*. In this chapter, I demonstrate both the contradictions that result from early American novelists' endeavors to create a new American literature, based on exceptionalism and separation from the rest of the Atlantic world, and the ways in which these texts acknowledge, through their contradictions, an affinity between West Indian and American (white) Creoles.

Carolyn Vellenga Berman, in her persuasive work *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Domestic Slavery* (also published in 2006), looks specifically at female Creole characters across linguistic and national boundaries (Anglophone British and American and Francophone literatures) and argues that the female Creole in literature is a hybrid figure who crosses borders in multiple ways, both literal and metaphorical (3).<sup>17</sup> Berman defines the functions of the Creole woman, and her location in nineteenth-century literature, at the convergence between antislavery and domestic fiction. In *Creole Crossings* female Creole characters are depicted not in the context of empire but "at home"—or in the motherland—and within a domestic setting. Berman argues that the borders between domestic and antislavery discourses are permeable, and the two should not be read as distinct but as intersecting with each other. Berman further proposes that the Creole woman is the link that brings about the "convergence of discourses of colonial and domestic reform," therefore she postulates the central function of female Creoles in

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Philip Freneau's poetry, J. Robinson's play *The Yorker's Stratagem* (1792), and Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1799).

<sup>17</sup> The novels Berman analyzes are: *Paul et Virginie* by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Belinda* by Maria Edgeworth, *Indiana* by George Sand, *La Fille aux yeux d'or* by Honoré de Balzac, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys.

transatlantic literature, albeit their importance is often hidden behind stereotypical images, such as that of the crazy Creole in *Jane Eyre* (3).

The growth of the novel as a genre in the nineteenth century, and the production of a plethora of works of domestic fiction, contributed to endorse the ideals of the rising middle class and its central nation-building role, against a declining aristocracy.<sup>18</sup> In nineteenth-century domestic fiction, the woman as wife and mother—but also the upwardly mobile governess—is a central figure in the household; she is charged with educating the children and instilling in them the values of the middle class. The lady in charge of the household, in nineteenth-century domestic and sentimental fiction, becomes influential, not only in her domestic functions, but also in her political and nation-building roles. She indirectly assumes political significance for the country, as she embodies and transmits the middle-class values that strengthen the modern nation. Alongside domestic fiction, antislavery literature and propaganda spread in both Britain and the United States. This type of literature is often addressed to women and depicts slavery as a threat to the values of both the nation and the family. Female writers, like Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, borrow the tenets and slogans of the antislavery campaign to advocate for the condition of the British wife, who they compare to a colonial slave; a “prisoner” within the confines of the patriarchal family, as critics have argued and as I will show in my reading of *Jane Eyre*. Berman begins her argument from these premises and demonstrates the “thematic cross-overs between domestic and colonial reform...[which address] the very same [female] readers,” showing that domestic fiction endorses the cause of antislavery propaganda and

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<sup>18</sup> The novel as a genre begins to develop in the eighteenth century, with authors such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding.

antislavery fiction advocates slavery's negative effects on the family, and is portrayed as both a national and a domestic problem (3). According to Berman, within this framework, the Creole woman "serve[s] as a test case for national belonging generally, as well as for the sex and/or gender norms that were thought to ensure the future of the nation," as she is the figure that most crosses-over multiple discourses of political enfranchisement and domestic reform (189).

Thus, according to Berman, the Creole woman becomes the point of intersection in the two parallel discourses of antislavery reform in the colonies and domestic reform at home because of her very racial indeterminacy (as the term Creole refers to both Blacks and Whites), embodying simultaneously the multiple stereotypes associated to colonial women, such as sexual excess and degeneracy, but also exemplifying the importance of their roles as nurses and nurturers. In her book, Berman acknowledges the importance of print culture as a facilitator of the emergence of the modern nation in the nineteenth century, as it is laid out in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and asserts that domestic and antislavery novels, which had, as their main audience, middle-class or bourgeois women and depicted Creole women in domestic settings, functioned to re-define national belonging through the figure of the Creole.<sup>19</sup> In my reading of *Jane Eyre* I begin from similar premises, and build on Berman's original work. Alongside Berman, and other scholars such as Edward Said, Anne McClintock and Susan Meyer, I acknowledge the importance of the novel as a genre that contributed to define the modern nation in the context of imperialism.<sup>20</sup> However, in "Shape-Shifting Creole Identities," I

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<sup>19</sup> See Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>20</sup> See Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, McClintock's *Imperial Leather* and *Dangerous Liaisons*, and Meyer's *Imperialism at Home*.

extend my argument to include not only female Creole characters in novels set in Europe and the United States, as Berman does, but also novels set in the West Indies featuring male Creole characters (often protagonists), and I use a series of Anglophone texts that span chronologically the periods before and after antislavery reform, and that encompass, not only Creole representations by British or American writers, but also some of the responses by self-identified West Indian (black and white) Creoles who write in the nineteenth century.

In “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” I consider the ways in which West Indians developed a Creole consciousness as early as the first half of the nineteenth century and I largely use the concept of Creolization developed in the 1960s-1970s, and in particular the work of Edward [Kamau] Brathwaite, who expounded his theories of creolization in two seminal texts: *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, published in 1971, which I use extensively in my reading of *Hamel*, *Warner Arundell*, and *Creoleana*; and his later text *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (1974), in which Brathwaite defines creolization as:

a cultural process perceived as taking place within a continuum of space and time, but which, for purposes of clarification may be divided into two aspects of itself: ac/culturation, which is the yoking (by force and example, deriving from power/prestige) of one culture to another (in this case the slave African to the European); and inter/culturation, which is an unplanned, unstructural but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke. The creolization which results (and it is a process not a product), becomes the tentative cultural norm of the society. (5-6)

In Brathwaite’s model of Creole society forces of “ac/culturation” and “inter/culturation” combine osmotically, in a fluid process that happens over time and is never finished, which is dialectic in its nature, and through which a new culture is formed as the

synthesis of European and African cultures. Before Brathwaite developed his model of Creole society, which has dominated both the fields of Caribbean and Atlantic World studies as an intellectual construct to describe West Indian history and culture, other models were theorized in the 1960s-70s, which I would like to briefly discuss.

M.G. Smith, in his book *The Plural Society in the British West Indies* (1965), proposed a plural-society model in which different ethnic groups coexist, and “European and African elements predominate in fairly standard combinations and relationships,” so that the former “Creole-European tradition” is the dominant element at one end of the scale, the latter “African’ Creole culture” is at the opposite end of a “graduated hierarchy of European and African elements” (5-9). Smith concludes by arguing that this “common culture,” made of a plurality of separate elements, is what ultimately causes the West Indies’ inability to develop a national unified consciousness. He writes in *The Plural Society*: “The common culture, without which West Indian nationalism cannot develop the dynamic to create a West Indian nation, may by its very nature and composition preclude the nationalism that invokes it. This is merely another way of saying that the Creole culture which West Indians share is the basis of their division” (Smith, *Plural* 9). In Smith’s plural-society model there is no real fusion of European and African cultural traditions but a “cultural pluralism” permeates a society divided into three social sections: Whites, free people of color, slaves and their descendants. This society, Smith argues, remained “culturally pluralistic—that is to say, it contained sections which practiced different forms of the same institutions” (Smith, *Plural* 112). In *Culture, Race, and Class in the Commonwealth Caribbean* (1984), Smith further distinguishes the existence of a plural society, as different from the concept of cultural pluralism. He argues that a



“plural society” exists when divisions between ethnic groups encompass the public sphere: “to constitute a plural society such division must also operate as corporations, *de jure* or *de facto*, within the public domain” (7).

Along with Smith’s plural-society model, a different model is used to describe the particular socio-historical legacy of slavery and plantation economy in the West Indies. The plantation-society model of creolization, theorized by Orlando Patterson, sees the institution of the plantation, slavery and its legacy as central factors in the process of creolization. Orlando Patterson, in *The Sociology of Slavery* (1967), argues that: “Jamaica is best seen more as a collection of autonomous plantations, each a self-contained community with its internal mechanisms of power, than as a total social system” (70). George Beckford, in *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (1972), follows Patterson’s model of plantation society but emphasizes the importance of the plantation in the wider context of international economic markets, of which the plantation is an integral part, distinguishing between the “plantation as a social system in the territory in which it is located (the internal dimension) and...the plantation as an economic system both in the territory of its location and in the wider world community (the external dimension)” (10). In the plantation-society model, the plantation is viewed as a coercive and exploitative institution which is all-pervasive, downplaying both the ability of individual members to influence the system, and the presence, within the plantation, of distinct and divergent social enclaves capable of cultural reproduction. In other words, the plantation-society model tends to conflate the economic system of production of the plantation with the entire society, downplaying

divergent elements of this society and their capacity to influence institutional culture and cultural reproduction.

While the plural-society and plantation-society models emphasize social fragmentation and hegemony of one group (Whites) over the others (free colored people and slaves), the Creole-society model, developed by Brathwaite, demonstrates a more positive view of Creole culture as integrative of all sections of the population, and its potential for the development of a national consciousness and Caribbean identity than the plantation-society and plural-society models. The concept of creolization emphasizes the integration of different cultural traditions, including African traditions, which become active participants in the formation of a common culture born out of the often conflicting encounters brought about by slavery and plantation economy. The process of creolization is thus a process of cultural change and integration over time, through interaction and conflict between the European and African traditions, in a new environment, which required adaptation and adjustment by both Whites and Blacks.<sup>21</sup> The society that results from this process of integration, conflict, adaptation and adjustment comprises of a new culture, which is neither European nor African, but is Creole. Brathwaite critiques Patterson's model as it did not account for the integrating power of the free colored population, arguing that "the large and growing coloured [sic] population of the island...acted as a bridge, a kind of social cement, between the two main colours of the island structure, thus further helping (despite the resulting class/colour divisions) to

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<sup>21</sup> Besides Whites and Blacks (and their descendants), other ethnic groups immigrated to the Caribbean, especially after emancipation, such as Indians (in particular in Trinidad) and Chinese workers. The immigration of Asian and Middle Eastern people to the Caribbean region shows that creolization is more than just about the conflicting relationships between Whites and Blacks during plantation slavery.

integrate the society” (Brathwaite, *Development* 305).<sup>22</sup> Brathwaite also argues that the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 contributed to the development of a Creole society as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the Slave Trade Act cut off the supply of newly imported slaves from Africa and, although the African tradition remained active, it had to adapt to the new environment of the Americas and to the influences of European culture.

Scholars of Creole studies are further divided into two camps: those who theorize the importance of the influence of the African tradition and languages in the process of creolization (Afrocentric scholars), and those who believe that Creole culture is a new culture, which is the result of different influences including European and African traditions. Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, in their seminal work *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past* (1976), see Creole culture as an entirely new culture formed by the adaptation to a new geographical, cultural, and social environment, while Mervyn Alleyne in *Roots of Jamaican Culture* (1988), alongside other linguists, emphasizes the continuity between Creole and African cultures.<sup>23</sup> The Afrocentric field of Creole studies—to which the work of Alleyne belongs— supports the preeminence of the African tradition in the process of creolization, and is contrasted by scholars such as William Green, who in *The Creolization of Caribbean History* demonstrates the importance of the influence of Euro-Creole culture in the process of creolization of

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<sup>22</sup> Brathwaite discusses his model of creole society in the context of Jamaica, an island in which the population was divided into a majority of black slaves and a minority of Whites. Other islands have different ethnic distributions, which obviously affects the process and extent of creolization. Religion is also an important factor in creolization. Trinidad for example, as I discuss in chapter 3, had a multi-ethnic population due to its past as a Spanish colony and its large population of French and Spanish Creoles who practiced Catholicism. It also had a large percentage of wealthy free coloreds, as I discuss in my reading of *Warner Arundell*.

<sup>23</sup> *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past* was republished in 1992 with the title *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*.

African traditions (35). The French Caribbean writers Raphael Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, in *Elogé de la Créolité*, reject the Afrocentric thesis and argue that Creole culture is a combination of the many cultural influences that shaped the French Caribbean experience. In the Prologue to *Éloge de la Créolité* they declare: “Neither European, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles,” and later define Creoleness as “the interactional and transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history” (75, 87). In my reading of nineteenth-century West Indian novels written by the white Creole authors Williams, Orderson and Joseph (chapter 3), I discuss the emergence of a Creole consciousness and the contradiction between such consciousness and the social divisions still present in societies that, on the one hand, are racially fluid and on the other hand display social divisions based on racial hierarchies. I apply Brathwaite’s theory of creolization as theoretical basis for my analysis of the three novels. Although the concept of creolization is best used to discuss Caribbean societies that developed after emancipation, creolization is already evident in early West Indian novels, such as Williams’ *Hamel, The Obeah Man*.

#### THE CORPUS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVELS BY WEST INDIAN CREOLES

In “Shape-Shifting Creole Identities” I analyze three novels written by white Creoles and set before emancipation, in chapter 3: *Hamel, The Obeah Man* (1827), *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* (1838), and *Creoleana* (1842).<sup>24</sup> In chapter 2, I analyze an autobiography by a West Indian woman of color, *Wonderful Adventures of*

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<sup>24</sup>*Hamel, the Obeah Man* was published anonymously, and although this text has been attributed to the same author of *A Tour Through the Island of Jamaica* (1826), Cynric R. Williams, whom Tim Watson identifies with Charles White Williams, a Jamaican planter, it is impossible to confirm this identification beyond doubt.

*Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), set after emancipation, and which I read alongside canonical British novels. In this section of my introduction, I would like to historically collocate the three novels I discuss in chapter 3 alongside other nineteenth-century texts by West Indian authors, which also focus on the emancipation debate, and share some generic, stylistic, and thematic similarities with Williams', Joseph's and Orderson's novels. *Hamel*, *Warner Arundell*, and *Creoleana* display a common Anglophone, white, West Indian Creole consciousness although they are set in different parts of the Caribbean archipelago, and are part of a larger body of works by nineteenth-century Creole authors, evincing the existence of a West Indian literature prior to the twentieth century. I briefly touch upon this body of West Indian texts in this section of the introduction in order to place the novels I analyze in chapter 3 within a larger West Indian early literary tradition, predating what has been considered to be the "birth" of Caribbean literature in the 1950s and 1960s. Although the texts discussed in this project are ideologically different from novels by mid-twentieth century émigré Caribbean authors, such as George Lamming's and V.S. Naipaul's (considered the forefathers of Caribbean literature), I wish to point out both continuities and differences, influenced by the specific historical and political conditions that preceded and followed emancipation and, later, independence and nationalistic movements. In spite of the many thematic differences, I argue that there is continuity in the history of West Indian literature, which predates the early twentieth century, as my analysis of these early texts demonstrates.<sup>25</sup>

The body of eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century works of nonfiction and fiction by Creole authors about the West Indies is small, and novels by West Indian

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<sup>25</sup> I will discuss continuities and differences between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Caribbean fiction in chapter 3 and in the conclusion of this study.

authors have received only limited critical attention. Besides the three texts I analyze in chapter 3, other novels have recently come to the attention of scholars in Caribbean and Transatlantic literary studies, but they are few and often considered as failing to provide realistic characterization, especially of black Creoles. Among works by British travellers and West Indian Creoles, we also find a larger body of travelogues, journals, and treatises about specific British colonies, such as Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad.<sup>26</sup> These works were often written by white West Indian Creoles (mostly planters, or other members of the educated elite) and include information about flora and fauna, horticulture, institutions and bodies of government, colonial laws and law enforcement, racial classifications, customs and morals, religion and education, as well as histories of the West Indies, advice on plantation management, sugar manufacture and trade, and reports on fevers and diseases. Among this type of literature, the best-known treatise and historical narrative is Edward Long's *History of Jamaica*, to which I refer in chapter 2 in my discussion of *Jane Eyre*. This is one of the first treatises in which a nascent Creole consciousness coexists alongside classifications of the inhabitants of the island based on their race and class, thus illustrating the type of contradictions we find in works by West Indian Creoles.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Many travelogues were written by British travellers who had temporarily resided in the West Indies and by absentee plantation owners. See, for example, William Beckford's *A Descriptive Account of the Island of Jamaica*, the anonymous *A Short Journey in the West Indies*, Matthew G. Lewis' *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*, J.B. Moreton's *Manners and Customs of the West India Islands*, Mrs. Carmichael's *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies*, and travelogues by Creoles, such as Cynric R. Williams' *A Tour through the Island of Jamaica*, and E.L. Joseph's *History of Trinidad*.

<sup>27</sup>Edward Long was born in Cornwall, England, in 1734 but moved to Jamaica in 1757, where he lived until 1769. He was private secretary to the Lt. Governor Sir Henry Moore, and later a judge in the court of Vice-Admiralty. Both his father's and his wife's, Mary Ballard, families belong to Jamaica's elite plantocracy. The Beckford-Ballard-Palmer Group was the greatest of all Jamaican family aggregations, which owned almost 45,000 acres of lands (see Brathwaite, *Development* 73).

Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), a pro-slavery narrative written from the point of view of the planter elite to which Long's family belonged, was published at the peak of Jamaica's prosperity and expansion of its sugar production, just before the American War of Independence, which greatly affected Jamaica's economy as it isolated the island from its American neighbors and increased its dependence on British mercantilism.<sup>28</sup> Long wrote to encourage permanent white settlement in Jamaica. Volume 2 of his *History* contains detailed descriptions of the island's parishes, and of its inhabitants (see Book II, Chapter XIII), which Long divides and organizes by race and social class. He includes charts and "scientific" nomenclature of racial classification to describe the various gradations of skin color from dark to light in mixed-race Creoles, as well as the stages of retrograde, or from light to dark, such as the union of a Mulatto and a "Negro" (Long 2, 260-61). In Book III, Long describes "Negro" slaves, whom he divides in two categories "Creole blacks" and "imported, or Africans," and their characteristics—such as their religion, customs, and diet—in great detail demonstrating the inferiority of black people (Long 2, 351). Long believed Black people were responsible for the corruption of morals in Creole society. In fact, Long's biggest concern was the effect of miscegenation in Jamaica, caused by planters' licentiousness with black female slaves (who were considered the instigators of these illicit relationships, rather than the victims of rape and coercion), resulting in a proliferation of mulatto children. Intercourse with slaves was a widespread practice that, in Long's opinion, weakened the white race.<sup>29</sup> Long writes to warn white Creoles against the corruption of morals and the threat of racial

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<sup>28</sup> See Brathwaite, *Development* 63-101.

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to consider that the same argument on the immorality of sexual relationships between masters and female slaves is taken up by abolitionists to argue for the end of slavery, an institution that Long, on the contrary, supported.

mongrelization, alongside other types of dangerous non-sexual cultural exchanges, such as the practice of wet nursing and the rearing of white children by black house-slaves in close proximity to their black offspring, which he thought contributed to the corruption of the Creole race, language, and manners (278). Long's ideas on the Black race and the dangers of miscegenation are reflected in nineteenth-century public opinion and are echoed in many nineteenth-century novels by British writers, such as *Jane Eyre*.

Notwithstanding Long's belief in the inferiority of Black people (typical of his times), his pro-slavery affiliations, and his conviction that the division of society in classes was ordained by God, Brathwaite argues that he demonstrates an emerging white Creole consciousness in his claim that "the Authority of the Assembly was derived not from Royal concessions but from the people" (Brathwaite, *Development* 73). Long writes that "the privileges which they [the Assembly] claim are absolutely necessary to support their own proper authority, and to give the people of the colony that protection against arbitrary power, which nothing but a free and independent assembly can give," envisioning, as early as the eighteenth century, a Jamaica independent from British control, through legislative reform, deployment of its own military defense, development of its society including diversification of its economy, and increase of white farmer-settlers, especially in the inland highlands (Long 1, 56). Long, contrary to colonial practices, advocates that the island should develop its own diversified domestic produce, instead of depending exclusively on imports from England and North America. In this respect, his *History* represents an early example of Creole consciousness, in spite of its



pro-slavery convictions, and Long is ahead of his times in individuating the reasons of Jamaica's dependence on Britain.<sup>30</sup>

Bryan Edwards, in his *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), also takes up the issue of Jamaica's legislative independence from the British Parliament, writing after the American War of Independence.<sup>31</sup> Edwards argues that, although the colonial Assembly is subject to the rule of the King of England, it should not be subject to the British Parliament and that the central Parliament should not legislate on colonial domestic affairs. Edwards argues that the colonial Assembly should pass its own laws, providing that these domestic laws do not go against Great Britain (Brathwaite, *Development* 76). Both Long and Edwards believe that the colonial Assembly should be independent from the British Parliament when legislating on domestic matters; however, they see themselves as English and as sharing an unbreakable bond with England, and ultimately they consider the colonial Assembly as being still dependent on and subordinate to the mother country, creating an internal contradiction in their arguments, as "the island assemblies [are]—and [are] not—masters of their own political households," which proves to be an unsustainable position (Brathwaite, *Development* 78). Like Long and Edwards as early as the eighteenth century, many white Creoles valued their cultural and ideological membership to their mother country (as O'Shaughnessy argues in *An Empire Divided*), even if they were born in the West Indies and had never travelled to England. It is, possibly, these cultural and ideological ties that engendered the contradictions that we already see in Edwards' political ideas, and which

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<sup>30</sup> See Brathwaite, *Development* 73-75.

<sup>31</sup> Bryan Edwards was born in England in 1743, but moved to Jamaica at sixteen, where he inherited properties from his uncle, Zachary Bayly. He was a member of both the Jamaican Assembly (1765-70, 1771-72, and 1787-92) and of the Council (1772-82). He returned to England where he became a member of the House of Common from 1796 until his death in 1800 (Brathwaite, *Development* 75).

I explore in my study. These cultural ties prevented white Creoles from recognizing their common interests and close affiliations with other West Indians, like free colored people, and from envisaging the possibility of real political freedom from England, along the same lines as their North American neighbors, even if many Creoles expressed negative feelings towards their motherland's political involvement in colonial administration. Although the novels by West Indian authors I analyze in chapter 3 clearly suggest the development of a Creole consciousness, as defined by Kamau Brathwaite in *The Development of Creole Society* and *Contradictory Omens*, and often dramatize white Creoles' opposition to the motherland, as in *Hamel*, *The Obeah Man*, generally this consciousness does not extend as far as including non-white Creoles in advocating freedom from England, but remains elitist and race conscious, except perhaps in *Warner Arundell*, as I argue in chapter 3.

Besides the somewhat larger body of travelogues, journals, and treatises written by nineteenth-century Creoles (and visitors to the West Indies), and generally describing the institutions, culture, customs, and manners of Caribbean society, scholars have also recovered a smaller body of prose fiction written by West Indian Creoles, demonstrating first-hand knowledge about the West Indies, and displaying a West Indian sensibility.<sup>32</sup> Among these works, we find a selection of Jamaican novels, to which *Hamel*, *The Obeah Man* ideologically belongs, as it shares common cultural referents with the other texts.

This body of works includes novels such as *Montgomery; or, the West Indian Adventure*

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<sup>32</sup> Besides the works of prose fiction I discuss in the following paragraphs, there also is a body of poetry written by West Indian Creoles, which is outside the scope of my project. These poems often imitate English models such as Dryden, Pope, Cowper, and Gray, with little correspondence to reality as they use English poetic conventions to describe a West Indian setting. Beside this elevated poetry, there also are a number of occasional political verses, which contain jokes and references to members of the elite Creole society and are generally more original than formal poems (see Brathwaite's "Creative Literature" for an analysis of poetry by West Indians.)

(1812-13), and *Marly; or, a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (1828), which I discuss in some detail in this section of my introduction. Other novels written by West Indian Creoles in the nineteenth century that demonstrate first-hand knowledge of the Caribbean landscape and culture, are: *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob* (1787) set in Barbados, W.G. Freeman's *Pickwick Jamaica*, an unfinished manuscript undated but relating to the 1830s (Institute of Jamaica), Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log* (1833) which I discuss in this section, J.W. Orderson's Barbadian novel *Creoleana; or, Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore* (1842), analyzed in chapter 3, Cyrus Perkins' *Busha's Mistress; or, Catherine the Fugitive* (written in 1855, but published in 1911), Maryne Reid's *Maroon* (1862), and William G. Hamley's *Captain Clutterbuck's Champagne* (1862).<sup>33</sup> Beside the Jamaican and Barbadian novels I just outlined, a body of works by Trinidadian Creoles, to which *Warner Arundell* belongs, has also received recent critical attention. Among these works we find: *Adolphus, A Tale* (1853), Mrs. William Noy's [Marcella Fanny] Wilkins's *The Slave Son* (1854), Maxwell Philip's (a non-white Creole) *Emmanuel Appadocca; or, Blighted Life: A Tale of the Boucaneers* (1854), Grant Allen's *In All Shades* (1888), a Jamaican novel set in Trinidad, and Stephen N. Cobham's *Rupert Gray: A Study in Black and White* (1907). I will touch on the Trinidadian corpus of nineteenth-century Creole novels as I discuss *Warner Arundell*, which partakes of the same Trinidadian sensibility and socio-political-historical context.

Although the novels I briefly discuss in this section are not part of my project, I occasionally refer to some of them, such as *Marly* and *Tom Cringle's Log*, in my analysis of West Indian novels in chapter 3. For this reason, I would like to give an overview of

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<sup>33</sup> For a description of some of these works see Lalla's *Defining Jamaican Fiction* 23-55.

three of these West Indian texts, touching upon recent scholarship, in order to place *Hamel*, *Warner Arundell*, and *Creoleana* within a larger cultural and literary context, rather than discussing them in a vacuum; thus individuating thematic similarities, contradictions and concerns these fictional narratives share. Specifically I provide an overview of *Tom Cringle's Log*, *Montgomery*, and *Marly*, all written before emancipation. These novels, such as *Tom Cringle's Log*, though displaying pro-slavery attitudes, present contradictions as they occasionally depict Blacks' humanity and the cruelty of bondage. Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log*, like *Warner Arundell*, is a travel narrative and picaresque.<sup>34</sup> In *Tom Cringle's Log* the protagonist, Tom Cringle, is a boy of thirteen who enters the Royal Navy as a midshipman, travels from Jamaica to Panama through many lands including Barbados, Cuba, New Providence, and Haiti, and experiences adventures which include wars, smuggling, piracy, shark attacks, and encounters with African slaves. Tom's often comic remarks demonstrate the novel's overall pro-slavery outlook and the author's belief that Blacks are inferior, as in Tom's stereotypical portrayal of African infants as "little, naked, glossy, black guinea pigs," alongside other stereotypical naming such as 'Blackie,' and caricatures of slaves that divest them of their humanity (Scott 217). Like *Hamel*, *Tom Cringle's Log* depicts the unfamiliarity of religious African practices. For example, in a scene displaying African rituals, Tom spies on an outdoor wake for a head cooper, during which a female singer tells the deceased that he will go back to Africa and see an African fetish: "Den you go in a Africa, you see fetish dere...Buccra can't catch Duppy, no,no," using the local patois

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Scott, author of *Tom Cringle's Log*, was born in 1789 and was educated in Glasgow, but moved to Jamaica in 1806 where he resided until 1817, working as an estate manager and as a businessman in Kingston. He returned to Jamaica in 1818, after he married, and remained in Jamaica until 1822. His attitude to white Creole society appears to be more positive than those of other authors, such as the author of *Marley* (Lalla, *Voices* 48). *Tom Cringle's Log* appeared serially in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1829.

dialect (129). The author also refers to Obeah practices, outlawed in many colonies, such as communicating with the Devil and with evil spirits, thus exoticizing the Caribbean landscape for his English readers. Alongside African religious practices, the novel depicts the superstition of shipmen, and contains many gothic scenes of horror, war and violence, like the sinking of a slaver with its human cargo (Scott 178). This picaresque ends with Cringle's promotion to captain and his marriage to his beloved cousin, Mary.

Barbara Lalla argues that Scott is sensitive to the Jamaican setting, and accurate in his descriptions of life in Jamaica, but overall “[his] vision does not synthesize its scattered sketches of black humanity with a universally applicable concern for independence and selfhood,” as he moves from pathos to humor without in-depth reflection on the horrors of slavery (14). There are, however, isolated moments in which Scott recognizes the humanity of Blacks, such as the scene of the sinking of a Spanish slaver, which Lucy Haydem, in “The Caribbean Presence in *Tom's Cringle's Log: A Commentary on Britain's Involvement in Slavery and the Slave Trade*,” reads as an indictment of the slave trade. In the scene of the sinking and burning of the ship, Tom is moved by the horror of “five hundred human beings, pent up in her noisome hold, [who] split the heavens with their piercing death-yells...men, women, and children...drawn down by the vortex... [in which] the women, and the gasping little ones, were choking, and gurgling, and sinking all around” (Scott 330-31). In another scene, Tom observes an overseer's funeral and seems to acknowledge the plight of a “brown girl”—the overseer's mistress—who “poor thing, said not a word, although her heart seemed, from the convulsive heaving of her bosom, like to burst” (438). While the scenes I have described seem to acknowledge the humanity of Blacks dying while being transported from

Africa's West Coast to the New World—thus indicting the cruelty of the slave trade—or to highlight the capacity of a brown girl to feel sympathy and love for her dead master, in other scenes the author perpetuates the stereotypes associated to Blacks, such as the myth of happy slaves singing and dancing—as if they were not the victims of violence and abuse—which planters used to justify the plantation system of economic production as preferable to the exploitation of poor industrial laborers in England. The contradictions I highlighted in *Tom's Cringle's Log* are also present in *Hamel, The Obeah Man*, in which although the Black protagonist, *Hamel*, is given a voice and occasionally speaks against slavery, other black characters, such as the rebels who follow the African leader Combah, are described as lustful, ignorant, and unprincipled individuals, whose rebellion is driven by personal motives (such as revenge, greed, and the possession of white women), rather than by a clear political agenda and social consciousness, as I will demonstrate in my reading of Williams' novel in chapter 3.

*Montgomery and Marly*, which I am going to analyze in some detail, like *Tom Cringle's Log* and *Warner Arundell*, belong to the genre of the picaresque. They are inspired by biographical events and are long, loosely constructed narratives that focus on the debate on slavery and, like *Hamel*, take the planter side, advocating gradual amelioration rather than immediate emancipation. In his analysis of *Montgomery*—a romance about the love between a Scottish book-keeper, Henry Montgomery, and the daughter of a white Creole planter, who are separated by class until Montgomery inherits a fortune and becomes a pastor in Jamaica—Brathwaite argues that, although the novel outwardly condemns slavery through digressions and mock-debates on its pros and cons, in actuality it rehearses anti-slavery debates and arguments for amelioration,

emancipation, and graduation, without openly advocating for the freedom of Jamaican slaves and without conferring on black characters any real depth (Brathwaite, "Creative Literature" 65-66). The novel, rather than for emancipation, argues for the humanity of black people and for the responsibility of slave owners to treat their slaves well.

Ultimately Montgomery, after marrying the woman he loves, returns to England, as he thinks that England is the place where proper cultural reproduction can happen:

"[Though] Jamaica is a country bless'd in many respects by nature...yet it is not the region in which it would be desirable to rear up and educate a young family...the society in Europe is in general better, the morals purer, the amusement more liberal, various and dear to the heart" (508-10). In a somewhat more positive analysis of this novel than Brathwaite's, Barbara Lalla argues that this conclusion demonstrates that Montgomery "remains an observant outsider," even though the author of this text demonstrates direct knowledge of the Jamaican setting (Lalla, "Dungeons" 9). Lalla concludes that "Montgomery reaches towards the Other, cautiously circling the moral issues of Jamaican slavery" and showing only occasionally glimpses of black individuality (9). As many of the novels written by West Indian Creoles show, *Montgomery* demonstrates the presence, alongside a racial scale, of rigid class divisions in Jamaican society, in which poor Whites could not aspire to the hand in marriage of the white Creole daughter of a planter, although they often obtained employment as bookkeepers and administrators in large estates, and they were generally considered superior to free colored people.

*Marly*, published anonymously in the same year as *Hamel*, is a picaresque that shares a similar worldview to Williams' novel, as it too favors gradual amelioration as preferable to immediate emancipation of slaves, a position supported by West Indian

slave owners to stave off abolitionists' advances. It is not completely certain who the author of this text is; however, sources point to John Stewart, a Jamaican resident from 1787 to 1808, who also wrote two other books: *An Account of Jamaica and its Inhabitants* (1808), and *A View of the Past and Present of the Island of Jamaica* (1823). Critics argue that biographical and textual correspondences between Stewart's life and work and the author of *Marley* make this identification plausible; however, the two authors seem to differ in their representation of slaves, whom Stewart describes as grateful and attached to their masters, while *Marley* deems them ungrateful, demonstrating a less conciliatory attitude than Stewart (Stewart, *Account* 239-42). The narrator of *Marly*, in fact, comments: "But the Negro character is in general extreme selfishness...even though they might uniformly receive kind treatment they repay it by ingratitude, a vice which appears to be the predominant feature exhibited in the Negro disposition" (Anonymous, *Marley* 210). There also are many correspondences between the plots of *Marly* and *Montgomery*, which might suggest that the novels could have been written by the same author, as the respective protagonists are both poor, Scottish bookkeepers of gentle birth, who fall in love with upper class Creole ladies they cannot marry because of their lower social status, until they come into fortune (Montgomery through an inheritance, Marly by having his property restored).<sup>35</sup> The novels, however, differ in their conclusions as, in *Montgomery*, the hero ultimately settles in England, while *Marly* sees its protagonist as a successful slave owner, "devoted to ameliorating the conditions of his laborers, by every practicable means, without proving hurtful to themselves and to his own interest" (Anonymous, *Marly* 324). The theme of the

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<sup>35</sup> John Galt's *Bogle Corbet; or, The Emigrants* (1831) is another novel that deals with the Scottish-Caribbean connection.



restoration of the white Creole protagonist to his ancestral inheritance, and his reinstated role as an enlightened master and a father figure to his slaves, is also shared in the conclusion of *Hamel*, in which Mr. Fairfax's estates and faithful slaves are returned to him, and of *Warner Arundell*, who marries a Creole lady of Spanish descent and, having been reinstated as proprietor of his father's estates, rules among his slaves with magnanimity and fairness. This common theme of lost and restored fortunes (and slaves), shared by pre-emancipation nineteenth-century West Indian novels written by white Creoles, highlights white Creoles' fears of loss of their status, as planters saw their world as coming to an end, due to the progress made by abolitionists and missionaries in their campaign against slavery, as I argue in my reading of *Hamel* in chapter 3.

Both *Marly* and *Montgomery* contain digressions and debates on the West Indian Question, but ultimately they are against immediate emancipation, and advocate amelioration and graduation as the safest course of action. The narrator of *Marly* affirms, at the end of the novel, that after a "moderate course of amelioration...slavery will then gradually cease...and though black, a virtuous race of peasantry will inhabit these islands" (324). Lalla, in her reading of *Marly*, argues that the novel fails because "no logical connection exists between the vision of slavery presented and the conclusion of the narrative... [as] in the end [Marly] settles into what is foreshadowed as a safe and moral life as a successful slave owner," thus engendering a disconnection between the novel's action and its polemic against slavery (12). In his Preface, addressed "To the Public," the author of *Marly* declares to be seeking the "truth" on the topic of slavery, through the medium of the novel instead of essays or letters, as "much has been spoken and written on both sides...whereby an impartial enquirer is unable to form anything like

a correct opinion on the actual state of the slaves in the British colonies” (Anonymous, *Marly* 2). The author states that “truth must lie in between” the opinions of those who are pro or against slavery, and that his self-appointed task is to “detail the actual occurrences which take place on a sugar estate” in an impartial manner (Anonymous, *Marly* 3). However, the diatribes against slave owners that ensue, as well as the many other contradictions in the novel’s claims, ultimately “do not articulate a consistent point of view,” and are not “impartial” as the Preface asserts (Lalla, “Dungeons” 12). Although *Marly* is valuable for the precision and detail with which it describes life on a sugar plantation—including sketches of slave culture, such as its description of the ceremony of “crop over” (Anonymous, *Marly* 41-3) and of slave dances during Christmas and New Year processions (Anonymous, *Marly* 256-63), or its focus on communities of Scottish immigrants to Jamaica, their industry and their preservation of clan culture—ultimately the novel does not appeal to modern readers as “the characters are mere mouthpieces for different kinds of ‘Creole sentiment,’ and the action is interrupted by long polemical oration” which slows down the narrative flow, and clashes with the novel’s plot (Williamson xi).<sup>36</sup>

As is evident by my brief overview of some of the fictional texts written by white Creoles in the nineteenth century, these novels are riddled with contradictions. They

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Seacole’s father was also a Scot, as Seacole tells her readers in the opening paragraphs of her autobiography, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. She traces her industry, “energy and activity” back to her Scottish blood, as I discuss in chapter 2 (Seacole 11). Scots, in fact, had a reputation for being hard working and industrious, as Edward Long observes in his *History* (Long 2, 286-87). They migrated in large numbers to Jamaica at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and “by the second half of the century, [they] were estimated to form nearly a third of the European inhabitants of the island” (Williamson xxvi). Scottish settlers generally aided compatriots new to the island, by helping them find employment and by providing hospitality and assistance, which Long refers to as a “national partiality” which was “very favorable to the colony, by inviting into it frequent recruits of very able hands” who formed communities, like the one in which *Marly* settles (Long 2, 286).

either support a pro-planter, pro-slavery viewpoint—even though they, simultaneously, argue that slavery is cruel and inhuman—or they defend emancipation in long-winded debates, but ultimately advocate for the continuation of slavery, and for amelioration rather than immediate emancipation. These novels depict a society that is clearly race-conscious, class-conscious and often culturally Eurocentric (as demonstrated by Montgomery’s return to England), and that privileges the point of view of white Creoles, or light-skinned brown Creoles, over black Creoles. There are also many thematic and stylistic similarities, such as the adaptation of the gothic and the picaresque, or adventure travel, to the West Indian setting, and the theme of the loss and retrieval of family fortunes, which is linked to marriage with wealthy, white Creole ladies.<sup>37</sup> The West Indian novels I analyze in chapter 3 partake in this general context, and share themes and genres with the texts discussed above, although they provide a more accurate insight into the minds of black characters. They focus on issues of slavery, race and class relations, on the defense of ancestral inheritances, and on the continuation of white Creole influence and economic power in a society that is undergoing rapid and destabilizing changes. The texts discussed above, and the novels I analyze in chapter 3, also share some characteristics with later Caribbean literature, such as the use of Creole dialects and a concern for the West Indian communities in which the novels are set. However, unlike twentieth-century novels by Caribbean writers, which focus on the condition of the Caribbean folk—thus on the black working class individual who often experiences dislocation and exile as he or she must leave their island to find work—nineteenth-century West Indian novels generally reflect the point of view of white West Indian

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<sup>37</sup> In chapter 3, I discuss generic similarities in nineteenth-century novels by white Creoles, focusing on *Hamel*, *Creoleana*, and *Warner Arundell*.

Creoles (who were the main producers of literature).<sup>38</sup> Although these novels depict a realistic (and valuable) picture of life in the Caribbean before emancipation and demonstrate that the authors shared cultural understandings with black and mixed-race Creoles, in these texts the point of view of non-white Creoles is generally presented through the filter of a white author, and often Blacks are used as mouthpieces for the opinions of white planters, as in *Hamel*, although occasionally the author, in an attempt to achieve verisimilitude of characterization, opens a space where the voice of slaves can come through. However these authors, while depicting a more realistic picture of life in the West Indies than pro-abolitionist English writers who wrote in support of Blacks without a direct knowledge of Creole society, paradoxically stereotype and marginalize black and brown Creoles as they themselves are stereotyped and marginalized in English fiction.

## CHAPTERS

Chapter 1, “The Early Republic, American Self-Definition and the Creole: Creole Degeneracy and Agency in *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo*,” analyzes two American texts written at the turn of the nineteenth century: Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoir of the Year 1793* (1799), and Leonora Sansay's *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo in a Series of Letters* (1808). Both works are set during the Haitian Revolution. *Arthur Mervyn* is a novel set in Philadelphia during the year of the yellow fever epidemic (1793) and the early stages of

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<sup>38</sup> I am aware that my reading of early nineteenth-century novels by West Indian Creoles might appear limited to white Creoles. This is due to the fact that the majority of the information that remains about West Indian societies in the early nineteenth century comes to us mostly through the writing of white Creoles, who generally belonged to the planter class or were educated members of the elite and typically endorsed the ideas of white plantocracy.

slave revolts in Saint Domingue. *Secret History* is an autobiographical epistolary novel set in Saint Domingue, Jamaica, and Cuba at the climax of the Haitian Revolution (1802-1804). I read both novels in a transatlantic context, and demonstrate the struggle of American writers to define a new post-independence American citizenship. The novels highlight the contradictions inherent in the ideal of a new American identity separate from the Creole, within the reality of the interdependence of the United States and the rest of the Atlantic World, and in the context of socio-political and economic transformations, and of the multiple fears associated with historical events unfolding in the Atlantic World at the turn of the century. I refer to events such as revolutions (in particular the Haitian Revolution), migration of people, dire conditions of transatlantic commerce, as well as shifts in the political and economic balance among colonial powers (England and France) and the new American Republic. In this context, the figure of the West Indian Creole assumes a growing influence in the discourses that are being produced about American identity and whiteness. While in Brown's novel, Mervyn tries to distance himself from Creole corruption and to construct an exceptional American identity through storytelling, in *Secret History*, the narrator, Mary Hassal, at first adopts the stereotype of Creole laziness and sexual promiscuity to describe the French and Spanish Creoles she meets. However, as the stories unfold, both novels cannot maintain the separation between Americans and Creoles. Mervyn is constantly imbricated in shady commercial deals with Creole characters, and in the movement of capital earned through West Indian slavery, while Mary Hassal and her sister Clara—who, I argue, should be read as a split-self, or as two facets of Sansay's identity—come to appreciate the qualities

of strength and resilience of French Creole women, whom they treat as sisters, engendering a series of parallels between the abuses of colonialism and of patriarchy.

*Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History* describe the constant movement of peoples and goods in the New World, and the implications that trade of goods and migration of bodies have on American identity formation. The figure of the “American” that emerges from these works of early nineteenth-century literature is inescapably part of a much larger international and transatlantic framework of socio-political and economic relations, which makes constructions of American exceptionalism through comparison with West Indian Creoles difficult to sustain, because clear distinctions between Americans and other New World Creoles are hard to maintain. In spite of *Arthur Mervyn*’s attempt to separate the new American hero, Arthur, from his gothic double, Welbeck, by means of Arthur’s identity construction through storytelling as a vehicle of truth, and through his good looks and his whiteness as signifiers of goodness, Arthur is ultimately very similar to Welbeck, who also uses storytelling and self-fashioning, but as a means to conceal the truth. Fixed categories, like those distinguishing the American from the Creole, are ultimately proven insufficient, as the destiny of the American nation cannot be separated from the troubled destinies of its Caribbean neighbors in a permeable world in which commercial and political interests break down any attempts to separate American identities from outside influences. Both novels leave the reader with a sense that, in spite of the efforts made by the respective narrators to catalogue, order and re-order reality through the process of writing and narration, it is ultimately impossible to create (even on the printed page) a single version of facts, as it is to define “Americanness” as a self-standing identity, so while in the end Arthur marries a British-Jewish heiress who is

described as being “tawny as a Moor” and moves to England, Clara and Mary envision a transatlantic community of white Creole women as a preferable option to a new and separate American national identity (Brown 331).

Chapter 2, “Race, Marriage, Englishness, and Liminality: Representations of Female Creole Characters in *Jane Eyre*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*,” analyzes female Creole figures who are either mixed-race women or are racially undetermined, in two British novels—Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847)—and the response to British representations of brown Creole women by a mixed-race West Indian Creole, Mary Seacole, whose autobiographical character, Mrs. Seacole, can be read as a semi-fictional persona—the Mother of English soldiers and Crimean heroine—whom the author creates to claim her status as a British subject. In my reading of these novels I begin by showing, through a close reading of *Jane Eyre*, the ways in which the figure of the Creole is typified in British domestic fiction, using the example of Brontë’s descriptions of Bertha and her brother, Richard. Miss Swartz, the Jewish-mulatto Creole in *Vanity Fair*, is also stereotyped because of her race and colonial wealth—even if she is given some lines of dialogue, unlike Bertha who never speaks—although the tone is lighter than *Jane Eyre*’s, as Thackeray’s novel is a satire not just of Creole characters, but of British society in its entirety. In my analysis of Rhoda Swartz, I consider the ways in which Thackeray deploys his brown-skin Creole heiress to deliver a more serious critique; that of English bourgeoisie’s hypocrisy, against which Rhoda’s native simplicity and naiveté—even if still satirized—seem the lesser of the targets of the Indian-born Thackeray’s satire. In my reading of *Vanity Fair*, I argue that Thackeray’s colonial birth

and his relationship with his Eurasian half-sister influence his contradictory responses to miscegenation and his portrayal of the West Indian Creole, Rhoda. However, ultimately, Miss Swartz is depicted as a more positive character than the white middle-class Amelia and Becky who become the victims of their society's hypocrisy, while Miss Swartz is able to carve a space for herself in *Vanity Fair*.

In my reading, I consider the ways in which contradictions in the portrayal of both Bertha Mason and Rhoda Swartz demonstrate the importance of the West Indies for the fictional world these texts depict, in spite of the authors' attempt to suppress, marginalize, or ridicule these Creole female figures. Through the contradictions in the portrayal of marginal Creole women in Brontë's and Thackeray's novels, I demonstrate their agency both by means of an analysis of speech acts, as is the case for Bertha, and by establishing Bertha's and Rhoda's historical relevance. I do this by placing these Creole characters within the history of Caribbean colonialism—often undermined or glossed over by critics—and by showing their resilience, as is the case for Miss Swartz, who I ultimately read as an example of success and determination. Mary Seacole, on the other hand, in her desire to embody the persona of a British subject, partly loses her identity—as many critics, such as Sandra Pouchet Paquet, have argued—and becomes emblematic of Creole homelessness and rootlessness, while simultaneously she fashions a new type of West Indian Creole identity based on entrepreneurial skills, liminality, independence, and a black female ethics of care.

In my reading of *Wonderful Adventures*, I consider the effects that Seacole's double marginalization—because of her race and gender—has on her identity construction, and the strategies she uses to deflect some of the issues that she faces



because of her identity as a woman of color born in the periphery of the Empire. Seacole uses many stylistic techniques—such as the adoption of masculine genres like the memoir—to self-fashion an image of herself that will allow her to attain the sympathy and financial support of her English audience. This demonstrates her ability to manipulate literary genres, racial and gender codes (such as Victorian dress codes), and to use “autoethnographic” techniques—as defined by Mary Louise Pratt in *Arts of the Contact Zone*—such as parody, to critique British racism. Seacole also employs strategic omissions (relating to her personal life in Jamaica), to present a public image of herself as both an entrepreneur, who is honest and hard working, and is not ashamed of her business success, and as a virtuous (and chaste) British mother-figure.

Chapter 3, “White Creole Perspective and Identity Formation in Nineteenth-Century Caribbean Novels: *Hamel*, *The Obeah Man*, *Creoleana*, and *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole*,” analyzes three novels written by white Creoles and set before emancipation. Firstly, I establish thematic similarities between these novels through an analysis of genre, expanding on Tim Watson’s, Candace Ward’s, and Barbara Lalla’s work, by investigating generic influences on West Indian literature, and, in particular, on Williams’, Joseph’s, and Orderson’s novels. I show that West Indian writers in general, and specifically the three texts I analyze, adapted eighteenth-century European genres—such as the picaresque, the imperial romance, the sentimental novel, and the gothic—to West Indian themes (and cited extensively from seventeenth-century masters, such as Shakespeare or Milton), using European literary models to promote West Indian concerns to an English audience, and to demonstrate that white Creoles were as refined in their tastes and knowledge of the English canon as their English readers. I

argue that although the three novels on which I focus present thematic differences and are set in various Caribbean islands (Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, etc.), they share a common Creole consciousness, which—as Brathwaite contends in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*—partakes of elements of both European and African traditions, as they come into contact and as they clash with each other, in the context of slavery and in the contact zone of the New World. However, I argue that this common Creole consciousness is also riddled with racial prejudice and class divisions, which engender contradictions in texts by white West Indian Creoles.

In fact, while Williams', Orderson's, and Joseph's novels depict fluid race relations within their diverse West Indian settings, they simultaneously portray a highly race and class conscious society, which produces inconsistencies in the novels' representation of mixed-race and black Creoles. I claim that while these texts participate in the known stereotypes associated to mixed-race Creoles—as I show in my reading of the light-skinned female Creoles Michal and Lucy, in *Hamel* and *Creoleana*—they simultaneously reject England's critique of Creole society and of white planters, who were portrayed as cruel and dissolute by English abolitionist propaganda, and produce a conscious re-fashioning of the figure of the West Indian Creole planter, who is presented as a kind and caring master of happy slaves. While *Hamel* and *Warner Arundell* uphold a pro-slavery, pro-planter ideology taking up the side of amelioration in the emancipation debate, *Creoleana*—written after emancipation but set in pre-emancipation Barbados—sketches pre-emancipation Creole society in nostalgic tones, showing its conservative views, although outwardly praising the end of slavery.

These novels depict the West Indian setting as central to the lives of their characters, while England remains on the periphery and is portrayed as a place of dislocation, homelessness, and corruption, thus reversing English literary mapping of social reproduction as happening not only in the motherland. I argue that, although these novels are critical of their motherland and articulate a desire to be rid of England's meddling in West Indian affairs, they fall short of advocating real political independence, except perhaps *Warner Arundell*, which uses the example of Latin America's struggle for independence as a model of political activism. Although the novels present black and brown Creoles as an integral part of the communities they portray, in opposition to English (and European) outsiders who are viewed as foreigners, these texts simultaneously uphold a rigid race scale that maintains divisions and preclude the possibility of an egalitarian alliance across racial barriers, between white Creoles and free colored people. Only *Warner Arundell* seems to envision the possibility of interracial marriages, and depicts fluid socio-economic relations between Whites and wealthy free coloreds (like the brown Arundells), who can prosper side by side in cosmopolitan West Indian Creole communities of the future. These communities encompass the entire Caribbean archipelago, in which white Creoles and free colored people can forge new alliances based on shared economic and political interests, and on common cultural referents. However, this optimistic picture of a semi-egalitarian Creole society coexists with a pro-planter ideology, which sees the novel's protagonist, Warner, restored in his ancestral property and owner of faithful slaves, to whom he pledges to be an enlightened master.

## Chapter 1

### **THE EARLY REPUBLIC, AMERICAN SELF-DEFINITION AND THE CREOLE: CREOLE DEGENERACY AND AGENCY IN *ARTHUR MERVYN*, AND *SECRET HISTORY; OR, THE HORRORS OF ST. DOMINGO***

Charles Brockden Brown's 1799 novel, *Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* and Leonora Sansay's *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo, in a Series of Letters*, published nine years later (1808), are literary texts that dramatize the crisis of identity and the fears that seize the American nation at the turn of the century, in the context of historical events such as the Haitian Revolution. These texts articulate the concerns that inform constructions of a new American identity, in the period of the early Republic, associated with the figure of the West Indian Creole. This is an age influenced by the effects of the American Revolution (1775-1783), and the French Revolution (1789-1799), among which are the slave revolts in the New World, and in particular the Haitian Revolution; a time of social and political turmoil with far-reaching consequences, beginning in 1791 and ending with the creation of the first Black independent government in the Western Hemisphere. The slave revolution of Saint Domingue (later renamed Haiti) is an event that had enormous repercussions, not only for the Americas and its European colonies, but reaching as far as Europe. The events in Saint Domingue are significant in shaping U.S. politics and economic policies in the early Republican period, as well as a new type of white American identity, often constructed vis-à-vis representations of Creoleness—and Blackness—in a Caribbean context. As I will show in this chapter, both *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History* describe the constant movement of peoples and goods in the Atlantic World, and the implications that trade of goods and migration of bodies had on America's identity formation. Both

texts are read within the socio-political and economic contexts that influence them, in which the figure of the Caribbean Creole assumes a growing influence in the discourses that are being produced about American identity and whiteness.

Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* and Leonora Sansay's *Secret History* should therefore be read in a transatlantic context, rather than in an exclusively American context. The figure of the American that emerges from these works of early nineteenth-century literature is inescapably imbricated in a much larger international and transatlantic framework, which provides the new American citizen with insufficient parameters for self-definition through comparison with England, Europe and their West Indian colonies. An attempt to define a new American identity as distinct proves inadequate because clear divisions between Americans and other New World Creoles are hard to maintain, as *Arthur Mervyn* demonstrates. Fixed categories, like those distinguishing the American from the Creole, are ultimately proven insufficient, as the destiny of the American nation cannot be separated from the troubled destinies of its Caribbean neighbors, as both live in a permeable world fraught with commercial and political interests that constantly break down—as they are being erected—any constructions of an exceptional and separate American identity.<sup>39</sup> Both novels leave the

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<sup>39</sup> Exceptionalism—a term first used in relation to the United States by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831—has its origins in Puritan theology, as the Puritan settlers of New England were the first who believed in New England's American exceptionalism. The Puritans' belief that they were chosen by God to lead other nations is expressed by Puritan leader John Winthrop, in his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" (1631), in which he uses the phrase "City on a Hill," from the Bible, to affirm his belief that the Puritan community of New England should be a model for the rest of the world. Winthrop's metaphor has been considered a forerunner of the ideology of American exceptionalism, and has been used by later theorists of exceptionalism to talk about America's unique destiny. Another fundamental event in the history of America, and of its claim to exceptionalism, is the American Revolution. The supporters of the Revolution believed that America was not just an extension of Europe, but that it was a unique country in its own right, full of opportunities and potential, which was being exploited by Britain (see Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, a pamphlet published in 1776, in which Paine argues against British rule). The belief in American exceptionalism is tied with the American Revolution, with Republicanism, and with the idea that the people

reader with a sense that, in spite of the efforts made by the respective narrators to catalogue, order and re-order reality through the process of writing and narration, it is ultimately impossible to create (even on the printed page) a single version of facts, as it is to define “Americanness” as a self-standing identity. As narration breaks down into multiple, often contradictory voices, the “truth” gets harder and harder to grasp and the process of writing, as validation of reality, is simultaneously put into question, as is the separation between the American and the West Indian Creole identities.



### Arthur Mervyn; or, Memoirs of the Year 1793

#### THE NEW REPUBLIC IN THE 1790s: FEARS AND EXCEPTIONALISM

Charles Brockden Brown's novel, *Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793*, taps into multiple fears gripping the newly formed American nation during the 1790's.<sup>40</sup>

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are sovereign and they should not bow to a hereditary ruling class. American exceptionalism upholds the central idea that the United States is unique, therefore “exceptional,” and superior to any other country. In Joyce Appleby’s words, exceptionalism “projects onto a nation...qualities that are envied because they represent deliverance from a common lot” (419). American exceptionalism links the past to the future, as it is a “teleological vision in which all history prior to the formation of the Euro-American ‘New World’ was pointed towards this formation as a goal, and in which that ‘New World’ is not simply a place but a mission” (Byer 86). Dale Carter describes American exceptionalism as “a belief in the quasi-mystical recuperative powers of the American landscape,” connecting the vastness and resources of the American territory with the idea of exceptionalism (79). The ideology of American exceptionalism will be further developed in the 1830s-1850s, and used to justify America’s expansionist policy; in particular, America’s expansion west (including the Mexican War). Exceptionalism merges with the ideology of Manifest Destiny, also used to justify westward expansion, which informs imperial romances such as Richard Harding Davis’ *Soldiers of Fortune*. For more on exceptionalism see Appleby’s “Recovering America’s Historic Diversity.”

<sup>40</sup> What follows is a brief synopsis of the novel: *Arthur Mervyn* is the story of its eponymous hero, Arthur, who is found feverish on the streets of Philadelphia by Doctor Stevens, who cures him, and to whom Arthur narrates his adventures. After his father remarries his milkmaid, Arthur leaves his country home for Philadelphia, in search of opportunities. During his journey, he is robbed by an innkeeper, locked in Thetford’s house, and then rescued by a mysterious gentleman, Welbeck, who gives him a job as an amanuensis, elegant clothes, and apartments in his mansion. Arthur falls in love with Welbeck’s daughter, the Italian Clemenza Lodi, but discovers she is, in fact, his lover. Welbeck is bankrupted by a bad business venture with the merchant Thetford, then kills a man, Mr. Watson, whose sister he had seduced, and hides the body with Mervyn’s help. He tells Mervyn his story, and disappears in the waters of the river, as they escape the city on a boat, inducing Arthur to believe he is dead. Arthur returns to the country, where he

Brown's 1799 novel purports to be an historical commentary on the year 1793, the year of Philadelphia's yellow fever epidemic, but it is much more than that, and the yellow fever functions, as many scholars have pointed out, not only as a real historical event that drives the novel's plot, but also as a metaphor for a more widespread array of fears that characterizes the year 1793, and the last decade of the century.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the use of the 1793 epidemic serves as a commentary on the year 1799—during which Brown writes—also a time in which epidemics of yellow fever often spread in U.S. cities, especially in the summer months. This (1799) is a period in which fear of foreigner invasion had reached hysteria levels, due to the flow of refugees from Saint Domingue, as the Haitian Revolution reached its peak. It is a period in which “the metaphors of contagion and race met,” as white Americans feared that free and enslaved African-Americans would follow the example of Saint Domingue (Doolen 85). These multiple fears, which this chapter places within a transatlantic context, are often linked to the figure of the West Indian Creole; a figure that also serves as a metaphor to reflect on America's sense of uncertainty about its political and economic destiny in a “national

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works at Mr. Hadwin's farm and falls in love with his daughter, Eliza. At the outbreak of the yellow fever epidemic, Arthur goes back to the city to look for Eliza's sister's boyfriend, Wallace. While in the city, he becomes sick and takes refuge in Welbeck's house, which seems abandoned, where he meets Welbeck, who is still alive and has come to look for the book where Lodi's money is hidden, now in Mervyn's possession. Mervyn burns the money when Welbeck tells him it is forged, angering him, as the money was real. Welbeck leaves Mervyn to die, but he is rescued by Dr. Stevens. In the second part of the narrative, Arthur travels back to the farm to look for Eliza and her family. He rescues Eliza (her father and sister are dead). Later he finds Miss Lodi and her dying child in a brothel run by Mrs. Villars and rescues her. After finding Welbeck in prison for debt and terminally ill, Mervyn retrieves the Maurices' West Indian capital, that Mr. Watson had on him when he was killed, and delivers it to its proper owner, the widow Mrs. Maurice, in Baltimore. At Mrs. Villars' Arthur had encountered Ascha Fielding, a British-Jewish heiress, with whom he falls in love. At the end of the novel Mervyn marries Ascha and they move to Europe.

<sup>41</sup> Yellow fever is a disease spread by infected mosquitos, characterized by yellowness of the eyes and skin, and by black vomit, which is caused by bleeding into the stomach. Other symptoms are high fever, headache, muscle pains, tremors, and convulsions. The first epidemic of yellow fever in the United States began in Philadelphia in July 1793, and peaked during the beginning of October. Philadelphia was the capital of the United States. It was a cosmopolitan city that had a large population of free Blacks and was the principal US target of immigration by French-Creole refugee from St. Domingue, fleeing from the slave rebellion. The epidemic killed 5,000 people (out of a population of 45,000 people) and, according to chronicler Mathew Carey, another 17,000 people fled (ocp.hul.harvard.edu Web. 23 May. 2014).

space made insecure by war and racial tension,” and by the political changes ensuing in the rest of the Atlantic World (Doolen 90). Economic and political uncertainty at home is conjoined with uncertainty about the new role of the individual, and the collective role the Republic should assume as leading free nation within the Western Hemisphere.

In her seminal work, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*, Ashli White (as I mentioned in my introduction) describes the importance of French Creole immigration from Saint Domingue to the United States, and the influence that the Haitian Revolution had on American notions of exceptionalism, as while “white Americans sought to ignore, if not deny, the political motivations of black and colored Saint Domingans and to evade the issue of slavery...they could not be confident that their particular brand of republicanism (either Federalist or Democratic Republican) would deliver them from Saint-Domingue’s fate” and, thus, feared the presence and influence of French Creole refugees and their slaves in cities like Philadelphia (123). White Americans worried that the influx of black slaves, travelling with their French Creole owners from the ex-French colony, would have disastrous consequences for slave owners in the United States, by disseminating dangerous ideas of liberty and equality; a sentiment echoed in *Arthur Mervyn*’s depictions of black Haitian refugees roaming the pestilence-infected streets of Philadelphia, where pestilence becomes a metaphor for xenophobic fears. However, in *Encountering Revolution*, Ashli White claims that, paradoxically, the Haitian Revolution, instead of functioning as a deterrent of the viability of slavery, shaped America’s ideas of exceptionalism and reinforced pro-slavery positions, as the New Republic came to believe that its brand of slavery was different from the cruelty displayed in French colonies, and that American superior moral values



would prevent slave insurrections of the kind that displaced Saint Domingue's French Creoles. White argues that conversations in newspapers, and public opinion about Saint Domingue, reported in print media, contributed to the development of American exceptionalism, and to anti-French sentiments, and that "the Haitian Revolution helped to forge this crucial moment in U.S. nation building," by using the French example to distance U.S. slaveholding practices from it, justifying the United States' anomalous position as both a slave-owning nation and a democratic Republic, so that "despite the ambivalence that marked U.S. attitudes toward the revolution, the result was a bolstering of the slaveholding republic, as white Americans used the exiles as a foil in arguing their own nation's exceptionalism" (204). Ashli White's argument reverberates in the characterization of Arthur Mervyn who goes through a process of "Americanization"—or distancing from both West Indian Creoles and Saint Dominguan refugees—largely based on Arthur's whiteness (which the novel equates with his moral purity and integrity) and exceptionalism. However, this process ultimately fails, demonstrating Arthur's and the nation's corruption, as I show in the following analysis of Brown's novel.

#### MOVEMENT, CONTAGION, CAPITAL, AND IDENTITY IN *ARTHUR MERVYN'S* REPUBLIC

The French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, immigration, race, and slavery form the subtext of Brown's outwardly "exceptionalist" novel, focused on the back and forth movements of its naive American eponymous hero, Arthur. The emphasis on movement in *Arthur Mervyn*, epitomized by the hero's physical and psychological back and forth journeying, reflects the state of flux of the *fin de siècle*, with its continuous transformations and reconfigurations enacted in a transatlantic, geopolitical landscape, and set in motion by slavery, revolutions, commerce, travel, and immigration. In

particular, the novel follows the path and movement of slavery's money—which becomes another metaphor for contagion and corruption—as it changes hands and infiltrates the New Republic from Guadeloupe and Jamaica. In fact, Thomas Welbeck, the novel's villain, comes into his fortune by appropriating the late Vincenzo Lodi's money, resulting from the sale of his plantation in Guadeloupe. Lodi's French-educated son brings the money into the United States, after Vincenzo is killed by a slave who, not having received manumission as he was promised, “assassinated Lodi in the open street, and resigned himself, without a struggle, to the punishment which the law had provided for such a deed” (Brown 75). Vincenzo Lodi's decision to liquidate his Caribbean estate (which results in his murder) reflects the fears of slave revolts that characterize the 1790s; these fears are epitomized by the figure of the slave who “resists his own reification as an asset and takes revenge” by killing Lodi, setting in motion a “chain reaction,” which shows that liquid capital has no fixed ownership and can circulate freely from person to person, like a contagion (Doolen 84).

Lodi's fortune—the proceeds of slavery—is then transferred from Lodi's dying son to Thomas Welbeck, and eventually to Mervyn, whose accidental recovery of the remaining capital from Lodi's estate—hidden in an Italian manuscript young Lodi entrusts to Welbeck—places Mervyn in a dangerous position, analogous to Welbeck's, who becomes a sort of gothic *dopplegänger* for Mervyn. Arthur, in fact, is temporarily tempted by the corrupting currency, and reflects, “the money was placed, without guilt or artifice, in [his] possession” (Brown 101). He debates with himself on the appropriateness of retaining the large sum: “My fortune had been thus unexpectedly and wondrously propitious. How was I to profit by her favor? Would not this sum enable me to gather

around all the instruments of pleasure?”(Brown 101). However, further consideration sets in doubts, and he concludes, “By retaining it, shall I not be as culpable as Welbeck? It came into his possession as it came into mine, without a crime; but my knowledge of the true proprietor [Lodi’s sister] is equally certain” (Brown 101). Although Mervyn, by the end of his reflection, decides to return the remaining capital to Clemenza Lodi, other plans keep him from this purpose, until he recklessly burns the money.

Similarly, the proceeds of the sale of the Maurices’ plantation in Jamaica are brought into the United States by Watson and restored to the Maurices by Mervyn, who therefore participates, once more, in the transfer of capital, gained through West Indian slavery, into the United States and demonstrates, by his involvement, that the New Republic—as well as its hero—cannot completely disentangle itself from commerce with Caribbean colonies, and with association to the profits of their plantation economy.<sup>42</sup> Mervyn’s guilt constitutes his inability to dissociate himself from the exchange of capital in a transatlantic economy based on slavery. Mervyn’s connection with West Indian slave money, even when he justifies his involvement as his duty to return the capital to its rightful owners, shows that Mervyn cannot distance himself from Creoles (false like Welbeck, and real like the Maurices), with whom he comes in contact through the transmission and movement of capital.

The gothic villain of *Arthur Mervyn*, Thomas Welbeck, around and against whose self-fashioned persona Arthur's own identity seems to take shape, is a quintessential transatlantic character; a “fluid social persona produced through a series of transactional

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<sup>42</sup> Welbeck is guilty of having seduced Watson’s married sister. This causes an altercation between the men, who were once friends, during which Welbeck murders Watson. Welbeck is unaware that Watson was carrying back the proceeds of the sale of the Maurices’ plantation. Later in the narrative, Mervyn retrieves the Maurices’ capital from Watson’s cadaver.

performances,” who represents the corruption of a market economy developed out of transatlantic commerce and slavery (Goddu 35). Welbeck's identity, which remains mysterious throughout the novel, linking him to the gothic tradition, is not rooted in a specific geographical location or backed by a family name. On the contrary, it represents the progressive disintegration of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' idea that one's background can be ascertained by one's aspect and possessions. The seventeenth century's assumption that one's ancestry and good name are reflected in one's deportment and apparel crumbles in the person of Thomas Welbeck, and identity becomes a matter of illusion and performance, something that can be worn or discarded. Thomas Welbeck is described as a Creole, or a West Indian "nabob" (Brown 36), a derogative appellative for someone who made his fortune in the colonies and, after America's Independence, as Goudie argues in *Creole America*, a "term of identity consistently defiled in the discourse of Creole degeneracy [opposed to] the renovated Creole identity of the 'American'" (177).<sup>43</sup> By posing as a West Indian Creole, Welbeck simultaneously embodies the corrupting influence ensuing from wealth acquired in the Caribbean, and the deceitfulness of the Old World. By his own description of his past misdeeds he confesses to Mervyn, Welbeck participates in contemporary American myths that associated both the Old World and Caribbean Creoles with degeneracy and loose morals; in fact, he says of himself that “the perverseness of [his] nature led him on from one guilty thought to another... A thousand methods of subsistence, honest but laborious, were at [his] command, but to these [he] entertained an irreconcilable aversion. Ease and the respect

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<sup>43</sup> The term “nabob,” is here applied to West Indian Creoles, but it originally refers to a very wealthy European who has made his fortune in India; a nabob is someone who is either a European born in India, or one who has lived in India for a very long time and “one returned from India with a fortune” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 902).

attendant upon opulence, [he was] willing to purchase at the price of ever-wakeful suspicion and eternal remorse” (Brown 71-2). Welbeck’s self-portrait makes him the antithesis of the American hero.

The character Welbeck, in fact, partakes in both the corruption of Old Europe and the negative qualities of deceitfulness, lust, and laziness attributed to West Indian Creoles, as can also be seen in Mary Hassal’s description of white Creoles as a “degenerate race” in Sansay’s novel (Sansay 141). Welbeck, by his own account, is associated with England, specifically with the port of Liverpool where his father (a trader of Liverpool), left [him by his] insolvency...without any means of support" (Brown 69). Welbeck’s beginnings in Liverpool connect this character to the slave trade. In fact, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the city of Liverpool was the main slave trading port in England; it participated in Atlantic trading, known as the triangular trade. Ships left the port of Liverpool with goods such as cotton, woolens, guns, iron, alcohol and tobacco, headed for the coasts of Africa where they traded these goods for slaves. From Africa they continued, through the Middle Passage, to the West Indies and North America where the slaves were sold.<sup>44</sup> The port of Liverpool's association with slave trade, therefore, connects the New Republic to Old World's slavery and shady commercial deals, through the figure of Welbeck, the novel’s gothic antagonist, demonstrating the impossibility of insulating the New Republic from the permeability of corruption resulting from transatlantic commercial routes and money exchange.

An echo of the French Revolution can be heard in Arthur's conjectures on the identity of Welbeck and his “sister” Clemenza: "I knew that the present was a period of

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<sup>44</sup> See Dumbell’s “The Beginnings of Liverpool Cotton Trade.”

revolution and hostility. Might not these [Welbeck and Miss Lodi] be illustrious fugitives from Provence or the Milanese? Their portable wealth, which might reasonably be supposed to be great, they have transported hither...Perhaps they discovered a remarkable resemblance between me and one who stood in the relation of son to Welbeck and of brother to the lady. This youth might have perished on the scaffold or in war" (Brown 48). The shadows of the French Revolution and of the *guillotine*, evoked in Arthur's imaginative speculations, function as agents of dislocation and separation of landowners from their estates, and furnish the basis on which Welbeck's false identity is validated by Arthur. In other words, one's family name can no longer be authenticated by the tangible presence of one's landed property; one's social status as a gentleman becomes uncertain as it can only be inferred by looks, as revolutions and migration unsettle the very foundations of one's identity.

Teresa A. Goddu, in her analysis of *Arthur Mervyn* as a gothic romance, argues that "the commercial world is associated with the gothic" and the yellow-fever stricken Philadelphia turns into a "gothic underworld," in which the emphasis on "black labor," in the shape of hearse drivers and black servants Arthur meets in the ghost city, connects the urban world of commerce to the slave trade (35-6). Welbeck represents the link between the corruption of the Old World and its West Indian slave economy, and the threat that such corruption represents for the new American Republic, especially through the immigration of ex-slaves from Caribbean colonies, such as Saint Domingue, but also British colonies like Jamaica. Americans, in fact, paradoxically believed that their brand of slavery was more humane than that practiced by the British and the French. This corruption is epitomized in the pestilence, with its "vapor, infectious and deadly...a

poisonous and subtle fluid” Arthur can “taste” rather than “smell,” believed to have been spread by foreign contact and trade (Brown 114). The trope of contagion, exemplified by Brown’s depiction of the fever-stricken Philadelphia, is described by Ashli White, who explains, “among slave holders in the Atlantic World, one of the common tropes used in describing slave revolts was contagion. The term likened an insurrection of the enslaved to an unpredictable and voracious malady, spreading quickly and striking the innocent without warning” (124). Contagion in *Arthur Mervyn* assumes metaphorical meanings associated to the New Republic’s interaction with both West Indian Creoles and French refugees.

Welbeck’s failed attempt to profit from a West Indian commercial enterprise with the corrupt merchant Thetford illustrates the risks involved in such ventures, especially as the Haitian Revolution increased the already high risks involved in navigation, following the war between England and France (1793). This conflict promoted the use of neutral U.S. ships to transport French and English goods to Europe, giving United States’ traders increased access to Caribbean markets through the policy of “re-export,” which re-directed goods to the United States, as “neutral trade” agents, and increased contact between the New Republic and its Caribbean neighbors (Doolen 77). The failed business venture that accelerates Welbeck’s precipitation into insolvency remains purposely ambiguous. Brown foreshadows the failure of this venture, as Thetford mentions that he is planning to cheat “the nabob” out of his investment in a conversation Mervyn overhears while locked in Thetford’s closet, in which Thetford defends his fraudulent scheme by his assertion that, anyhow, “[Welbeck’s] wealth flows from a bad source” (Brown 36). Thetford’s plan to profit from Welbeck’s West Indian investment

demonstrates the corruption of “a mercantile community that operates according to such mentality” as Thetford’s, as well as the influence of the Saint Domingue Revolution on the outcome of such ventures (Goudie 177). Regardless of whether the incident, which causes the ship to be condemned and the insurance to be void, is fabricated by Thetford and his brother to buy back the ship and its cargo at auction prices, it immediately evokes the “specter of servile war being carried like fever to the United States from the West Indies by the nation’s diseased paracolonial commerce,” exemplified by the “conspiratorial mulattoes” whose presence onboard causes the cargo to be confiscated by a British privateer (Goudie 177). The failure of Welbeck’s enterprise speaks to the fears, shared by Americans at the turn of the century, to engage in commercial exchanges with European colonies, a position later supported by President Jefferson.<sup>45</sup>

#### WRITING, CATALOGUING AND STORYTELLING AS PATHS TO IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The character Welbeck, who invents his persona as he counterfeits his money, suggests that “stories and money are both fictions that circulate without stable referents, earning credit through exchange,” and metonymically casts a shade of doubt on Arthur’s own emphasis on storytelling as path to true knowledge and personal worth (Goddu 36). Arthur not only tells his story to Dr. Watson and writes it down, as directed by Mrs. Wentworth; he is also employed by Welbeck as an amanuensis, as Welbeck has a “maimed hand” and cannot “write accurately” (Brown 47). Welbeck’s maimed hand reflects his lack of transparency and legibility. The trope of writing runs throughout the

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Jefferson (President from 1801 to 1809) believed the new Republic should become economically independent and self-sufficient from other nations, and in particular from Britain and France, by developing its agriculture. He believed that the United States should not become dependent on European powers for its sustenance. He imposed the Embargo Act (1807) on both French and British ships, which were not allowed to stop in American ports, if not authorized by the President (See Milkis 85-115).



novel, alongside the trope of movement of peoples and money. In fact, the novel's emphasis on the need to record and re-tell events to guarantee their truthfulness, and the hero's obsession with cataloguing, ordering and re-ordering seem to attempt, paradoxically, to counter the sense of dislocation, loss of identity and insecurity that characterize the hero of this novel—and the New Republic—in the 1790s.

The idea of cataloguing is also connected to race and to the figure of the Creole, as Mervyn “catalogues” the physical traits of French Creoles and Black servants he meets, in particular during his journey from Philadelphia to Baltimore in which he encounters a refugee from Saint Domingue with his black servants and a monkey and takes “an exact account of the features, proportions, looks, and gestures of the monkey, the Congolese, and the Creole Gaul” (Brown 284). In this humorous scene Mervyn observes the visages of the Blacks, the French Creole and the monkey to “discern the differences and sameness between them,” suggesting by this statement that the French Creole and the “blacks, who gazed in stupid wonder” and spoke with “open mouthed, half-articulate, monotonous, singsong jargon” resemble the monkey, whose name of “Dominique!...Diable noir” alludes to the Haitian Revolution (Brown 284). The idea of cataloguing is connected to the rise of the genre of natural history. Christopher Iannini, in *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery and the Routes of American Literature* (2012) connects slavery in the Atlantic World and the plantation system with the rise of the genre of natural history “as a new scientific discipline, intellectual obsession and literary form” (3). Eighteenth-century natural science, argues Iannini, influenced plantation literature in the Americas; and the region of the Caribbean—to which the southern States were considered an extension—is central not only to the

development of colonial prose narrative, which is influenced by natural science, but also to the development of the literature of North America, in the context of Atlantic slavery.

Christopher Iannini follows the lead of Ralph Bauer and Susan Scott Parish in establishing a link between natural history and literature in West Atlantic European colonies, which greatly influenced the literature of the United States, as Mervyn's cataloguing obsession, in connection to race, demonstrates. Iannini argues that the region he defines as "Greater Caribbean" and "extended Caribbean," which included the southern United States, and which shared "tropical and semitropical ecosystems" and an economy based on plantation slavery, was "stitched together...by patterns of commercial exchange and human mobility that traversed imperial, national, and linguistic boundaries, often in blatant disregard of official mercantile policies" (10). These economic and ideological connections were maintained throughout the early nineteenth century, in spite of changing boundaries and historical factors such as the political independence of the American colonies and the post-emancipation isolation of Haiti, and are reflected in literature of the Americas. This literature is clearly influenced by the science of natural history and by extensive publications on the flora and fauna of the Caribbean regions, in the form of travel writings or treaties. The influence of natural history on the genre of the novel extends to the development of the early American novel. Iannini argues that natural history is employed, in an eclectic array of eighteenth-century texts, not strictly as a "scientific" tool, but as allegorical, or as "specimen-as-emblem," where, for example, depictions of animal predation and naturalistic scenes in literature often became emblematic of the brutality and violence of slavery (23-29).

Mervyn's interaction with the Jamaican servants in Mrs. Maurice's house also illustrates his cataloguing impulse and his fear and deep distrust of black Creoles. This distrust on the part of Mervyn is translated into an analysis of how the Maurices' "negroes" feel at the sight of Mervyn, which amounts to the transference of Mervyn's own feelings onto the black Creoles and, at the same time, to an acknowledgement of Mervyn's sense of superiority. He explains, "A Negro came, of a very unpropitious aspect, and, opening the door, looked at me in silence. To my question... he made some answer in a jargon which I could not understand" (Brown 290). Having been turned down by the black gate keeper, who speaks in an incomprehensible jargon that renders him alien and not quite human, Mervyn feels entitled to "lift the latch" (Brown 290), and "[bully] his way inside to see Mrs. Maurice," as he has done many times in the course of the narrative (Levine 156). Doolen argues that the act of breaking in turns Mervyn into "a white intruder in a house defined by miscegenation and supported by slavery" (99). However, Mervyn is oblivious of his transgression, and instead of seeing himself as an intruder, regards the Blacks with suspicion as they, "looked upon each other, as if waiting for an example. Their habitual deference for everything *white*, no doubt, held their hands from what they regarded as a profanation" (Brown 291). Instead of comprehending his inappropriateness as the cause of the servants' distrust, Mervyn describes the black Creoles as potentially capable of unmentionable violence, imagining he knows what they are thinking about him.

Like Vincenzo Lodi, the Maurices have sold their plantation in Jamaica—an island that, like Guadeloupe, had become dangerous due to the threat of revolts—and have moved to the United States with their black slaves. Mrs. Maurice, a white Creole, is

described as living in a dwelling “naked and dreary...sitting in an ill-furnished chamber...and visibly infirm. The lines of her countenance...far from laying claim to my [Mervyn’s] reverence” (Brown 289, 291). The dreariness of Mrs. Maurice’s surrounding, her illness, her rudeness and ingratitude, translated by Arthur as “sordidness, stupidity and illiberal suspicion,” represent the ways in which Mervyn catalogues her West Indian Creole alterity, alongside her servants’ menacing behavior and incomprehensible language (Brown 293). Mrs. Maurice seems to be lacking the qualities associated with proper womanhood and to be a female version of a cunning West Indian merchant.

The Maurices’ story also runs parallel to the story of Vincenzo Lodi, as both families fear insurrection and the loss of their plantations. This shows that “the fortunes of the characters of the novel are deeply implicated in the (post)colonial Atlantic world...its multiple relocations of people and property...and the ups and downs of the slave-based Atlantic economy,” and that Mervyn is implicated too, as Mrs. Maurice unceremoniously points out, as she accuses him of being complicit in the disappearance of her money instead of showing the gratitude that Arthur expects from her (Mackenthun 347). Moreover, the story of the Maurice family illustrates how West Indian slave plantations are liquidated because of the threat of slave revolts and emancipation and turned into liquid capital, which is brought into the United States, and, when separated from its West Indian owners, freely circulates, “infecting Philadelphia with corruption and murder” and staining the hands not only of corrupt “nabobs” like Welbeck, but also of *not quite* naïve American heroes, like Arthur (Goudie 94).

The obsession with describing and cataloguing people’s physical traits inaugurates scientific racism, which escalates in the nineteenth century, as well as

underscoring Mervyn's attempt to re-define who should be included in the renewed post-independence American citizenship and identity.<sup>46</sup> However, while Arthur is busy re-defining a new American (white) personhood versus the West Indian Creoles he encounters, the novel simultaneously establishes a series of resemblances between Mervyn and various French and Italian (Creole) characters, such as Clavering, Clemenza Lodi's brother, and Maravegli, thus disavowing Mervyn's—and the New Republic's—claim of distinction between the new American citizen and the (white) Creole. As Mervyn points out, “identity itself frequently depends upon a casual likeness,” as that which makes Welbeck “startle” and Clemenza “shriek with surprise” when they encounter Arthur (Brown 49, 44-5). Dressed “all in the French Style,” Mervyn looks like his friend Clavering, and like the “miniature portrait” of Lodi with “its resemblance to [Mervyn's] own visage” being so strong that “for a moment [he] imagined [himself] to have been the original from which it had been drawn” (Brown 44, 67). These mirroring effects have the function to undercut the hero's claim to American exceptionality and to show that appearance is never an undisputable proof of identity. *Arthur Mervyn's* mirroring effects blur the differences between the American hero and his white Creole counterparts.

However, these are not the only mirroring effects in the novel. Before Mervyn is attacked by a West Indian mulatto in the house of the dying Maravegli, he sees “some appearance in the mirror,” which at first seems as if “the dying man had started from his bed” and then reveals itself to be “a human figure” with “one eye, a scar upon his cheek,

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<sup>46</sup> Scientific racism is “the act of justifying inequalities between natural groups of people by recourse to science. It is the result of a conjunction of two cultural values or ideologies: (1) that natural categories of the human species are of different overall worth; and (2) that science provides a source of authoritative knowledge. These ideas arose separately, but at about the same time in the late seventeenth century” (“Scientific Racism” 1).

a tawny skin, a form grotesquely misproportioned, brawny as Hercules” (Brown 116). The Black Creole at whom Mervyn glances, through the medium of the mirror, is first depicted as a ghostly appearance, and then as a grotesque and terrifying image that contrasts with “Mervyn’s uncommon countrified good looks: [which are] unlike [the man’s] monstrously scarred visage” (Goudie 183). The image in the mirror appears grotesque and disproportioned, recalling similar images in later American gothic novels, such as George Lippard’s *The Quaker City* (1854), a urban gothic and sensational novel also set in Philadelphia, in which the gothic and the grotesque are used as metaphors for the corruption of the city’s elite, and their black servants, such as Devil Bug, the grotesque black monster and guardian of Monk Hall, described as “a thickset specimen of flesh and blood, with a short body, marked by immense broad shoulders, long arms, and thin distorted legs...[his]head ludicrously large in proportion to the body...tangled and matted [hair] over a forehead, protuberant to deformity...a flat nose with wide nostrils...an immense mouth [with] heavy lips [and] two long rows of bristling teeth...one eye...while the other socket was empty” (Lippard 51). In *Arthur Mervyn* the gothic and the grotesque are similarly employed as metaphors for the corruption of the city—represented as contagion caused by an unwelcome foreign presence—where black figures roaming the ghost-like streets are depicted using images that connect natural history to the fear of black intruders, as Americans were “preoccupied with Caribbean slavery and commerce and a social world in which the wealth produced by Caribbean plantations was vital to...national survival” (Iannini 29). Doolen claims that “the mirror gives a reflection one cannot trust,” attesting to the paranoia that spread with the “suspicions of a foreign threat” under the disguise of a trusted servant (87). The “fearful

dream” of captivity and bondage that follows Mervyn’s loss of consciousness, after he receives “a blow upon [his] temple,” seems to conflate the threat of the disease as “abyss” and bottomless pit with the racial threat represented by the “two grim and gigantic figures” ready to cast Mervyn in the pit (Brown 116).

In a later scene, Brown creates another implicit mirroring effect; this time, however, the “ghost” is not a mulatto attacker but Mervyn himself, who skulks around Watson’s house and frightens a black servant girl. Mervyn thinks that the girl’s “innocent and regular features wanted only a different hue to make them beautiful,” as he watches the family from outside; but when the girl “caught a glance of [his] figure through the glass” she screamed in a “tone of half surprise, half horror” (Brown 286). Mervyn, in his description of the servant girl, links “innocent” to “regular features,” and “hue” to beauty, articulating the correlations between morality, skin tone, and aesthetics in his racial classification system. However, in this scene it is he who threatens the tranquility of this “setting of romanticized US racial slavery” and Southern domestic tranquility with his ghostly presence (Goudie 196). Goudie argues that, in observing the scene, Mervyn—and the readers—momentarily participate in the “gaze of the master...and patriarch,” and that Mervyn “delights in exercising a measured terror over the feelings and emotions of the subjects he observes,” by which he is able to invert the racial fears he experienced in Philadelphia and to become “the apparitional attacker,” whose “spectral whiteness” temporarily embodies the “disembodied, horrifying heart of racial darkness that the West Indies have come to represent in his mind,” and from which he strives to liberate himself (196). Reading the two scenes side by side highlights the ambiguity of Mervyn’s position

and of his claim to innocence, as he tries to assert his identity through the gradual development of a racially supremacist consciousness.

Arthur's need to classify the individuals he encounters is born out of his traumatic experience in Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic, where he confronts West Indian refugees from Saint Domingue and the threat of racial violence they embody, epitomized by his "fearful dream," in which "two grim and gigantic figures" are ready to throw him into a bottomless pit, and by the black hearse driver ready to "put [a man] in his coffin before the breath was fairly gone" (Brown 116, 111). These encounters influence Mervyn's identity construction, as well as his definition of the national citizen's character, in relation to West Indian presences within and without national borders. The shadows of the French and Haitian Revolutions, and their repercussions on the Atlantic World, lurk behind Arthur's interaction with strangers during the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic and behind his attempt to make sense of a confusing and unstable reality. In the 1790s the busy city of Philadelphia, capital of the newly formed American Republic was, in fact, a prime destination for domestic and foreign immigration, and became a popular refuge for those fleeing both France and Saint Domingue.

*Arthur Mervin* is set after the onset of the French Revolution, in the years of the Reign of Terror. The novel demonstrates that the effects of the revolutionary force unleashed in France crossed the Atlantic, and that the New Republic's Founding Fathers inspired not only French Jacobins, but also the heart of black slaves in Saint Domingue, who put their "human rights" to attain "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*" on the same level as



those of the French or the white Americans who fought in the War of Independence.<sup>47</sup> One of the problems of the 1790s, and of *Arthur Mervyn*, is that of reconciling the realities of Saint Domingue with the words of the Declaration of Independence, which affirms that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (Article 1). However, it is clear that for Americans *all men* stands for *all white men*, and that the fear of violence perpetrated by black rebels, as it was depicted in accounts of Saint Domingue's bloodshed, echoes through the pages of Brown's novel. Sibylle Fisher in *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery* explains that "in response to the revolution, a cordon sanitaire was drawn around the island to interrupt the flow of information and people...[and] the only newly independent state in the Americas to have unequivocally abolished racial slavery (and until the 1830s, the only post slavery state in the New world), Haiti was also the only one that was not invited to the Pan-American conference of 1826" (4). Fisher argues that the refusal to recognize both the political motives of the rebels and the significance of Haiti's independence—thus, the refusal to place the Haitian Revolution on the same level as the other great revolutions of the age, demonstrated by John Quincy Adams' refusal to establish diplomatic relations with Haiti—is a position that is also shared by twentieth-century historians, who strategically omitted Haiti's accomplishments from history books (4). However this tendency to downplay the importance of Haiti and the seriousness of the rebels' motivations, did not prevent the Haitian Revolution from becoming a constant

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<sup>47</sup> The Reign of Terror (Sep 1793-July 1794) was a period of dictatorship and bloodshed under the Jacobins, characterized by mass executions of suspected traitors: "Between September 1793 and July 1794 some 25,000 victims were dragged to public squares in carts...and delivered to the guillotines" (See Burmmett et al. 619).

source of lore and an inspiration for the gothic; as both Brown's and Sansay's texts demonstrate.

Arthur's "scientific" racism and racially supremacist consciousness, which escalate in the second part of the novel, and his efforts to catalogue the racial traits of black and French Creoles he encounters in Philadelphia during the epidemic and during his trip to Baltimore, seem to respond not only to racial fears, mostly expressed in the metaphor of contamination, but also to the principal question underlying the novel's historical period: are black Creoles in Saint Domingue entitled to fight for the same freedoms and rights Americans fought for and, if so, how is the New Republic to reconcile Saint Domingue's revolutionary script to its own? The contradictory way in which *Arthur Mervin* depicts West Indian Creoles is an indication of the internal struggle the nation is undergoing in relation to the events destabilizing the Atlantic World (such as the Haitian Revolution), and to its self-assumed role as beacon of liberty against the corruption of Europe and its colonial empires. Of course, the necessities of trade agreements, and of securing a position of power in transatlantic commerce, come to complicate the already problematic American construction of a new "non-Creole" white self.

The novel also draws parallels between the anarchy and violence that characterizes the Reign of Terror in France, which flooded Philadelphia with French refugees, alongside refugees from Saint Domingue, and the social mayhem caused by the yellow fever epidemic. The New Republic, initially sympathetic to the French principles of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, now sees the influence of France on the New World as contagion, and therefore as something corrupting the American nation and inciting slaves

to revolt. The appearance of Jacobinism in the United States coincides with the epidemic of 1793.<sup>48</sup> This conflates, in the American consciousness, the French Revolution and the plague, which are equally perceived as threats to the New Republic, since, as John Miller believed, "the French would 'contaminate' the American character: their 'loose morals and irreligion threatened to infect Americans'" (qtd. in Samuels 225).<sup>49</sup> The ideological overlapping of contagion and immigration is apparent in John Miller's above articulation of contemporary fears, which are linked to the movement of peoples across the Atlantic—of which Welbeck becomes the emblem—and which forms the subtext of Brown's novel. Thus, in *Arthur Mervyn*, we can map three simultaneous threats to the American character and to the American nation represented by the novel's eponymous hero.

#### INSTABILITY AND SELF-FRAGMENTATION OF THE AMERICAN HERO

The first threat comes from the Old World, and crosses the Atlantic as triangular slave trade and shady commercial deals, evoked by the reference to the port of Liverpool being Welbeck's origin. The second threat also originates in the Old World, with the exodus from France that followed the French Revolution's bloody Reign of Terror. The third threat ensues from the movement of slaves and their French Creole masters, resulting from the Saint Dominguan Revolution, culminating in 1804 with the proclamation of the first Black independent state in the New World, alongside

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<sup>48</sup>A Jacobin is "a member of a radical democratic club established in Paris in 1789 in the old convent of the Jacobins" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 726). The term is used to refer to any extreme radical, holding revolutionary ideas. Federalists referred to the Democratic-Republicans, who supported the French Revolution, as the Jacobin Party (See Milkis 89-92).

<sup>49</sup> See Miller's *Crisis in Freedom* 40-3.

immigration from British West Indian colonies to the East Coast of the United States.<sup>50</sup> Reading Brown's novel, it becomes apparent that these trajectories of movement and contamination overlap, and are inextricably interconnected to the economic and political development of the New Republic. Mervyn's ideological journey in search of an American new self, and his continuous efforts to document this journey, may attest to the strength of Mervyn's convictions, and to his determination. However, Mervyn's convictions often fail in execution, as do his attempts to disengage himself from the lines of contamination that keep enclosing him, because of his inability to sever his relationship with characters such as Welbeck, or to keep away from the fever-stricken Creoles with whom he comes in contact.

In this process of shifting self-definition, which underscores the unstable nature of the early American self, complicit in the corruption of transatlantic commercial routes, the novel paints a figure of an "American Creole" that is never clear cut and distinct from the "other Creoles" Mervyn tries to separate himself from, both physically and ideologically. In spite of Mervyn's insistence on his moral worth, the reader remains unconvinced, doubting all along his self-proclaimed innocence and naïveté. The novel shows that there is no respite, no refuge from the instability and self-fragmentation linked to West Indian commerce and deception, neither in the country as locus of naïveté and purity, nor in the act of writing as a way to re-order and cleanse reality. The more Arthur insists on his rectitude, the more the reader doubts his outwardly stated motives for his

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<sup>50</sup> Saint Dominguan refugee began to immigrate to the U.S. East Coast as early as 1791; however, immigration peaked in the summer of 1793—after the French lost the battle of Cap Français (depicted in Sansay's *Secret History*), which resulted in the first declaration of emancipation by Toussaint Louverture. A second influx of Saint Douminguan immigrants followed the withdrawal of British troops in 1798, and a third peak in immigration is recorded after Haiti's declaration of independence in 1804. The last surge of French exiles to the United States occurred in 1809, when "ten thousand Saint-Dominguans fled from their first haven, Cuba, again seeking sanctuary, this time in the United States" (White 5).

unorthodox actions, such as his need to break in people's homes, even if it is "so contrary to ordinary rules" (Brown 249), or his decision to personally return the Maurices' money when "he is not a neutral party in the affair"(Goudie 195), but participates in Welbeck's schemes, "guided by blind and foreign impulses" as he tries to justify himself in his own mind (Brown 91). As mentioned earlier, Mervyn's decision to go to Baltimore to make restitution of the Maurices' fortune is, in itself, "a test of his criminality or virtuousness" and a proof of his guilt—hidden behind a mask of superiority—for his complicity in the concealment of Watson's body, as well as evidence of the inevitable involvement of the American nation, through its most well-intentioned citizens, in the exchange of slavery's money (Goudie 195).

The metaphor of contagion, dramatized in *Arthur Mervyn*, is associated with U.S. commercial expansion in the Caribbean, which increased after 1793, due to greater U.S. access to Caribbean markets through the policy of "re-export," which re-directed French and British goods to the United States as "neutral trade" agents (Doolen 77). Federalist propaganda and scare tactics also significantly contributed to the fears of contagion and to the political debate on the yellow fever *Arthur Mervyn* taps into. Federalists argued that the fever resulted from contact with infected French foreigners and revolutionaries, rather than from poor hygiene, stagnant sewers, and over-populated cities, as the Republicans believed; a conviction echoed in Mervyn's rendition of his conversation with Medlicote: "He combated an opinion I had casually formed respecting the origins of this epidemic, and imputed it, not to infected substances imported from the East or West, but to a morbid constitution of the atmosphere, owing wholly or in part to filthy streets, airless habitations and squalid persons" (Brown 126). Unlike the Republicans, who

blamed the epidemic on poor health habits and lacking infrastructures, Federalists saw the yellow fever as a “foreign disease” or as a direct consequence of increased foreign influx to the United States, brought about by the French and Saint Domingue Revolutions and by commerce with Saint Domingue as “2,000 French refugees fleeing the Black revolution in St. Domingue [...] arrived in Philadelphia at the end of the summer [1793]” (Goddu 35).

*Arthur Mervyn* echoes the racial anxieties that accompany U.S. economic expansion in the Caribbean and the fears that the example provided by Saint Domingue could influence American slaves to rebel, as Ashli White argues in *Encountering Revolution*. The novel further links U.S. entanglement with West Indian corrupt trade to a crisis of national identity, as represented by the pair Welbeck-Mervyn, and by Mervyn’s inability to distance himself from Welbeck’s influence and to find a stable sense of self. Furthermore, the exchange of money and goods between the West Indian colonies and the New Republic has the unsettling consequence of bringing the threat of Black insurrection closer to home—as the incident of the “two French mulattoes” clandestinely carrying “two sabers” on the U.S. vessel chartered by Welbeck demonstrates—and of reconfiguring the ways in which white American identity is constructed vis-à-vis the lurking presence of the Caribbean Creole (Brown 81).

*Arthur Mervyn* should be read in the context of the 1790s’ debate between Federalists and Republicans on multiple, often contradictory, issues centering on the need to strike a balance between a new American identity, based on the ideals of liberalism, and an equally crucial need to establish long-term political, military and economic supremacy. The Federalists, led by Hamilton (who was a Creole) and Adams, favored a

central government with heightened control over the States, a strong army and an active military intervention policy in foreign affairs, as well as increased trade with the West Indies and an expansionist politics that required improving U.S. relations with Britain.<sup>51</sup> The Federalists were against supporting the French in the Revolution; they opposed anti-monarchy groups and the immigration of French revolutionaries and Saint Dominguan refugees to the United States. On the other hand, the Democratic-Republican Party, led by Jefferson and Madison, believed in strong local control by the States rather than central government; they supported the French Revolution and advocated U.S. backing of French revolutionary efforts.<sup>52</sup> The Republicans did not want to increase U.S. military power, as they believed this would constitute a threat to individual liberties. While the Federalists favored trade, commerce and expansion abroad, the Republicans advocated an economy based on farming.<sup>53</sup> *Arthur Mervyn* echoes and complicates this debate, both in Brown's use of the yellow fever as the central metaphor around which the figure of the Creole is shaped, and in Brown's ability to set up a series of dichotomies—such as city vs. country, naiveté vs. corruption, enlightenment vs. gothic—to then proceed to dismantle them. Through these dichotomies Brown shows that corruption cannot be circumscribed to a particular location or set of individuals, but circulates like currency, which travels from hand to hand, crosses the Atlantic, and spreads to French and British

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<sup>51</sup> Goudie argues that Alexander Hamilton, a Creole born on the Caribbean island of Nevis, negotiates his Creole upbringing and the New Republic's necessity to trade with the West Indies—seen as “degenerate”—by advocating that the United States should promote homogeneity at home, by limiting immigration, and dominance abroad and over the rest of the Atlantic World, thus “erecting a creole regenerate U.S. American Empire,” and negating America's historical and economic affinity to the West Indies (95).

<sup>52</sup> For a history of the New Republic see Wood's *Empire of Liberty*.

<sup>53</sup> For a complete discussion see Wood's chapter “The Federalist Program,” in *Empire of Liberty* 95-139.

West Indian colonies, and inevitably is laundered into the U.S. economy by merchants like Maurice, Thetford, and Welbeck, causing the breakdown of U.S. morals.<sup>54</sup>

### THE (MIS) IDENTIFICATION OF LOOKS AND TRUTH

The novel blends the “dichotomy between Internationalism and Isolationism,” which characterizes the Federalist-Republican debate, within a representation of the yellow fever as “pestilence” and as a “sociocultural agent” capable to determine who belongs to the new American nation and who does not (Kunow 28-9). In order to “belong,” Arthur must repeatedly prove his innocence by re-telling his story, and must constantly draw on his “simple and ingenuous” looks and “uncommon but manly beauty... unspoiled by luxury” as corroboration of his inner goodness as, in Dr. Stevens’ opinion, “he that listens to [Mervyn’s] words may questions their truth, but he who looks upon his countenance when speaking, cannot withhold his faith” (Brown 10, 179). Dr. Stevens, upon finding a sickly Mervyn, brings him back to health, furnishing the motive for the telling of Mervyn’s story, despite his neighbors’ words of caution to which Dr. Stevens responds corroborating Mervyn’s innocence and sincerity on the strength of his beautiful countenance, rather than on the influence of his words. Mervyn’s looks therefore function as a parameter of acceptance and belonging to the new American nation.

Dr. Stevens’ reliance on Mervyn’s aspect, as gauge to his personality, echoes one of the tenets of sentimental literature, which asserts that a beautiful soul is reflected in a beautiful visage. The novel, therefore, brings forward a discourse that associates

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<sup>54</sup> Although Brown’s novel is set in the year 1793, it serves also as a commentary on the last decade of the century as Brown writes in 1799.



goodness to looks in the new American hero, and therefore metonymically links goodness to whiteness. The novel, thus, reflects upon three aspects of interpersonal communication to ascertain the possibility of a relation between identity and truth: looks, storytelling and writing. While the portrayal of Mervyn seems to advocate that there is a correlation between looks and truthfulness, and that it is possible to establish the truth through storytelling and writing, Brown complicates his novel by denying the certainty of a correspondence between truth, looks, storytelling and writing, through Mervyn ‘gothic double’; Welbeck’s constructed persona, fabricated story, and counterfeited money. The impossibility of establishing a stable relation between looks, storytelling, and writing, in the case of Welbeck, casts a shade of doubt on the possibility of doing the same in the case of everyone else, including Arthur.

Although Arthur’s looks are a marker of his “Americanness,” and therefore goodness, from the beginning of the narrative, they create, at the same time, as I discussed earlier, a doubling effect of resemblances with the French Creole characters Clavering and young Lodi. As with the pair Welbeck-Mervyn, Welbeck’s deceptive narrative undermines Mervyn’s choice of storytelling as vehicle of truth, Mervyn’s looks represent a double signifier of American and Creole identity, which demonstrates not only the contradictions present in Brown’s novel, but also the impossibility of isolating the American hero, and the American nation, from outside influences. Brown’s novel, in other words, seems to be making a point about being American through its focus on physiognomy, while at the same time it complicates its trajectory—and contradicts its claims—through the chain of events that entangles Mervyn to Welbeck by means of Mervyn’s resemblance to the specters of Clavering and Lodi.

## FROM AMERICAN TO COSMOPOLITAN HERO

The end of the novel, with its romantic marriage between Achsa Fielding and Mervyn, functions once more to cast doubts on Arthur's incorruptible morality. This marriage reaffirms the importance of capital in *Arthur Mervyn's* turn of the century America, along with the impossibility of practicing isolation—both in commercial and interpersonal relations—from racial and financial corruption, even though, for Arthur, this realization is coated in the language of romance. In fact Arthur, who declares multiple times, in the course of his narrative, to be “able to discern the illusions of power and riches,” yet forsakes his American counterpart—the poor country girl and former sweetheart Eliza Hadwin—because “her ignorance exceeds his own,” to marry the rich, and intellectually stimulating, British widow of Jewish descent, Achsa, as her fortune will allow him to “mix with the world, [and] enroll [himself] in different classes of society” (Brown 156, Justus 313).<sup>55</sup> Arthur rejects Eliza's romantic love because he considers her “unworthy” and “an obstacle and encumbrance” to his intellectual and social ambitions, as such union would not allow him to “ramble” and “loiter”—adjectives he earlier uses about himself—and to be engaged in “more agreeable employments than plowing and threshing” (Brown 229, 263). Arthur, therefore, by rejecting Eliza, rejects the Republican ideal of the yeoman's life as the most fit to develop the American character and, in a sense, rejects his own rustic self, demonstrating that he “[has adapted] himself to his new environment” and to a cosmopolitan type of American identity, and that “for all of his insistence on virtuous motives, his streak of self-interest has always been at least as

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<sup>55</sup> As with Miss Swartz, the mulatto heiress from St. Kitts in Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*, who is the daughter of a white Creole of Jewish descent, Brown uses Ascha's Jewish ancestry, in connection to her wealth, as an anti-semitic critique of Jewish greed (For a portrayal of Jews in American literature see: Louis Harap's *Images of the Jew in American Literature: from the Early Republic to Mass Immigration* and Sol Liptszin's *The Jew in American Literature*.)

strong as his rigid morality,” by which he conveniently appeals to Eliza’s understanding, demonstrating his hypocrisy and opportunism (Justus 313).

In contrast to Eliza’s country beauty, youth and simplicity, Achsa is described by Mervyn as being “of superior age, sedateness and prudence” that commands a filial affection (Brown 304). Achsa is “of English birth...only a year and a half in America,” widowed and endowed with a “considerable, and even splendid fortune,” as her father was “a Jew, and one of the most opulent of his nation in London—a Portuguese by birth” (Brown 317-18). She is “in stature...too low; in complexion dark and almost shallow; and her eyes, though black and of piercing luster have a cast which [Mervyn] cannot well explain” (Brown 317). Achsa’s half-Jewishness is indicative of her role of outsider both to British and American culture, and of her connection, through her father, to modern market economy and capitalism. Shapiro argues that Achsa’s Portuguese origin connects her father to slavery as “fiction often uses ‘Portugal’ as a metonym for the Atlantic trade in slaves and Caribbean products,” and that this, added to her physical attributes, casts doubts on her race (295). In fact, while Mervyn mitigates Achsa’s lack of beauty by an affirmation of the beauty of her intellect, Dr. Steven describes her with words that focus on her racial alterity: “a foreigner...unsightly as a night-hag, tawny as a Moor, the eye of a gypsy, low in stature, contemptibly diminutive, scarcely bulk enough to cast a shadow as she walks, less luxuriance than a charred dog, fewer elasticities than a sheet pebble” (Brown 331-32). In particular, the expression “tawny as a Moor,” is often used to refer to mixed-race individuals; therefore, it can be constructed as “a periodic code for blackness,” which emphasizes, if not her blackness, at least Ascha’s racial indeterminacy (Shapiro 267-87). Shapiro reads the marriage between Achsa Fielding and Mervyn as an

indication that the novel supports an abolitionist agenda, in spite of its outward xenophobia. He argues that “[as] *Arthur Mervyn* ends with the romantic pairing of a plebeian native (white, Christian) male and an exotic wealthy female, Brown proposes egalitarian miscegenation, rather than recolonizing the slaves back to Africa, as the best vehicle for overcoming racism in a postslavery society” (264-65). In other words, Shapiro argues that the “‘oddity’ of the romantic conclusion” goes to disavow all that was implied before, including Arthur’s display of a white supremacist consciousness in his interaction with black Creoles and American slaves during the course of his physical and psychological journey (265).

Without doubt the fact that Arthur marries a woman of “inferior” racial standing, however rich and sophisticated she might be (whether or not she has African blood cannot ultimately be proven), remains disturbing for many critics and adds to the contradictions in the novel, especially because Arthur prefers Ascha over Eliza, who is a model of white American country virtue, defying the novel’s nation building function and complicating categorizations of this text as an example of early American exceptionalism. However, I disagree with Shapiro and argue that the marriage of Mervyn to Achsa is not a sufficient ground to conclude that this ending demonstrates that Brown advocates “egalitarian miscegenation,” and mixed marriages, as a solution “for overcoming racism in a postslavery society” as Shapiro believes (265). The fact that Mervyn and Achsa ultimately leave the United States rejects the validity of this claim, and seems to imply that exile is the only condition in which such a couple can thrive. By “taking a rather unpatriotic step”—emigrating to Europe and becoming an expatriate—Mervyn proves exactly the opposite of what Shapiro suggests (Mackenthun 348). He is

not advocating the possibility of a future post-emancipation society where mixed unions can bridge the gap between races; on the contrary the end of the novel demonstrates that there is no room for him and Ascha in the New Republic.<sup>56</sup> By opting to emigrate, Mervyn ultimately rejects the role of quintessential American hero, to embrace his financial interest and a life that is not dissimilar to the life Welbeck had envisioned for himself. Mervyn's choice of wife, thus, reflects his desire to "see his future materially assured in the affluence of Achsa Fielding," as he needs the financial means to "realize his high destiny in an urban society" in which he has adapted and thrives (Justus 314).

While Goudie argues that the marriage with Achsa fits in the novel because "her ethnic identity" fulfills his "classifying abilities," as well as his financial needs, I claim that the marriage confirms Arthur's inability to disentangle himself from the West Atlantic imbrications that characterize the life of the New Republic (Goudie 198). Marrying Achsa is not just an indication, as Mackenthun maintains, that Mervyn's "non-teleological, circular and rhizomorphic narrative spoils the project of creating a national literary mythology" (348). The marriage supports the realities of the 1790s, and forges a New American character full of the contradictions and ambitions of the times, who would either meddle in West Indian shady commercial deals—like in the case of Arthur's involvement with Welbeck and Thetford—or marry a rich widow with a tawny complexion in order to have access to the capital necessary to thrive in a modern, transatlantic economy. Mervyn, therefore, at the end of the novel, becomes a

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<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, *Warner Arundell* ends with the marriages of the eponymous hero with a Spanish Creole lady, and of his brown-skinned cousin with a white woman in pre-emancipation Trinidad. This seems to suggest the possibility of just the kind of future Shapiro sees in Arthur's marriage to Ascha. *Warner Arundell*, written by a white Creole in 1828, seems to allow for the possibility of semi-egalitarian relationships between whites and free coloreds based on common financial interests, and on a shared Creole consciousness and West Indian identity, as I will argue in chapter 3.

cosmopolitan character, who has changed in the course of his journey and has adapted to the needs of modernity, in order to assure his own financial stability, and who reflects the New Republic's interconnectedness—both financial and ideological— with a larger a circum-Atlantic reality of which the United States is an integral part.<sup>57</sup>



### **Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo in a Series of Letters**

#### LEONORA SANSAY'S *SECRET HISTORY*: A (WHITE) FEMALE (CREOLE)'S HISTORY

Leonora Sansay's *Secret History; or, the Horrors of St. Domingo*, written in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution and published in 1808, is an epistolary novel, loosely based on biographical facts from the life of its author, which focuses on the transformations that shook the Atlantic World, as the Haitian Revolution changed the lives not only of *gens de couleur libre*, black slaves, and French Creoles living in the colony, but of the entire Western Hemisphere, including the United States and its capital Philadelphia, home of the narrator, Mary Hassal, and her sister, Clara.<sup>58</sup> *Secret History*, like *Arthur Mervyn*, is multi-vocal (although the main point of view is that of the observer Mary), and multi-generic as it is an historical narrative, a "secret history," and a travelogue, describing Mary's movements, with and without her sister, from Philadelphia

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<sup>57</sup> Roach in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996) distinguishes between the terms circum-Atlantic and transatlantic: "The concept of a circum-Atlantic world (as opposed to a transatlantic one) insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity. In this sense a New World was not discovered in the Caribbean, but one was truly invented there" (4-5). Roach's definition presupposes the existence of an "oceanic intercultural" encompassing the people of the Caribbean and the Americas, including North America, a definition that draws on ideas of Creolization (5). Armitage in "Three Concepts of Atlantic History" (2003) uses the term circum-Atlantic to refer to the transnational exchanges between Europe, the New World and Africa, and "the history of the people who crossed the Atlantic, who lived on its shores, and who participated in the communities it made possible, of their commerce and their ideas, as well as the diseases they carried, the flora they transplanted and the fauna they transported" (16).

<sup>58</sup> *Gens de couleur* were free blacks, they were often wealthy and owned slaves (Drexler 17).

to Cape Francois (Saint Domingue), to Barracoa and St. Jago de Cuba, to Kingston Jamaica, and ultimately back to Philadelphia.<sup>59</sup> Although the text does not narrate the adventures of a *picaro* (or roguish hero), *Secret History* also shares some characteristics with the genre of the picaresque, a seventeenth-century Spanish genre adapted to English audiences in the eighteenth century, by authors such as Henry Fielding, whose character Tom Jones is the quintessential English *picaro*, and modified by nineteenth-century West Indian writers, such as E.L. Joseph, to treat West Indian themes, as I will discuss in chapter 3. *Secret History*, like the picaresque, is episodic and contains many digressions in the form of anecdotes. In this hybrid text, which denounces the public horrors of the Haitian Revolution alongside the private horrors of marital violence, and describes the fear of slave revolts among white Creoles, the outsider narrator shows how the United States is indissolubly linked to the history of the Atlantic World, its revolutions, colonialism and slavery, as the New Republic forges "complex relations [with] a variety of colonial, post-colonial and transnational geopolitical formations" (Dillon 79). These associations are also formative relations in terms of the United States' understanding and formulation of the domestic and the private versus the public sphere, and of the overlapping of the two.

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<sup>59</sup>Although Sansay's text shares some characteristics with the historical novel, the genre of the historical novel develops later, with Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814). Sansay's *Secret History* is an historical narrative, as it is based on actual historical facts and dramatizes the actions of real historical figures; however, it is more than that. The genre of the "secret history," from which Sansay borrows, is an eighteenth century genre, predating the historical novel. Secret histories are revisionist accounts that "suspend tension between a partially concealed past and an uncertain future as a result of narrative disclosure" (Woertendyke 257). They depict a hidden story, different from official historical events (See Catherine Gallagher, Michael MacKeon, and Gretchen Woertendyke). In this case, the sisters narrate events pertaining to the Haitian Revolution, but from a female perspective, denouncing domestic violence alongside other types of domination. *Secret History* shares some generic similarities with *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, also a travelogue narrated from a female perspective, which I analyze in chapter 2.

Both Brown's and Sansay's works grapple with the difficult relations of their American protagonists with white and dark-skinned West Indian Creoles they encounter in their journeys, and with the protagonists' efforts to define a new American identity versus the figure of the Creole. As I have argued, the contradictions present in *Arthur Mervyn* demonstrate the hero's inability to disentangle himself from the Atlantic World of commerce, slavery and liquid capital, viewed as pestilence but ultimately inseparable from the protagonist's construction of self. In *Secret History*, the main female narrator, Mary, also grapples with definitions of white and brown Creole identities, which she distinguishes from conceptions of an exceptional American identity. However, in the course of her journeys and observations, she gradually shifts towards a recognition of the inner strength and remarkable survival skills of white French Creole women who, having been forced to escape Saint Domingue, are able to form temporary female communities and to thrive without their husbands, seeking "a subsistence by employing [their] talents" independently from men, and "supporting with cheerfulness their wayward fortune" (Sansay 116). The shift in the depiction of white Creole women in Mary's narrative, and her progressive opening up to a greater understanding of white (French and Spanish) female Creoles' point of view renders *Secret History* a text that envisions new ways of conceiving Creole women as members of a larger female circum-Atlantic community which includes the United States. The female (Creole) community, which Sansay envisions at the end of her narrative, transcends geographical borders to embrace a transnational female identity centered in the Americas, and part of a new West Atlantic World, in which American women can forge new connections with other Creole women. However, this Atlantic community's membership falls short of its promise, as, in Mary



Hassal's vision, it is limited to white female Creoles. Like *Arthur Mervyn*, this text shows the impossibility of erecting impermeable divisions between the U.S. and the rest of the West Atlantic World; Clara's and Mary's diasporic experiences engender in both a sense of responsibility and personal involvement with other (white) Creole women, as they create parallels between marital violence and revolutionary violence, and link the "more personal 'secret history'" of the protagonist Clara, "to the larger, hemispheric history of the narrative" in which the United States is unavoidably involved (Woertendyke 258).

#### EFFECTS OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION ON THE NEW REPUBLIC

Politically, the Haitian Revolution had enormous repercussions for the Atlantic World and, in particular, for the United States, as explained in Ashli White's seminal text *Encountering Revolution*.<sup>60</sup> The French defeat in Saint Domingue marked a loss of ambition, on the part of the French, to control the Western Hemisphere, which resulted in the 1803 sale of the Louisiana Territory, including the important port of New Orleans, to the Jefferson administration for a price of \$ 15 million. In spite of Americans' widespread fears, connected to racial violence in Saint Domingue circulated by the press, the purchase of the Territory of Louisiana from France resulted, paradoxically, in an expansion of slavery in the United States, and in the opening up of the West to white settlers, which progressively displaced Native Americans from their lands. The Haitian Revolution, born partly out of the ideas spread by the American and French Revolutions, "put the test to the philosophy, rhetoric, and practices of the revolutionary period, [as] neither France nor the United States could easily accommodate Haiti into universalizing visions of freedom and equality," in spite of their own egalitarian beliefs (Drexler 11). In

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<sup>60</sup> For an analysis of the Haitian Revolution also see C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins*.

fact, as Ashli White argues, the Haitian Revolution had the contrary result of increasing support for the practice of slavery in the United States, although restrictions were placed on Atlantic slave trade and immigration, in order to minimize contagion and block the spreading of dangerous revolutionary ideas.<sup>61</sup>

Another apparent paradox in the New Republic's reaction to the Haitian Revolution is that, in spite of widespread fears of contagion and insurrection—fears dramatized in *Arthur Mervyn*— and of an “ideology of African inhumanity, [which] could comprehend slave resistance only as the barbaric, impulsive response of caged animals” and not as a fight for equality, the US government, under President Adams, supported Toussaint Louverture by breaking the *exclusif* and trading with the insurgent French colony of Saint Domingue; a decision which demonstrates the New Republic's need to establish new trade relations, following Britain's refusal to engage in commerce with its ex colony (Drexler 11).<sup>62</sup> The protracted presence of American merchants in Saint Domingue is documented in Mary Hassal's travelogue and demonstrates that, in spite of the U.S. desire to maintain an isolationist policy and to block information coming into the United States from Saint Domingue, the necessity to “open trade access to the

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<sup>61</sup> Legislation to abolish the Atlantic slave trade was passed in 1807 (“An Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves”) by Congress and President Jefferson (the same year in which Britain passed the Slave Trade Act), and went into effect on January 1, 1808 (avalon.law.yale.edu). The Alien and Sedition Acts (1798) were bills signed into law by President Adams partly as a reaction to increased immigration from France and St. Domingue, and as a “measure to support the national government's right of self-protection” (Milkis 92). The Alien Act “gave the president authority to expel foreigners who were suspected of subversion” (Milkis 92). The Sedition Act made it illegal and “punishable by fine or imprisonment, to bring ‘false, scandalous, and malicious’ accusations against the president, Congress, or the government” (Milkis 92). The Sedition Act was criticized as being unconstitutional (Milkis 92-93).

<sup>62</sup> France's *exclusif* laws limited St. Domingue's trade by forcing all exports to go through France (Drexler 22). The Quasi-War with France (1798-1800), during which the U.S. government under President Adams helped Toussaint Louverture and U.S. merchants traded with St. Domingue risking interception by French privateers, followed the scandalous “XYZ Affair” (1797-98). French government representatives (referred to as “X, Y, and Z”) were sent “to find out from Adam's emissaries in Paris how much the United states was willing to pay in bribes to French officials and loans to the French government in order to secure a treaty,” causing the outrage of the American government (Milkis 90).

lucrative commodities of the island formerly controlled by France” prompted the government to seek a temporary alliance (later rescinded by Jefferson) with Louverture, the black leader of the slave revolt of 1791 (Drexler 22). The U.S. government took contrasting positions in respect to the Saint Domingue Revolution, but it always maintained a keen interest in the island, and when Gen. LeClerc, Napoleon’s brother in law, was sent to take back the colony (1802), and a black army under Dessalines attacked *Cap-Français*, Mary Hassal tells us that “the American captains and sailors volunteered their services; they fought bravely and many of them perished” (Sansay 16). Sansay’s novel depicts in vivid colors the social milieu in Cape Francois, where French Creoles and American merchants lived in harmony, attesting to the involvement of the United States in the destiny of the contested French colony. At the beginning of the narrative Mary writes that Clara “having heard that there were some American ladies here [...] expressed a desire to see them,” pointing to the presence of an American Creole community on the island, and to Clara’s desire to become part of it (Sansay 7).

#### COLONIAL ABUSE, PATRIARCHAL ABUSE, AND THE SPLITTING OF THE SELF AS NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

*Secret History* can be considered an historical narrative as it dramatizes historical facts and personages who really existed and played a role in the last stages of the Haitian Revolution, such as Generals Christophe, LeClerc and Rochambeau, Pauline Bonaparte, and Toussaint Louverture. The narrative takes place in the years 1802-1804, after the French, under Gen. LeClerc, took back control of the island from Toussaint Louverture.<sup>63</sup> Many French colonialists, such as Clara’s (Sansay’s) husband, returned to Saint

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<sup>63</sup> Toussaint Louverture was arrested by Gen. LeClerc and sent to France, where he died in prison in April 1803 (See James 334-65).

Domingue to claim back their sugar plantations. However, Bonaparte's endeavors to reestablish slavery failed, and Dessalines took back the island, declaring it the first black independent nation and ordering the slaughter of all white people who had not left.<sup>64</sup> Clara's and Mary's escape from Saint Domingue and diaspora as refugees are framed within the context of the final months of the conflict between the French, under Gen. Rochambeau, and the black army of Dessalines. Interestingly, all the scenes of Blacks' violence towards Whites are never witnessed directly by Mary, but always received second-hand, from someone else's mouth, and narrated in the form of anecdotes. Instead of focusing on external events connected to military action, the novel focuses on private and domestic incidents, and "links [Clara's] domestic history to the public history of the revolutionary crisis" as her body becomes the site of "violence in both private and public spheres of the geopolitical space of the New World colonies," being the object of spousal rape, and of Gen. Rochambeau's colonial desire (Woertendyke 264). The violence Clara suffers is always perpetrated by white men, and this establishes a correspondence between the condition of white women and black slaves, both exploited by the patriarchal system that governs the colony as well as gender relations.

Like *Arthur Mervyn*, Sansay's novel is multi-vocal. In *Arthur Mervyn*, "the story is continually told and re-told by different narrators...representing events and possible interpretations of them in a mirror's game that becomes ever more ambiguous and ungraspable" as the story unfolds, reflecting the impossibility to reach a single truth or a stable identity, and in a structure that seems to grow more and more chaotic (Tattoni 559). *Secret History*, on the contrary, follows a linear, chronological narrative pattern and

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<sup>64</sup> With Dessalines' declaration of independence, St. Domingue was renamed Haiti, from the original Arawak Taino name Ayiti, pre-dating Columbus' discovery (Drexler 12-13).

is mostly written from the point of view of Mary Hassal. Mary gathers and retells, in the form of anecdotes, the tales of the men and women she encounters, and relates her sister's vicissitudes as the victim of both an abusive husband—who “is vain, illiterate, talkative”—and of a colonial market, in which Clara becomes an object of desire for the French General Rochambeau (Sansay 6). The form of the anecdote is connected to the genre of the secret history. Woertendyke explains that “the ‘anecdote’ is generally linked to, if not quite the source of, secret histories” as it is finite in its scope, as opposed to the open-ended form of the novel (260). The secret history, which is always specific and temporally finite (in this case, Clara's secret history is the story of her abusive marriage), is superimposed, and sheds light on another type of patriarchal abuse: that perpetrated by colonial France over its colony. In this analogy the body of the female (in this case, Clara) comes to represent the colony. The use of anecdotes by different women, retold by Mary, has the effect of making this text seem multi-vocal and heteroglossic, in spite of the fact that the majority of the letters are from Mary, to either her “friend” (Aaron Burr), who remains silent, or to Clara, whose voice is heard only after Letter XXVII.<sup>65</sup> Although the point of view is mostly that of Mary, Clara and Mary are facets of the same persona, as the author splits herself, and the biographical facts that inspire this text, into the two sisters.<sup>66</sup>

The splitting of Sansay's experience into two bodies, becomes evident when Mary tells about her sister Clara: “Her proud soul is afflicted at depending on one she abhors, and at beholding her form, and you know that form so *vilely bartered*...The society of

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<sup>65</sup> Clara only writes three letters out of the thirty-two that comprise *Secret History*.

<sup>66</sup> Leonora Sansay loosely bases her novel on the actual letters she exchanged with Aaron Burr, while living in St. Domingue with Louis Sansay, her French Creole husband (Drexler 29).

*her friend* gave a charm to her life, and having married in compliance with his advice...their separation has rent the veil which concealed her heart; she finds no sympathy in the bosom of her husband” [my emphasis] (Sansay 6). Clara/Leonora Sansay is “vilely bartered” by Aaron Burr, who arranges her marriage to St. Louis/Louis Sansay (Sansay 6). However, in the narrative Burr is simultaneously the *friend* to whom Mary writes, and the same who “gave a charm to [Clara’s] life” in the above quote, engendering the split of Sansay’s persona into the identities of the two sisters Mary and Clara (Sansay 6).<sup>67</sup> The function of this split persona is to arouse sympathy for Clara, the sister who best embodies the experiences of Sansay, and to maintain narrative distance between the author and her text. Mary admits that Clara is a “coquette”; however, in her letters to Burr she takes pains to explain the reasons for Clara’s behavior and concludes that,

if...a woman is disappointed in the first object of her affections, or if separated from him she loves, fate connects her with an inferior being, to what can it lead?...A feeling heart seeks for corresponding emotions; and when a woman, like Clara, can fascinate, intoxicate, transport, and whilst unhappy is surrounded by seductive objects, she will become entangled, and be bore away by the rapidity of her own sensations, happy if she can stop short on the brink of destruction. (Sansay 223)

The passage quoted above is an attempt by the fictional narrator Mary to justify (and thus condone) her sister’s Clara/Leonora Sansay’s actions, by framing them in the language of sensibility used in sentimental literature, attributing the lack of

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<sup>67</sup> Leonora Sansay had a close friendship with Col. Aaron Burr, who persuaded her to marry Louis Sansay, a refugee from St. Domingue, with whom Sansay travelled to the French colony in 1802, as her husband owned a plantation that he intended to reclaim. Aaron Burr was the third Vice President of the United States, under President Thomas Jefferson. He shot and killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, and although he was never charged for the illegal duel, this ended his political career. He later travelled west and conspired against the government, possibly with the intent to capture New Orleans to form a “new empire of Mexico” (Burr Conspiracy) (Drexler 31). He was arrested on charges of treason (1807) but then acquitted. He moved to Europe where he lived until 1812 (Drexler 29-31).

“corresponding emotions” that a “feeling heat” requires in order to survive, as the cause of Clara’s “being bored away by the rapidity of her own sensations” almost to the “brink of destruction”; emotions which cannot find a counterpart in a husband who is not endowed with the same sensibilities as Clara is, a coarse, violent, and uneducated man (Sansay 223). Woertendyke argues that Mary’s description of Clara, as she arrives at the Admiral’s Ball with “arms and bosom... bare; her black hair... ornamented by a rose which seemed to have been thrown there by accident” (Sansay 30), demonstrates the eroticization (and creolization) of Clara, as it “aligns her more with the female slaves on the island than with the French elite” (263). However, if Clara is being eroticized by Mary’s description, and Mary and Clara are, as I argued, two facet of Sansay’s consciousness, I claim that by turning the gaze upon herself as Clara, Sansay is engendering an act of transgression and reversal; a critique of American society’s—and literature’s—treatment of women who are perceived to be coquettes. Sansay, by self-representing herself as Clara—through the gaze of the split-self Mary—becomes the subject of the gaze and redefines the meaning of the term “coquette” within a Creole West Indian context, in which different standards of morality, from those upheld on the mainland, seem to apply to married women, who in Saint Domingue are considered chaste if they only keep one lover and are devoted to him.<sup>68</sup> Mary explains that, in Saint Domingue, “that unfortunate class of beings [the coquette] so numerous in my own [country] —victim of seduction, devoted to public contempt and universal scorn, is unknown. Here a false step is very rarely made by an unmarried lady, and a married lady

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<sup>68</sup> The figure of the coquette was popular in the New Republic’s sensational literature. In novels such as Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*, the coquette becomes a symbol of the lack of virtue and corruption in the new nation. See Tennenhouse’s *The Importance of Feeling English* on the figure of the coquette in American literature.

who does not make one, is as rare...the *faux pas* of a married lady is so much a matter of course, that she who has only one lover, and retains him long in her chains, is considered a model of consistency and discretion” (Sansay 77). Clara’s coquetry—and Sansay’s relationship with Aaron Burr—is, therefore, made more acceptable and pardonable when described in the context of Saint Dominguean costumes and mores. At the same time, Mary’s forgiving gaze on Clara’s coquetry, engenders a critique of United States’ “public contempt and universal scorn” for women who are obviously victims of patriarchy’s, and society’s unreasonable expectations, rather than culpable of loose morals (Sansay 77).

Goudie argues that the different viewpoint on Creoles, expressed by Mary and Clara, shows that “whereas Mary remains hostage to a grammar of Creoleness in relation to French, Spanish (especially), and British West Indian Creole societies and cultures, Clara evolves into a figure of creolité—a creolized and creolizing West Indian Goddess in the making” (210).<sup>69</sup> His observations are correct, if we read Clara and Mary only as two separate fictional characters. However, because Clara and Mary should simultaneously be read as two facets of the same consciousness that splits itself in order to maintain psychological distance from the events narrated and to give credibility to Clara’s actions, it is difficult to separate them as Goudie does, as both participate in the “creolizing” process Goudie discusses (210). Moreover, although, at first, Mary seems to mirror the standard colonial traveler’s viewpoint on Saint Dominguean Creoles as being hyper-sexualized, licentious and degenerate individuals, she does not remain fixed for

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<sup>69</sup>Glissant, in *Caribbean Discourse*, exposes his theory of creolité, which aims at “uniting Creolephone peoples... and promoting the exclusive use of the language” (263). Creolité describes the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the French Caribbean. Glissant rejects the monolithic view of blackness as cultural heritage, which was celebrated by the négritude movement (Aimé Césaire). Creolité sees the French Caribbean identity as unique, and influenced not only by African heritage, but also by European colonization and by indigenous Caribbean peoples. Glissant celebrates the unique cultural roots of the French Caribbean (See *Caribbean Discourse*).



long in an outsider/observer's role, but her observations evolve into a deeper understanding of the women she meets. She perceives "herself and other white U.S. [female] citizens to be Creoles as well," recognizing their (and America's) belonging to a larger Atlantic female Creole community, of which Mary, like Clara, becomes a part (Dillon 88). Goudie argues that "Mary for much of the novel remains subject to a poetics of Creoleness" (209), because she expatiates on the characteristics of the various types of Creoles she encounters, partaking in the official discourse on Creoleness as "geography of sexual license and moral degeneracy—of sexual pleasure, excess and voluptuousness" (Dillon 86). However, her classifying eye, which reminds us of *Arthur Mervyn's* "scientific" racism, gives way to empathy, and to a reversal of the ways in which she decodes the social relations and allegiances that characterize a community in the midst of a revolution.

#### MARY HASSAL'S CLASSIFYING EYE AND THE CONVERGENCE OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC HISTORY

Many of Mary's letters to Aaron Burr carefully map the social interactions between Creoles of different skin colors, class and gender, in both French colonial Saint Domingue and Spanish Cuba. Although Mary writes in the middle of a revolution, she seems to direct her attention to the costumes and habits of the Creole communities she comes in contact with, rather than on the military conflict.<sup>70</sup> However, as Dillon has persuasively argued, the language of war filters into the domestic and private sphere of the

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<sup>70</sup> Mary Seacole in *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* uses a similar narrative technique. As I discuss in chapter 2, Seacole's narrative of her experience as a Crimean heroine and mother to British soldiers focuses on the private/domestic experience of Mrs. Seacole, as she runs the British Hotel in Spring Hill—a British microcosm outside Britain where she provides British soldiers with the comforts of home in a war zone—rather than on the military achievements of the British Army during the Crimean war. This technique is generally used by colonial female writers of travelogues as a revisionist attempt to create a female space within a male-dominated public history.

novel, and the racial conflict between the black army of Gen. Dessalines and Gen. Rochambeau's French soldiers is recast as a gender conflict, in which the violence of patriarchy, including spousal rape, is placed on a level with colonial and revolutionary violence (Dillon 91-92). So, for example, Mary describes General Rochambeau's "siege" of Clara at Picolet using military terms. The General and his men "came full speed," and "appeared like a horde of Arabs"...the General "seized her [Clara's] hand"...St. Louis, Clara's husband, was surprised to find Clara "so surrounded," and approached "as if to defend her" (Sansay 93, 95-6). Gen. Rochambeau's military campaign to take back the colony, and his "campaign" to conquer Clara converge and become interchangeable. St. Louis's arrival spoils the General's plan to defeat Clara's resistance and conquer her body. To help the situation, and as a redirection technique, "Major B—engag[es] St. Louis in a conversation on the situation of the colony, which [makes] him forget the dangerous one in which he had found his wife"; this analogy effectively puts the female body and the land on the same ideological plane (Sansay 97). Major B—'s tactics to divert St. Louis's attention from the General and his wife demonstrate, thus, the interchangeability between the female body and the "situation of the colony" (Sansay 97).

As the reader enters the world of the novel, Mary's approach to French and Spanish Creoles appears to be similar to the stereotypical viewpoint of manifold texts of the period, that use exotic and orientalist language to describe Creoles and their habits of laziness, sensual promiscuity and degenerate morals, as well as their voluptuousness and beauty. This extends also to white Creole women, who are depicted as being "both excessively natural and passionate in [their] emotions, and as fundamentally deformed as

a result of [their] upbringing in the colony” (Dillon 87). Mary, in fact, writes to Burr that “[the] Creole ladies have an air of voluptuous languor... [they are] almost too indolent to pronounce their words they speak with a drawling accent that is very agreeable...[they] are the most irresistible creatures that the imagination can conceive...but if I wanted a friend in any extraordinary occasion I would not venture to rely on their stability” (Sansay 20). The argument on the correlation between Creole upbringing and education in the colonies, and the corruption of Creole morals was part of nineteenth-century discourses on Creole degeneracy, as Berman points out: “By the late nineteenth century, metropolitan observers testified...to the effects of colonial fostering on Creole children...Creole tongues thus [attested] to the ways in which transplanted nationals could become foreign, and the ways in which colonial homes could render the families who resided within them alien” (47). Moreover, Creole degeneracy was associated with warm climates as “not just ‘the Creoles and creolified’ but ‘all Europeans’ gradually lapse into the same indolent indulgence as the natives’ in such a climate,” as Mary’s description of French Creole ladies demonstrates (Berman 32).

Mary expounds on the virtues and vices not only of white Creole women (French and Spanish) but also of mixed-race Creoles, creating a complex classification of the various types of Creoles she comes in contact with, and their relation to each other, which is similar to Mervyn’s need to classify the Creoles he meets during his journeys to Philadelphia and Baltimore.<sup>71</sup> Mary describes mulatto Creole women as having “inspired

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<sup>71</sup> The island of Saint Domingue, before the start of the revolution, was organized legally according to the color of the skin of its inhabitants. At the onset of the slave revolts that lead to the Haitian Revolution (1790), “a slave population reaching to as many as 500,000 worked the 8,000 plantations [mostly of sugar]...under some 28,000 whites” (Drexler 16). Beside the largely greater population of black slaves subjected to a white colonial control of the utmost brutality, there was another set of the population comprising of free blacks, named *gens de couleur libre* (17). Free blacks were often rich and owned their

passions which have lasted through life” and as being “faithful to their lovers through every vicissitude of fortune and chance,” to the point that they inspire “the rage of the white ladies...for what is so violent as female jealousy?” (Sansay 77-78). Mary Hassal further describes brown Creole women as “the most caressing creatures in the world” and explains that “one of their most enviable privileges, and which they inherit from nature, is that their beauty is immortal—they never fade ” (Sansay 79). This description of mulatto female Creoles seems, on the one hand, to confirm race-based stereotypes, such as the myth of the immortality of brown women’s beauty and, on the other hand, to reject other stereotypes associated to race. In fact, Mary’s description of brown Creole women’s faithfulness and devotion to their white lovers rejects and reverses the stereotype of mixed-race women’s sexual promiscuity, replete in other nineteenth-century texts, including novels written by white Creole men, such as *Creoleana* in which, as I discuss in chapter 3, the author describes his mixed-race character Lucy’s undoing by a white man, who succeeds in seducing her, even if she is engaged with someone else. However, Mary describes the relationship between Creole women of different races as often antagonistic, due to the jealousy of white women, who see black and mulatto Creoles as rivals for white sexual desire.<sup>72</sup> Mary further depicts Creoles as being "generous, hospitable, magnificent, but vain, inconstant, and incapable of serious application," and

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own slaves. They worked in a variety of trades and served in the colonial militia. Although free blacks were economically independent and often better off than some of the white Creoles, “an elaborate system of regulations severely restricted anything resembling civic equality [and] St. Dominguan society recognized a staggering 128 racial categories to discriminate all conceivable gradations from white to black,” which, instead of alienating blacks from their own race, contributed to the alliance between *gens de couleur libre* and black slaves during the Haitian Revolution (Drexler 17).

<sup>72</sup> This is one of the arguments later used in texts by anti-abolitionist female writers, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851), and by slave narratives, such as *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), and Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), in which the genre of sentimental literature is used to argue that slavery was detrimental to the patriarchal family as it destroyed family relations. See also Carey’s *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility*.

endorses the period's belief in the connection between hot climates, and a propensity to promiscuity and sexual freedom, stating that "in this abode of pleasure and luxurious ease vices have reign at which humanity must shudder" (Sansay 18).

#### MARY HASSAL: FROM TRAVELOGUE TO CREOLE CONSCIOUSNESS

However, alongside these orientalizing views of French Creoles, Mary brings forward a contrasting discourse that disavows the received opinion on Creole degeneracy. In the opening scene, while physically sick from the long journey at sea Mary finds "the society of [her Creole] fellow-passengers...so agreeable that [she] often forgot the inconveniences to which she was exposed" (Sansay 1). She remarks "there is elasticity in the French character which repels misfortunes. They have an inexhaustible flow of spirits that bear them lightly through the ills of life" (Sansay 1). These observations, made even before arriving at Le Cape, are followed by other instances in which Mary moves beyond the stereotypes associated with Saint Domingean Creoles, demonstrating solidarity to the plight of other white Creole women. She reflects that "since they [French Creole women] have been roused by the pressure of misfortune many of them have displayed talents and found resources in the energy of their own minds which it would have been supposed impossible for them to possess" (Sansay 20). The passive construction in the last part of the above quote—"it would have been supposed impossible"—demonstrates that Mary does not subscribe to this idea, but rather sees French Creole women as endowed with qualities of resilience and industry that make them not unlike British Creoles and, most importantly, not unlike Americans (Sansay 20). Even though Mary engages in descriptions of the libertine ways of the Creoles (especially males) she observes, it becomes clear, throughout the text, that she ultimately takes their side—and

even, at times, the side of black rebels—above that of continental French generals who have clearly come to the island to exploit it. Mary’s critique of the French military—which reiterates the United States’ own rejection of British intervention in their affairs that led to the revolutionary war—is conjoined with Sansay’s rejection of patriarchy, whereby “the battles for the possession of Clara and for the possession of the colony are inseparable” and stand in for one another (Burnham 182).

By positioning herself on the Creole side, Mary asserts her belonging to a transnational Creole community of which Saint Domingue’s Creoles are a part, as the following passage demonstrates:

The Creoles complain and they have cause; for they find in the army sent to defend them, oppressors who appear to seek their destruction. Their houses and their Negroes are put under requisition, and they are daily exposed to new vexations...Many of the Creoles, who had remained on the island during the reign of Toussaint, regret the change and say that they were less vexed by the Negroes than by those who have come to protect them. (Sansay 33-34)

The above quote attests to Mary’s Creole sensibility, as she sees the position of the French planters, who “have cause” to complain, as being similar to that of the United States’ colonists prior to independence. The Haitian Revolution, in fact, very much like the American Revolution, started as “opposition to centralized, imperial mercantilism,” although it ended differently, as black slaves took over the island, which, for Mary (and for the French Creoles), seems preferable—at least according to her words, cited above—to Europe’s exploitation and control over NewWorld commercial interests (Drexler 19).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> As Drexler explains in his introduction to *Secret History*, the Haitian Revolution began because “white planters of Saint Domingue wanted to gain political representation in the French Assembly” in order to increase their legislative influence against the *exclusif*, which redirected exports of sugar and molasses through France (15). The planters asked for greater representation in the Assembly, based on “the entire population of the island—including the freemen of color and the black slaves,” which sparked controversy

Mary, in fact, depicts Europeans as “oppressors who appear to seek [the Creoles’] destruction”; for Mary even political control by Blacks seems preferable, at least at this stage of the hostilities (Drexler 19, Sansay 33). Although Mary clearly supports the position of white French Creoles, she interestingly also recognizes Saint Dominguean slaves' plight for liberty, and French Creoles' injustice that kept them enslaved.<sup>74</sup> As the quote below shows, she describes the psychological emancipation of the “Negroes” who “acquired knowledge of their own strength,” in a language that echoes the language used to describe the newly discovered strength of Creole women who, because of the revolution, have become independent from men, and have learned to “bear adversity with cheerfulness and resist it with fortitude,” thriving in their new condition (Sansay 140).

This is how Mary describes the rebels’ epiphany:

the moment of enjoying these pleasures is, I fear, far distant. The Negros have felt during ten years the blessing of liberty, for a blessing it certainly is, however acquired, and they will not be easily deprived of it...these Negroes, notwithstanding the state of brutal subjection in which they were kept, have at length *acquired knowledge of their own strength*. More than five hundred thousand broke the yoke imposed on them by a few thousand men of a different color, and claimed the rights of which they were so cruelly deprived...Dearly have they [French Creoles] paid for the luxurious ease in which they reveled at the expense of these oppressed creatures. Yet...examples of fidelity and attachment to their masters have been found, which do honor to human nature. [emphasis mine] (Sansay 25, 34)

Although Mary’s words frame the injustice of the condition of Saint Dominguean slaves in terms specific to the French colony—as she says that the slaves were kept in a “state of brutal subjection” by their French masters who lived in “luxurious ease”—the

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among the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, and lead to the start of the revolution in August 1791, as the National Assembly required French planters “to concede rights to certain free coloreds, provided that both their parents were free” (Drexler 15, 18). These “paradoxical allegiances and antinomies of race,” as Drexler defines them, did not last and free coloreds allied themselves with the revolutionary black slaves (19).

<sup>74</sup> However her recognition of the motives of Saint Dominguean slaves does not extend as far as to openly include American slavery.

language used by Mary simultaneously focuses on the humanity of faithful slaves, who “do honor to human nature,” and on the “rights of which they were so cruelly deprived” by men of “a different color” (Sansay 24, 34). Mary’s claim of the humanity and rights of Black men is remarkable, although her narrative appears contradictory, as she simultaneously seems to emphasize with the plight of their French Creole masters. Moreover, all the examples of Blacks’ cruelty in the novel are never witnessed directly by the sisters but related through anecdotes. However, anecdotes also expose the cruelty of General Rochambeau who, when “three Negroes were caught setting fire to a plantation,” ordered that they should be “burned alive; and the sentence was actually executed” (Sansay 99).

Surprisingly, the French general’s violence is directed, not only towards the Blacks, but also towards French Creoles, whom the French army was, supposedly, there to protect, which seems to imply that French Generals were as bad as the rebels. Mary tells the anecdote of the young Creole Feydon to show the corruption and greed of the French General Rochambeau. Feydon is arrested and executed without a trial because “he had incurred...the displeasure of General Rochambeau” (Sansay 100-1). Although Feydon's brother raised the ransom money requested by the General to save Feydon's life, he was too late in delivering the sum and saving him and, even if “the government [was] indebted to [Feydon’s family] more than a hundred thousand dollars,” Feydon's brother was arrested too, while his money was confiscated (Sansay 101). By relating anecdotes like the ones described, Mary distances herself from the horrific tales circulating in the American press and public opinion about the cruelty of the rebellious slaves—tales that are dramatized in *Arthur Mervyn's* metaphor of contagion—and gives her readers a



picture of the conditions in St. Domingue, in which the "horrors" seem to proceed from both sides.

In *Secret History*, women can also be both the perpetrators and the victims of violence. In one anecdote, Mary tells of a Creole lady who was jealous of a "beautiful negro girl," ordered a slave "to cut off the head of the unfortunate victim" and presented it to her husband at dinner (Sansay 18-19). In another anecdote, Mary relates that one of her Creole friends' husbands "was stabbed in her arms by a slave whom he had always treated as his brother," her children were killed, and "her house burned"; but a slave who saved her, also "saved all [her] madras handkerchiefs, [which] seemed to console her for every other loss" (Sansay 19). In these two anecdotes, gothic scenes of racial violence are retold for an American audience hungry for sensational literature on the horrors of Saint Domingue. However, in the second tale, as Dillon argues, a solidarity based on "the Creole marker of the madras handkerchief" is formed between a white and a black woman, where "the preserved collection of madras handkerchiefs seems to stand in for the creole family that has been killed, [linking] the creole black woman and the creole white woman, [and] forming something of a common currency uniting the two" (91). This anecdote also demonstrates that the madras handkerchief is a symbol of creolization. Creolization is defined by Braithwaite in *The Development of Creole Society* as a process of the mixing of African and European cultural traditions, as they come into contact and clash in the context of plantation slavery, forming a new Creole society; or, "a complex situation where a colonial polity reacts, as a whole, to external metropolitan pressures, and at the same time to internal adjustments made necessary by the juxtaposition of master and slave, élite and laborer, in a culturally heterogeneous relationship"

(Braithwaite xvi). In fact, as Sansay explains, the madras handkerchief was worn by black women who were not allowed, by sumptuary laws, to wear silk, like white Creoles: “No woman of color was to wear silk, which was then universally worn, nor to appear in public without a handkerchief on her head,” which served to cover up black females’ sexual appeal, deemed dangerous for white families (Sansay 78). Consequently, the madras handkerchief became a symbol of sexuality, associated with the excessive sexuality of Creole culture, as the donning of the madras handkerchief was prohibited in both France and England, making it a unique signifier for Creolization as white Creole ladies, as well as Black women, began wearing it as a symbol of sexual attractiveness.

The fact that white ladies, like the lady in this anecdote, or Pauline Bonaparte, began to wear colorful madras handkerchiefs as markers of attractiveness, attests to the presence of a unique Creole culture shared by both white and black Creoles, from which Pauline Bonaparte—who was not a Creole—decides to borrow, because of the sexual connotations associated with the exotic garment. Pauline Bonaparte shows her “engagement in the aesthetics of Creolization,” in spite of her refusal to find “society” or “amusement” in the Creole community, to which she feels superior, opting instead for boredom as, in Mary’s disapproving words, “she never...imagined that she would be forced to seek an equivalent for either [society or amusement] in the resources of her own mind” (Dillon 83, Sansay 11). The madras handkerchief, therefore, becomes a signifier of creolization that seems to unite women across both racial and geographical borders, and attests not only to the possibility of “social reproduction” of the Creole culture within a specific Creole geopolitical location, as Dillon argues, but also to the transatlantic

implications of the signifier, and to the ways in which Creole culture penetrates into mainstream culture, haunting it back (Dillon 83).

The phrase “cultural reproduction,” an expression deriving from Marxist theory, in the context of my reading of *Secret History* means the work done by women to create culture, including fashion, childbirth and child rearing.<sup>75</sup> Dillon argues that French colonies, if analyzed according to the Marxist model of capital production, should be viewed exclusively as sites of production (by slave labor), while the social reproduction happened in France. As Dillon explains, “Culture, as it was understood by French colonials, emanated from the metropole: fashion, education, and civilization were not to be found in the colony...the term ‘Creole culture’ was by definition oxymoronic” (Dillon 83-86). The question of the presence of creolization Dillon raises, should be extended to include the influence of Creole culture on the United States, or what Dillon defines “counter-discourse of creolism,” and the birth of a new and unique Creole transatlantic identity, capable of social reproduction and diasporic, as represented by Mary and, in particular, by her sister Clara (Dillon 89). Clara writes only three letters, in which the readers hear her story from her point of view for the first time, and in which she shows a progressive development of a Creole sensibility, and a genuine empathy for the poverty of the people she meets during her diaspora.

#### CLARA ST. LOUIS: FROM DOMESTIC ABUSE TO SELF-DISCOVERY, AND COLLECTIVE FEMALE CREOLE AGENCY

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<sup>75</sup> The term “cultural reproduction” refers to the transmission of culture “between and within generations,” where “culture is the production, reproduction and transmission or relatively stable informational processes, and their public representations, which are variously distributed in groups or social networks” (Patterson 139). Cultural reproduction results in social reproduction, which “refers to the means by which structural features of society—class, gender, race, segregation, and other patterns of differentiation and organization—are maintained” (Patterson 140). See Patterson’s essay “The Mechanisms of Cultural Reproduction: Explaining the Puzzle of Persistence” 139-51.

For the first time, in letter XXVIII—which Clara writes to Mary from Bayam (near St. Jago)—the acts of domestic violence to which Clara has been subjected by her husband are narrated in the first person: “Often returning at a late hour from the gambling table, he has treated me with the most brutal violence—this you [Mary] never knew; nor many things which passed in the loneliness of my chamber, where, wholly in his power, I could only oppose to his brutality my tears and my sighs” (Sansay 186). Clara reveals to Mary, in a language that is graphic and explicit, the horrors and the secrets of her bedchamber, which ultimately occasioned her elopement. These personal revelations, which justify the allusion to the genre of the “secret history” in the title, overshadow the “horrors of St. Domingo” with a more “secret” domestic type of horror:

The night before I left him, he came home in a transport of fury, dragged me from my bed, said it was his intention to destroy me, and swore that he would render me horrible by rubbing aqua-fortis in my face. That last menace deprived me of the power of utterance; to kill me would have been a trifling evil, but to live disfigured, perhaps blind, was an insufferable idea that roused me to madness. . . From this stupor I was roused by his caresses or rather by his brutal approaches, for he always finds my persona provoking, and often, while pouring on my head abuse which would seem dictated by the most violent hatred, he has sought in my arms gratifications which should be solicited with affection, and granted to love alone. (Sansay 187-88)

If Clara and Mary represent the author’s split consciousness, and are two facets of the same persona, the fact that Clara acquires her own voice only in letter XXVIII, where she reveals herself to have been subjected to marital rape, shows the difficulty of the psychological journey the author has to undertake in order to let out the “secret” of her heroine and to acquire her own voice, independent from the filter of Mary’s mediation.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> I am not claiming that the incidents of spousal abuse narrated in letter XXVIII happened to Leonora Sansay, verbatim. Details of her life are sparse and, although the novel is inspired by the long-term relationship she had with Aaron Burr and by their correspondence during Sansay’s trip to St. Domingue, *Secret History* ultimately remains a work of fiction.

Clara's liberation from the "horrors"—both public and private—of Saint Domingue seems to parallel that of other Creole women who, having lost their husbands, learn to support themselves independently from men. At the same time, as I argued earlier, the Creole women's deliverance from patriarchal control parallels that of the black rebels, whose liberation proceeds from their growing awareness of their own strength. Clara's escape from her abusive husband coincides with the height of the Revolution, which supplies Creole women—with whom Clara ideologically belongs—with the opportunity to embody their newly acquired freedom.

The decision to write this epistolary novel, inspired by the letters Sansay exchanged with Burr, becomes an act of transgression, and an affirmation of "the affinities between the society of post-revolutionary United States and that of revolutionary St. Domingo," as, in both, women are subjected and "circumscribed by a violent masculinity" (Drexler 33). Clara's body, in fact, becomes a token of exchange between her American "friend" and her French Creole husband, as well as becoming the object of a French general's pursuit. By opting for an utopian, imagined community of women based on a shared experience of violence and abuse, rather than for a national citizenship strictly based on geopolitical borders, and on a non-Creole American identity, Clara—who, for a time, seems to prefer living with her Creole refugee sisters to returning to Philadelphia—embodies a new, diasporic, female Creole consciousness based on homosocial bonds: "For me, henceforth all men are statues... Let me avoid the dangerous intercourse, let me fly to my sister[s]!" (Sansay 212).

Clara's growing Creole sensibilities, as she hides in Cobre and Bayam, are exemplified by her budding social consciousness and empathy for the poverty and

generosity of the people who live in these remote villages. She notices “the striking difference between [Cuba] and St. Domingo. There [St. Domingue] every inch of ground was in the highest state of cultivation, and everybody was rich, here, the owners of vast territories are in the most abject poverty. This [Madame V—] ascribed to the different genius of the people, but I think unjustly, believing that *it is entirely owing to their vicious government*” [emphasis mine] (Sansay 200). Clara’s understanding of the effects of colonialism’s relentless exploitation on the lives of colonized people, shows her changing sensibilities since her arrival in Cobre, when she commented: “The inhabitants, almost all mulatto, are in the last grade of poverty, and too indolent to make an exertion to procure themselves even the most necessary comfort” (Sansay 195). After travelling to Bayam and becoming a member of the local Creole community, Clara becomes aware of the existence of a different and noble set of values, by which indigent people still live: “This place is the abode of poverty and dullness, yet the people are so hospitable that from the little they possess they can always spare something to offer to a stranger” (Sansay 205-6).

Clara’s creolizing sensibilities are not limited to a feeling of empathy for the living conditions to which colonized people are subjected; her immersion in the Cuban culture is also linguistic—she learns foreign languages with ease and speaks “with the facility of a native”—and spiritual (Sansay 121). Goudie argues that “there is evidence not only of her coming into contact with Afro-Caribbean faith traditions in the Spanish West Indies but of her becoming prepossessed—if not possessed—by the Iwa

Ezili/Erzulie” (212).<sup>77</sup> During a visit to the temple of the blessed Virgin, while admiring the opulence and splendor of this site, which is surrounded by abject poverty, and the beauty and majesty of the statue of the blessed Virgin, to whom the locals believed unconditionally, Clara feels that “the mind almost involuntarily yields to the belief of supernatural agency” (Sansay 196).<sup>78</sup> She writes to Mary that the setting and atmosphere of the place concur to “fill the mind with awe; and we pardon the superstitious faith of the ignorant votaries of this holy lady, cherished as it is by every circumstance that can tend to make it indelible!” (Sansay 196). The use of the pronoun “we” seems to suggest that Clara is not indifferent to the local faith, even if, while writing to her sister, she deems it to be “superstitious” and practiced by “ignorant votaries” (Sansay 196). Goudie further argues that Clara’s sensual aura, as she appears at the Admiral’s Ball clad in white, with bared arms and bosom, and her black hair decorated by a rose, in the Creole fashion of the island, links her image to that of Erzulie, and foreshadows her “initiation in the temple of Mary/Erzulie,” with whom Clara shares the same “resistant, creolizing force as lived experience,” and the same enchanting beauty (213). Clara’s experience as a quasi-devotee of Mary/Erzulie, who has more than pardoned the “superstitious faith” of the locals, reverberates in her later empathy for the poverty of the locals, in her critique of imperialism and, ultimately, in her regret at having to leave the tranquility of Cuba to return to the expectations of American society: “I feel something like regret at leaving this country. The friendliness of the people can never be forgotten. Here, like in Barracoa, they are poor but contented... Often when reviewing the events of my past life, I wish that

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<sup>77</sup> Ezili/Erzulie is a “goddess of love and luxury, a flirtatious light-skinned Creole known as the personification of feminine beauty and grace. She has... ‘all the characteristics of a pretty mulatto: she is coquettish, sensual, pleasure loving and extravagant’” (Olmos 114).

<sup>78</sup> The *Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Cobre*, one of Cuba’s most sacred pilgrimage sites (Drexler 142).

their calm destiny had been mine” (Sansay 220). Although the above quote can be read as idealizing and exoticizing the lives and the poverty of the Cuban Creoles Clara encounters, and as applying an anthropological gaze to these peoples, who are condescendingly described as “poor but contented,” nonetheless Clara seems to have found a community in which she feels free and temporarily happy (Sansay 220). Her diasporic experience as a refugee from private and public “horrors,” is the measure of her creolization and the source of her new understandings of the realities of colonialism and patriarchy (two facet of the same controlling power) and their abuses.

Clara’s journey through Cuba, and her immersion in the local culture and in a lifestyle devoid of luxuries but serene—the kind of life she had wished for when she lived with St. Louis—is enriched by the homosocial bonds she forms with white Creole women, like Madame St. Clair, who “wearied of a place where she has known nothing but misfortune, where the talents she possesses are absolutely lost, intends going with [Clara] to Philadelphia” (Sansay 211). Clara’s empathy for the plight of French Creole women, and her new understanding of the correlation between the poverty of the mulattos of Spanish Cuba and the abuses of colonialism, are sentiments that distinguish this text as an example of the presence of a circum-Atlantic Creole consciousness, which the New Republic shares with other West Indian Creoles, centered, in Sansay’s travelogue, on the diasporic experience of female Creoles. Sansay’s narrative is different from other texts, written in the early Republican period, which focus on a definition of white American nationalism that elides America’s belonging to a larger Creole community, and the similarities between the United States and its Caribbean neighbors; texts such as



Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, and Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, Mary's narrative of the chain of violence perpetrated not only by the black rebels, but also by white male Creoles (like Clara's husband) and, mostly, by corrupted French officials, shows that guilt and culpability are not polarized, but must be allocated all around.

Ultimately, however, Mary's alliances are with French Creoles, who are being exploited by their homeland's government and attacked by their slaves, even though she also empathizes with black revolutionaries, who fight for "the rights of which they had been so cruelly deprived" (Sansay 34). Mary's stance affirms the United States' solidarity with its West Atlantic neighbors, rather than with the intrusive and unwelcome presence of Europe's patriarchal power, whose oppressive force is epitomized by the troubling relation between Gen. Rochambeau and Clara. Nonetheless, Mary's and Clara's closest bonds are forged primarily with white Creole women, as they acknowledge that Creole men, like St. Louis, participate in the same oppressive patriarchy of which Mary faults General Rochambeau. In fact, the novel implies, through Mary's allusions to Clara's "vilely bartered" body, that the condition of Creole women is not so unlike that of women in the United States, although sexual mores appear to be more relaxed among Creoles (Sansay 6).

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<sup>79</sup> Later American novels grapple with the idea of American exceptionalism, an ideology that fully developed after the 1830s, although it has its roots in Puritanism and in the Revolutionary period, and that, therefore, is not yet fully defined at the time *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History* are written. Among such novels are: James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851) and *Benito Cereno* (1855), and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). These later texts are steeped in the ideology of exceptionalism, which seems to inform their core beliefs; however, at the same time, they engender a critique of it.

However, Clara and Mary's budding social consciousness, and their indictment of the injustices of colonialism—which causes the uneven distribution of capital, and the social stratification of the communities which they temporarily inhabit—seem to fall short of an active social participation in the improvement of the conditions of those they pity. Clara's and Mary's friendships remain exclusively white; they only associate intimately with members of the white Creole communities they become a part of; white, upper-class ladies such as Doña Jacinta, Madame V—, or Madame St. Clair. The latter will even move to Philadelphia with Clara, demonstrating that the Creole community Mary envisions is only open to white Creole ladies, such as Madame St. Clair. Although the novel expresses sympathy for the plight of blacks or mulattos, they generally appear in anecdotes or are observed from a distance, they never enter the lives of the characters intimately. Even Clara's parting regrets and her praise of the Cuban locals as the most hospitable, generous, and poor, but “contented with their lot,” seem to stereotype the local population indiscriminately, rather than understanding them as individuals with distinct and separate needs (Sansay 206). Ultimately Clara's depiction of the locals remains monolithic and undifferentiated.

Mary, in her last letter to Burr, writes that Clara “now enjoys a delightful tranquility, which even the thought of many approaching struggles with difficulty and distress, cannot disturb,” a tranquility she has attained outside the influence of patriarchy and outside the national space of the United States, to which we are told the sisters will return with their Creole friend in tow (Sansay 225). In the last lines of the novel, Mary seems to merge with the other side of her split self, when she tells Burr: “I hope we shall meet you [in Philadelphia]; and if I can only infuse into your bosom those sentiments for

my sister which glow so warmly in my own, she will find in you a friend and a protector, and we may still be happy” (Sansay 225). Mary’s wish that Burr might become “a friend and a protector” for Clara accomplishes the synthesis of the two fictional characters, Mary and Clara, into the persona of the author, Leonora Sansay, and suggests that Burr will be admitted to share the creolizing vision of a new West Atlantic female Creole community that, like Sansay’s novel, expands beyond the confines of the nation state and disavows the New Republic’s vision of a new American identity, defined vis-à-vis the identity of the Creole, that *Arthur Mervyn* tries—but fails—to validate.

The fact that the novel ends before the sisters embark for the States, as it started “after a passage of forty days” to Saint Domingue, aboard a ship on the Atlantic Ocean, might be indicative of the utopian and unrealizable nature of Mary’s wish, and of the ideological division between the New Republic and the West Indies, in spite of the clear economic and political entanglements of the one with the other (Sansay 1). Mary’s wish for a better understanding and for an alliance between American and West Indian white Creole women, remains relegated in a space outside the nation state, it never quite makes it home. Similarly, Arthur Mervyn’s unquestionable American consciousness fails to materialize into the model of white citizenship Mervyn sets himself to impersonate, both through action and storytelling, and he ultimately must leave the country and migrate to Europe, having married a woman who looks “tawny as a Moor,” in order to maintain the lifestyle he would have otherwise had to purchase in the West Indian colonies (Brown 331).

*ARTHUR MERVYN AND SECRET HISTORY AS ANOMALOUS NOVELS*

*Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History* are somewhat anomalous novels, as they contradict the ideals of American exceptionalism that characterize American works of fiction produced during and after the years of the early Republic. These two historical narratives reach towards a new definition of Creoleness, and recognize the political and commercial entanglements of the United States with British, French, and Spanish West Indian colonies, and the West Indies' influence on American identity formation. Both novels, therefore, should be read as historical documents that highlight the contradictions inherent in the ideal of a new American identity separate from the Creole, and the reality of the interdependence of the United States and the rest of the Atlantic World. These novels identify the United States as part of a larger circum-Atlantic community from which the U.S. cannot disentangle itself, whether this is seen in a negative light, like in *Arthur Mervyn*, or in a more positive light, like in *Secret History*. These texts give a clear picture of the struggle of early American writers to redefine what it means to be an American at an historical time and ideological juncture, in which the New Republic could not ignore the political changes that affected their Caribbean neighbors, and the importance of U.S. economic relations with other West Atlantic Creole communities, in spite of the ways in which the New Republic tries to define itself in opposition to the figure of the West Indian Creole, and as superior to its Caribbean neighbors, as outlined by the works of Sean X. Goudie and Ashli White. However, these novels differ from other turn-of-the-century American texts because they seem to question, more or less intentionally, the idea that early nineteenth-century American fiction was solely and exclusively directed towards a definition of nationhood and citizenship. They,

nonetheless, fall short of their promise because, although they recognize that the United States is an integral part of a larger circum-Atlantic community, they still deny entry to non-whites in their more open definition of American-Creole identity.

Dillon distinguishes between the concepts of “Americanization” and “Creolization,” and shows how they describe a contrasting idea of identity formation. She argues that:

Creoleness names ‘the adaptation of Europeans, Africans, and Asians to the New World; and the cultural confrontation of these peoples within the same space’<sup>80</sup>... ‘Americanization,’ by way of contrast to ‘Creolization,’ defines a process by which Europeans adapted to the New World without interacting with other cultures. The distinction... is conceptually useful... because it evokes two distinct and incompatible ideologies of cultural identity and nationalism... ‘Americanization’ is an idea of enculturation that has been imagined in relation to a history of hybridity (the melting pot), but it is an idealization which has tended towards the production of a new being—the white American. The assimilative logic of Americanization is not inflected by the brutal confrontation of native, colonial, and enslaved populations that in fact dictated the history of both the West Indies and the North American colonies. The term ‘creole,’ by way of contrast... points to a colonial history that unsettles the structuring racial divide of black versus white in America insofar as it names a history of geographical dislocation and non-nativity in which both whites and blacks participated. (95-96).

As Dillon persuasively argues, the idea of “Americanization” as it is defined in the above passage is a utopian ideal that refuses to acknowledge the reality of cultural mixing.

However, cultural mixing is inevitable when diverse cultures come in contact, even when one culture is dominant and the other is subordinate as in the case of slavery. This is discussed in the work of Mary Louise Pratt, who in *Arts of the Contact Zone* describes contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other,

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<sup>80</sup> Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant’s *Éloge de la Créolité*.

often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relation of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (34). Pratt’s definition applies as much to the United States as it does to other New World colonies, as the United States shares a similar colonial history based on slavery with its Caribbean neighbors, even though the concept of Americanization tries to deny such history.<sup>81</sup> Building on Dillon’s definition of “Americanization” versus “Creolization,” I conclude that both *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History* try, but ultimately fail, to demarcate an American space as separate from a Creole space, and to define American identity in oppositional terms to Creole identity, proving that it is impossible for “Europeans [and Americans to adapt] to the New World without interacting with other cultures” (Dillon 96).

*Arthur Mervyn* employs the metaphor of the yellow fever to dramatize the fear of a Creole influx from Saint Domingue into the United States and, specifically, the influx of dark-skinned West Indian Creoles, which Mervyn sees as a threat to white American citizens like him. The novel and its protagonist endeavor to reject the recognition of the similarities between Americans and West Indian Creoles, as this would open the floodgates to a discourse that would threaten an American identity construction based on whiteness, rather than on geographical location and on a common history of “dislocation and non-nativity” the United States shares with the rest of the Atlantic World (Dillon 96). Moreover, acknowledging the common history of the United States and its West Indian neighbors runs the risk of having to allow non-white Creoles—such as the Saint

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<sup>81</sup> I use the work of Mary Louise Pratt extensively in my analysis of Seacole’s autobiography to define the “contact zone” in which different cultures coexist and clash with each other in the frontier territories of Grenada and Crimea where Seacole establishes her “British Hotel” (See Pratt’s *Arts of the Contact Zone*). The idea of the melting pot in which cultures adapt and merge into one new ideal and monolithic American culture that suppresses differences does not effectively describe the American experience of racial conflict and inevitable cultural exchange with other colonial Creole communities, but reflects Americans’ desire to forget their colonial past.

Dominguean rebels—a claim to the same liberties and equalities gained and enjoyed by white American citizens. As many historians have argued, the United States, as well as Britain and France, were not prepared to recognize that the Haitian Revolution was based on the same principles and human rights that brought them to arms against a controlling monarchy. The novel's contradictions come exactly from these contrasting impulses: on the one hand, the need to define a white model of American citizenship through the process of storytelling and writing; on the other hand, the realization of the impossibility of embodying such model, in a society complicit in colonialism and slavery as much as Europe and the West Indies. For this reason, Mervyn's marriage to a British-born Jewish woman who, according to Dr. Stevens, does not fulfill the criteria for whiteness imposed by American society, and his decision to move to Europe (and thus renounce his claim to a new type of American citizenship), seem to be a compromise that demonstrates Mervyn's ultimate inability to embody a new model of American citizenship. His marriage with Ascha constitutes the best way for Arthur to disentangle himself from the temptations of West Indian commerce, capitalism and slavery, while maintaining the lifestyle he has become accustomed to—something he could not have done if he had not married Achsa Fielding. Arthur Mervyn, therefore, represents a figure of cosmopolitanism and modernity rather than an American hero.

Similarly, *Secret History* tries to demarcate American space as separate from Creole space and to define an American identity in oppositional terms to a Creole identity, through Mary's commentary on French and Spanish Creoles' lack of morality, loose customs, and excessive sexuality, resulting from the exposure to a hot climate and from the lack of a proper education. While *Secret History* manages to break away from

the categories it tries to enforce, and to acknowledge the parallels between the conditions of white American and French Creole women, who are both victims of patriarchal control—a recognition that distinguishes *Secret History* as a unique early nineteenth-century American text—the novel simultaneously fails to reach all its goals. *Secret History* cannot remove the racial barrier between white and dark-skinned Creole women, and fulfill the promise of a circum-Atlantic collaboration and understanding between Creole women of both races, as the story privileges its white female Creole characters over black and brown Creoles, who remain at the margins of the narrative and are viewed through a patronizing, although empathizing, gaze. The fact that the novel stops short of reaching the East Coast of the United States, may speak for the impossibility of realizing Sansay's dream of a circum-Atlantic female Creole community including both Creole and American women.



## Chapter 2

### **RACE, MARRIAGE, ENGLISHNESS, AND LIMINALITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE CREOLE CHARACTERS IN *JANE EYRE*, *VANITY FAIR*, AND *WONDERFUL ADVENTURES OF MRS. SEACOLE IN MANY LANDS***

In chapter 1, I analyzed two early American novels that grapple with shifting definitions of American identity and citizenship, often constructed in opposition to the figure of the Caribbean Creole. These novels are set in the aftermath of the American War of Independence and of the French Revolution, and in the context of a world that has lost many of its certainties. This widespread uncertainty about the future is due to the effects of epidemics, revolts, and to the influx of peoples migrating to the New Republic from Europe and the Caribbean, in particular after the onset of uprisings in Saint Domingue, culminating in the creation of Haiti, the first independent Black nation in the Atlantic World. The birth of Haiti complicates established notions of (white) identity and citizenship, and is seen as a threat to the American slaveholding South. Chapter 2 shifts chronologically to the middle of the century to take up again the discourse on Creole identity formation within, and in opposition to, mainstream Anglophone literatures and in the context of the influence of Atlantic World commercial and geopolitical relations on notions of race and citizenship. In this chapter, I analyze three mid-nineteenth century texts that belong to the British literary tradition; two of these—Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), and William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847)—are canonical British texts, the third—Mary Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857)—is an autobiography that represents a Creole response to canonical British literature, and which re-conceptualizes British self-representations from the viewpoint of

a Jamaican/British Creole of mixed-race; a “yellow woman” as Mrs. Seacole defines herself (Seacole 31). Although scholars tend to discuss the American and British literary traditions separately, and definitions of Creoles vary in the United States and Britain, as after the Louisiana Purchase the term Creole becomes synonymous with ex-French colonists (as I have explained in my introduction), I discuss American and British texts within the same project because of the continuities in representations of West Indian Creoles in British fiction and American fiction written in the period of the Early Republic. Literary Creoles in early American and British texts share physical and psychological characteristics and are used in a similar fashion to construct mainstream English and American identities and to exorcize the multiple fears connected with modernity and the effects of revolutions.

The overarching problem that brings these texts together in my imagination is that of identifying ways in which female Creole characters function within a clearly defined “British world,” which can be geographically located both in the motherland and in the wider British Empire. How do literary female Creole characters contribute to the creation of Englishness and to the cultural reproduction of English values, and how do they modify, adapt and/or re-invent these values? How are female Creole characters depicted by white English authors writing about “Englishness,” such as Charlotte Brontë, and how do these liminal Creole literary identities, like Bertha Mason, develop and change in the hands of British colonial writers, such as the Indian-born W.M. Thackeray or the Jamaican Creole of color Mrs. Seacole?<sup>82</sup> In this chapter, I argue that Creole literary

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<sup>82</sup> W.M. Thackeray is generally read as a canonical English writer, although he was born in India, because he moved back to England when he was only six years old. However, in my reading of *Vanity Fair* I argue that his colonial background, his childhood memories, and his continued contact with Anglo-Indians,

identities serve to construct English literary identities and vice versa, in a symbiotic process that highlights the fluidity of identity formation in the Atlantic World, the role of literature in the construction of selfhood and national identity (as discussed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*), and the central role of the literary Creole woman in developing notions of bourgeois national belonging and cultural reproduction. While canonical novels like *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* maintain an imperial gaze in their representations of Creole female figures who “infiltrate” the homeland—seen as the only locus of English cultural reproduction—it is possible to detect inherent contradictions in the portrayal of these characters, although they still embody many of the stereotypes associated with (racial) alterity. These contradictions, which I analyze in the following pages, highlight the importance of the literary Creole as an agent of change, within both the world of the novel and larger society. While canonical British novels inevitably depict the Creole from the point of view of the “proper” British citizen, texts written by colonial writers, such as Mary Seacole’s autobiography, embody the contradictions present in the process of (black) Creole identity formation within a colonial culture that inevitably influences and regulates what the colonial subject says and how she says it, resulting in hybrid identities, colonial homelessness, but also in a re-writing of the imperial script.




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among whom his Eurasian sister Sarah, have partly influenced his writing, and have contributed to the contradictions inherent in his depiction of the West Indian character, Rhoda Swartz. Although Mrs. Seacole writes an autobiography and not a fictional story, she creates the “character” of Mother Seacole. Her autobiography is not a work of introspection in which she reflects on her private life, but a public text in which she carefully shapes her identity and public persona with a specific audience in mind, English readers.

## Jane Eyre

Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel, *Jane Eyre*, depicts the quintessential, stereotypical Creole woman in mid-nineteenth century British literary imagination: Bertha Mason Rochester, the first wife of the physically and metaphorically dark (a sign of the corrupting influence of the West Indies) Mr. Rochester. Bertha is Gilbert & Gubar's "madwoman in the attic," who has engendered critical debate for over a century, but who remains voiceless throughout the novel (Gilbert). She has been used to make a variety of arguments about the main character, the governess Jane Eyre. Before I discuss Bertha's Creoleness as it is depicted—and, at the same time, left intentionally ambiguous—by Charlotte Brontë, I will provide a brief overview of the main critical perspectives through which Bertha and her role in the novel have been constructed.

### BERTHA: FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS, TO FEMINISM, TO POSTCOLONIALISM

A long critical tradition reads Bertha as a symbol for something/someone else, rather than as a real, flesh and blood character, negating her historicity and materiality, as well as a specific Creole identity. In these readings, Bertha becomes a gothic double (doppelgänger) through whom Jane vicariously enacts her forbidden passions and/or rage. Alternatively (or simultaneously), Bertha is depicted as a manifestation of Rochester's problematic sexuality. In this interpretation "Bertha and Rochester bear a remarkable resemblance to one another" which is physical, as they are both dark in complexion, as well as psychological, as they are both morally dark (Rodas 151). In fact, "[Rochester's] series of mistresses...demonstrate a predilection for sexual self-indulgence that seems to parallel the 'vices' of his captive wife," a sign that her

unchastity has infected him too, and that the taint of the Caribbean Creole is not only dangerous but also contagious (Rodas 151). As I argued in my analysis of *Arthur Mervyn*, in *Jane Eyre* the trope of contagion is also associated to the Creole. Bertha is, therefore, taken to represent Rochester's promiscuity and deviant sexuality, as in Mark Kinkead-Weeks' reading of the novel.<sup>83</sup> For Helene Moglen, Bertha represents a "monstrous embodiment of psychosexual conflicts," present, albeit unconsciously, also in Jane and Rochester (Moglen 124-26). Bertha therefore symbolizes the external manifestation of Jane's resistance to male authority and sexual surrender, taken to its extremes. For Moglen, the tearing of the wedding veil by Bertha symbolizes sexual violation, which both Rochester and Jane unconsciously fear. A similar interpretation by Judith Williams relegates Bertha Mason to the realm of the imagination, as the third story of Thornfield Hall represents a "dangerous realm of fantastic, heady passion," which simultaneously attracts and terrifies Jane (J. Williams 30-33). Other critics, such as Richard Chase, Shirley Foster and John Maynard, associate Bertha to excessive sexuality, and Robert Keefe uses Freud's psychoanalytic theory and the Oedipal complex to argue that Bertha represents Jane's oedipal rival who thwarts her marriage to Rochester.<sup>84</sup>

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, argue that *Jane Eyre* is a "story of enclosure and escape" where what is being repressed is not Jane's sexuality, but her anger (339). Differently from other critics, Gilbert and Gubar shift their focus from sexuality to female rage, showing that "Bertha now represents not

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<sup>83</sup> See Kinkead-Weeks' "The Place of Love in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*."

<sup>84</sup> For these readings of Bertha Mason see: Chase's "The Brontë, or Myth Domesticated," Foster's *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom, and the Individual*, Maynard's *Charlotte Brontë's Sexuality*, and Keefe's *Charlotte Brontë's World of Death*.

sexual desire but anger, not the repressed element in the respectable woman, but the suppressed element in the unemancipated woman” (Lerner 275). Gilbert and Gubar’s feminist reading of *Jane Eyre* greatly influenced the critical debate on the importance of Bertha. However, although they placed Bertha Mason at the center of this debate, Gilbert and Gubar simultaneously contributed to reducing this character to a symbol of escape from Victorian patriarchal power, negating her historical significance as a Jamaican Creole.

Gilbert and Gubar reduce Bertha to a projection of Jane’s unresolved anger; they argue that, “on a figurative and psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is still another—indeed the most threatening—avatar of Jane [...]. Bertha, in other words, is Jane’s truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress since her days at Gateshead” (359-60). According to this script, Bertha’s rending of Jane’s wedding veil is not symbolic of sexual violation, as Moglen argues, but it enacts Jane’s unconscious fear of female submission and loss of self in marriage; it demonstrates Jane’s anger against patriarchal control over women and the institution of marriage. For Gilbert and Gubar, Jane can express her ever-present rage through her double, Bertha, as “what Bertha now *does*...is what Jane wants to do” (359). Gilbert and Gubar proceed to establish, through a close-reading of the text, a parallelism between the behavior of the child Jane and the adult Bertha, as they are both described by Brontë as being wild, mad and animalistic. Gilbert and Gubar also analyze the recurring metaphors of fire and ice and mirror doublings (in the red-room at Gateshead, and at Thornfield) to corroborate their argument that Bertha is Jane’s double (340). They examine the novel’s symbolism in order to

establish a direct connection between Jane's rage and foretelling dreams, and Bertha's actions, which culminate in Bertha's immolation at Thornfield, symbolically freeing Jane from her alter-ego; the orphan child of her dreams, the "mad cat" of Gateshead (Brontë 9). Bertha's death removes both real and symbolic impediments, and allows Jane to marry Rochester on equal terms.

Although this reading has contributed to *Jane Eyre's* canonical status, it has also stripped Bertha of her Creole identity. Gilbert and Gubar's reading, by reducing Bertha to a projection of Jane's latent rage and "criminal self," erases Bertha's identity, "incorporating her negativity into the white middle-class woman's psyche," and thus effacing from the novel the history of slavery and imperialism that forms the background of Bertha's Jamaican upbringing and marriage to Rochester (Kucich 107). Carolyn Vellenga Berman, in *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Domestic Slavery*, argues that the most glaring shortfall of Gilbert and Gubar's work is that "Brontë's characterization of the Creole *as* Creole is unimportant to their analysis, since it indicates neither gender nor sexuality," as the critics, in their exclusively feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*, fail to consider the intersectionality of gender, race and nationality in their discussion of Bertha Mason (8).

Gayatri Spivak, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," argues that the "ideology of imperialism... provides the discursive field" for Jane's rise in status, through the effacement of the racially other Bertha (899). Without imperialism and the Atlantic routes of commerce there would be no Jane Eyre Rochester, as both the money she inherits from her uncle and her husband's fortune, prior to the destruction of Thornfield Hall, have their origins in the colonies (respectively Madeira and Jamaica).

The rise of the middle-class in Britain and the upward mobility of “plain Jane,” from governess to heir, are inseparable from the movement of capital and peoples in the Atlantic World. Similarly, sex and marriage are intimately linked to commerce and capital, as the marriage of Bertha and Rochester demonstrates. But what is the role of Bertha in Jane’s “progress” from governess to heir? Spivak suggests that the figure of Bertha Mason is “a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism” (899), as imperialism was a “crucial part of the cultural representation of England and the English” (896). Spivak further asserts that the “native female” (897)—in this case the racially undetermined Jamaican Creole Bertha—is excluded from social reproduction and the “soul-making” project of imperialism and, therefore, “Bertha’s function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not under the letter of the Law” (901). It is, in other words, Bertha’s condition as a mad and beastly Creole that provides Jane with the entitlement to develop the individuality that allows her to rise to her new station in society. Spivak’s argument falls short in her failure to acknowledge Bertha’s *unique* Creole identity, as she uses the appellative “native female” encompassing the non-white female *in general*. Similarly to Gilbert and Gubar, by reducing the Creole Bertha to a “native female,” Spivak glosses over her specific identity as a “legally white” Jamaican Creole and denies her historic specificity.<sup>85</sup> In order to argue that British female writers excluded their native sisters from “the British novelist’s emerging ‘female individualist’ norm,” Spivak fails to account for Bertha’s identity as a Creole, and essentializes her condition as that of “native female” (Berman 8).

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<sup>85</sup> Although Bertha is understood as being legally white, Brontë’s description of Rochester’s Creole wife casts doubts on her racial purity, raising the specter of miscegenation.



## BERTHA MASON: "A CREOLE"

In this section, I will reconfigure the character Bertha as an historical figure, illustrative of the relationship between British citizens living at home and Creoles and vice versa, looking at the ways in which Creoles were depicted in mainstream British literature. If I have distanced my approach to Brontë's "madwoman" from the highly symbolic reading of *Jane Eyre* by Gilbert and Gubar, by proposing to frame Bertha in a realistic context, I nonetheless agree with the contention that Bertha is not a "real Creole," but is depicted in terms that serve to document, not what Creoles were like, but rather how they were perceived and portrayed in the British imagination. In Brontë's novel, Bertha never speaks back (why not?)—not at least in human words, as she only grunts and growls in animalistic fashion—although her death can be interpreted as a speech act; an act of rebellion and defiance, along the lines proposed by Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, rather than as the enactment of a sacrificial *sati* that frees Rochester from the West Indian taint.<sup>86</sup> In spite of Bertha's voicelessness—the reader knows her only through the medium of Rochester's narration and Jane's commentary—her disturbing presence in a British novel and her negative characterization illustrate the fraught relation between colonialists and their original homeland, both at the time when Brontë writes (after emancipation), and at the time when the novel is set (1821-1836, before emancipation and at the height of the abolitionist movement).<sup>87</sup> Bertha's uncanny presence also attests to the impossibility of isolating and protecting England from the "corrupting" influence of the New World and of the Caribbean Creole as, in Brontë's

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<sup>86</sup> In the famous revision, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1996), Jean Rhys gives Bertha a voice.

<sup>87</sup> Slavery was abolished in the British colonies in 1833, but complete emancipation was fulfilled only in 1838. The above dates (1821-1836) range from the marriage between Rochester and Bertha, to the marriage between Rochester and Jane, according to Brontë's chronology (Meyer 255).

novel, Bertha and Jane are connected in more ways than Gilbert and Gubar allow. They are both imbricated in colonial means of production, the first as she is the daughter of a white Jamaican-Creole slaveholder, the second because she achieves financial independence through the profits of a colonial venture in Madeira.

Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, argues that “the Empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction...the facts of Empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities” (63-4). However, both “what went into [a text and] what its author excluded,” i.e. the unedifying realities of imperialism, are factors driven by the material production of the colonial plantation, which makes possible British economic survival and influences Britain’s cultural reproduction at home (67). Applying Said’s analysis of nineteenth-century novels to *Jane Eyre*, it becomes evident that the presence of Empire permeates the entire text—although Brontë never mentions British imperialism explicitly—even if Bertha is only a marginal character, and West Indian slavery is never openly discussed. Other characters in Brontë’s novel—such as Jane, Rochester and St. John Rivers—depend on the Empire’s material production in the colonies both for survival and financial independence, and to support and justify their identity, spirituality and definition of Englishness.<sup>88</sup> Bertha Mason, the Jamaican Creole who, with her presence at Thornfield Hall, threatens the English landscape and the notion of English femininity, therefore, becomes much more than a prop to create romantic

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<sup>88</sup> St. John’s decision to travel to India as a missionary defines his identity and spirituality.

tension in the novel, much more than Jane's double; she sets the parameters by which Englishness is defined and upheld, as "the antipodes of the Creole" (Brontë 265).

As I argued in my discussion of *Arthur Mervyn*, the commercial, financial and political fluidity of the nineteenth century makes it impossible to insulate the homeland (in the case of *Arthur Mervyn* the new American Republic) from the perceived damaging influence of the Caribbean Creole. In the stereotypical portrayal of Rochester's Creole wife and of her brother, Richard Mason, Brontë partakes in many of the beliefs shared by her contemporaries, described at length in my reading of *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History*, as well as in countless nineteenth-century travel narratives and histories on the West Indies. *Jane Eyre* rehearses the same associations of Creole degeneracy with hyper-sexuality, depravity, illness, and madness. These attributes are linked to the negative effects of the hot climate on the British constitution and on the progeny of British colonialists, and to the lack of proper education in the colonies. However, similarly to *Arthur Mervyn* and *Secret History*—which prove that it is impossible to insulate the white American citizen from the rest of the Atlantic World in spite of the perceived threat constituted by the Caribbean Creole—the characters in *Jane Eyre* remain dependent on the West Indies for financial sustenance, independence, and identity construction.

In *Arthur Mervyn*, the yellow fever is not only treated as a factual historical event, but also as a metaphorical pestilence that threatens the survival of the American nation, and that is the result of an unwelcome foreign presence. Similarly, in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha represents a threat of contagion and contamination of the purity of the British landscape and of the Englishness of the proper British citizen. Historically, in fact, the colonial

subject (especially non-white) becomes associated with images of contagion, as I have demonstrated in my reading of *Arthur Mervyn*. The metaphor of contagion transcends geographical borders and assumes a transatlantic significance that, paradoxically, draws connections between the ways in which American and British citizens construct the figure of the West Indian Creole. For Brontë, as for many of her contemporaries, “the Caribbean tropics are a site that purges a sense of industry, morality, propriety—read ‘Englishness’—out of the people that reside there... [it] can turn even the [white] ‘Creole’ into someone lazy, promiscuous, and uncouth—understood as the freed Caribbean blacks—that is socially undesirable,” and that can pollute the homeland upon his or her return (Hickman 183). Therefore, “when absconded to England [Bertha] in effect brings the infectious tropics with her,” as life in the West Indies produces changes that become irreversible; the Creole is no longer English (Hickman 183).

Edward Long, in his *The History of Jamaica* (1774), discusses the concept of “moral infection,” which was a concern for Long, as English colonizers indulged in promiscuous acts with mulatto women “with so little prudence and caution in their amours, that they are almost *morally* sure of being very speedily *infected*” (Long 2, 535).<sup>89</sup> Edward Long was a British-born Creole who lived extensively in Jamaica and who wrote his *History* in support of the Jamaican plantocracy and of the slaveholding system. In his three-volume book he provides information on the island, the slave culture, the class system, the creolization of the language, the institutions of government, the flora and fauna of the Caribbean, and the ways in which he thinks Jamaica could be rendered more productive and politically efficient. Long, as I discussed in the introduction, in spite

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<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of Long’s *History* also see the introduction of this project.

of his pro-slavery beliefs, provides a testimony of the emergence, as early as 1774, of a white Creole consciousness among the Creole offspring of British settlers in Jamaica, who seek political and economic independence from the “illegal and pernicious measures of government,” imposed by England against the colonial Assembly (Long 2, 76). At the same time, Long expresses his concern with white Creoles’ noxious “constant intercourse from their birth with the Negroes” (Long 2, 278). He believes that such intercourse spoils not only their diction but also their character—a belief he paradoxically shares with English public opinion—as, according to his *History*, Blacks “are void of genius and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science. They have no plan or sense of morality among them... They have no moral sensations; no taste but for women; gormandizing and drinking to excess; no wish but to be idle” (Long 2, 353). These stereotypes Long associates with slaves are, in various degrees, also attributed to the white slaveholding West Indian plantocracy of the nineteenth century, by writers such as Charlotte Brontë. Long is aware of the “dangers” of miscegenation as early as 1774, and worries about Creoles’ relations with mulatto women, who “harbor in [their] blood the seeds of many terrible distempers [and especially the] latent taint of the venereal distemper, or *scrofa*, either hereditary or acquired and ill-cured” (Long 2, 275-6). Long’s anxieties, expressed in 1774, are still a source of fear at the time Brontë writes her novel, and are reflected in the depiction of both Richard Mason’s effeminacy, lack of physical and mental stamina, and cowardice, and in Bertha’s sexual excesses and “vices, [which] sprang up fast and rank” after her marriage to Rochester (Brontë 261).

Richard Mason, Bertha’s brother, is described by Jane using a feminized language that undermines both his Englishness and his masculinity, and that shows how “both Jane

and *Jane Eyre* the novel partake in a deep abiding faith in the discerning powers of physiognomy, [which] was also used to discern madness and idiocy,” and which is used, in this instance, to associate Richard’s Creoleness not only to feminine traits, but also to weakness, sickness, and lack of stamina (Donaldson 104). When Jane first meets Mr. Mason, she describes him as speaking with an accent “not precisely foreign, but still not altogether English,” foregrounding his liminality (Brontë 162). As she observes him, she notices that: “his *complexion was singularly sallow*; otherwise he was a fine looking man, at first sight especially. On closer examination you detected *something in his face that displeased*, or rather that failed to please. His features were regular, but *too relaxed*: his eye was large and well cut, but *the life looking out of it was a tame, vacant life*” [emphasis mine] (Brontë 162). Susan Meyer, in “Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of *Jane Eyre*,” reads the singular sallowness of Richard’s skin as proof that “the yellow-skinned yet socially white Mr. Mason” (and his sister Bertha) might have been passing for white, echoing the fears Long expresses in *The History* (252). Sue Thomas, on the contrary, argues that references to Richard’s “sallow complexion, regular (symmetrical), yet too relaxed features, and large eyes, are...physical attributes attributed to white Creole women,” thus conforming to the stereotype of the effeminate colonial man (5). Other adjectives used in this description, such as “tame and vacant,” suggest laziness, lack of resolution, and passiveness (Brontë 162).

On a closer look, Jane confirms her initial feelings of repulsion at the sight of Richard, reaffirming the connection between physiognomy, phrenology, personality and the potential for mental illness, which seems to be inscribed in Richard’s Creole traits, whereby “according to phrenology, inner organs of the brain are associated with specific

personality traits and cognitive skills. The over- and under- development of these inner organs can be read through the external shape of the skull and its protrusions and recesses” (qtd. in Donaldson 103). Richard’s wandering eye described in the following passage, thus, has “no meaning in its wandering,” and together with his “low, even forehead”—a sign of diminutive intellect—suggests that the germs of madness might also be inscribed in his body, as well as his sister’s body (Brontë 162):

I liked his physiognomy even less than before [upon seeing him again]; it struck me as being, at the same time, *unsettled and inanimate*. His eye wandered, and had no meaning in its wandering... For a handsome and not unamiable-looking man he *repelled me exceedingly*; there was no power in that smooth-skinned face...no firmness in that aquiline nose, and small cherry mouth...no thought in the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye.” (Brontë 162)

Jane’s description, above, demonstrates not only Mr. Mason’s lack of mental strength, intelligence and initiative, alongside his inability to sustain prolonged intellectual effort, but supports Rochester’s prediction that “his feeble mind...will probably be in the same state [as his siblings] one day” (Brontë 261). As Jane learns that Richard “came from some hot country,” she understands why “his face was so sallow, and [why] he sat so near the hearth, and wore a surtout in the house,” demonstrating that Brontë endorses the contemporary belief that hot climates had lasting effects on the bodies of British colonialists (Brontë 163). Richard is further contrasted to Rochester. The first is described as a “sleek gander” and as a “meek sheep,” the second as a “fierce falcon” and as a “rough-coated keen-eyed dog”; a comparison that serves, once more, to highlight Richard’s effeminate nature, and passivity in his relationship with Rochester, towards whom Richard acts submissively, recognizing Rochester’s mastery over him, as

exemplified by the above analogies: gander-falcon; sheep-dog (Brontë 162). Moreover, in the interrupted wedding scene, Richard is depicted as pale-faced and hesitant. When Rochester attempts to strike him, he “shrank away and cried faintly,” like a lady, provoking contempt in Rochester who, “looking at his quivering limbs and white cheeks,” assures him that he’d “almost as soon strike a woman as [him]” (Brontë 248-9). Richards’s “white lips” and paleness suggest draining of blood, and sickness, as well as lack of “courage” to “speak out” about the illegality of the impending marriage (248). The relationship between Rochester and his brother-in-law underlines “the perversity of Richard’s effeminate masculinity,” which repels Jane “exceedingly,” and which is a direct consequence of his rearing and education in the colonies as well as the result of miscegenation, a possibility Brontë alludes to, but never directly confirms (S. Thomas, “Tropical Extravagance” 6).

The gender reversal of the Mason siblings is effectuated by the description of Bertha in masculine terms. She is described as “a big woman, in her stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides,” showing “virile force” and thus infringing the boundaries of Victorian femininity (Brontë 250). Her poor domestic management, her inability to provide her husband with a “quiet or settled household, because no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper,” add to Bertha’s inability to embody proper womanhood (Brontë 261). Bertha’s physical description, reversing gender roles, complements the description of her behavior, and contributes to her racial indeterminacy as, Sue Thomas argues, “the vices of intemperance, cursing, and unchastity...are normally, but not exclusively, masculine, lower-class, ‘coloured’ female, or black ones in early nineteenth-century discourses about



Creoleness,” adding racial ambiguity to Bertha’s un-feminine looks and demeanor (S. Thomas, “Tropical Extravagance” 6).

Bertha is masculine and coarse, thus incapable of enacting proper Victorian womanhood. Unlike her brother, who is represented as sickly but is still seen as a person, Bertha is depicted in animalistic terms. She is represented as being not quite human. She is a “demon” and a vampire (251). Brontë describes Bertha using the trope of the vampiric woman, which was recurrent among the Romantic poets she read, such as Keats and Coleridge.<sup>90</sup> When Jane sees Bertha for the first time she compares her to “the foul German specter—the Vampyre” (Brontë 242). Bertha attacks her brother Richard by biting him “like a tigress” in the shoulder (Brontë 181). The doctor confirms that “she had her teeth here [in the arm] too” (Brontë 181). Richard recounts that “she sucked the blood: she said she’d drain [his] heart” (Brontë 181). Similarly, when Rochester brings the aborted wedding party to the attic, after his secret is revealed, Bertha “sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek” (Brontë 250).

The trope of the vampire that kills children and sucks the blood out of its victims turning them into a progeny of vampires, alongside misguided ideas on cannibalism among Caribbean blacks, conflate in Brontë’s depiction of Bertha, who remains intentionally racially undetermined, indicting both white and black Creoles, and highlighting contemporary fears of miscegenation among the progeny of white Creoles. The idea of vampirism is associated with fears of infection and contagion, fears also present in *Arthur Mervyn*, as he describes the gothic underworld of pestilence-stricken

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<sup>90</sup> The figure of the Lamia in John Keats’ poem *Lamia* was “half woman and half snake” and was “derived from Lilith, a mythological woman supposed to have been the rebellious first wife of Adam” (Hickman 184).

Philadelphia. If, in Brontë's contemporary imagination, the trope of the blood-sucking vampire is synonymous with the idea of infection and contagion, by explicitly comparing Bertha with a "Vampyre" (Brontë 242), Brontë "hints that bringing 'mad' Caribbean women to England is tantamount to bringing the tropical 'infection' of the Caribbean atmosphere" into the British home (Hickman 186). The Jamaican "sulphur-steams" Rochester abhors and from which he flees, seem to follow him to England in the body of his Creole wife, who contaminates the purity of Thornfield Hall (Brontë 262). By using contemporary stereotypes to describe Bertha, Brontë subscribes to the fear of foreign invasion that also informs Brown's novel albeit in the context of the early American Republic and, at the same time, denounces "the horror of British depredations overseas coming home to haunt the 'immaculate' estates of the English countryside" with the specter of slavery, as Bertha—we must not forget this, although she can be construed as a victim—belongs to the class of the oppressors and to the slaveholding plantocracy, which was under attack by abolitionists at the time when Brontë sets her novel (Hickman 187).

Bertha's "moral madness" is defined in Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* as "a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, temper, habit, moral disposition, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect," or, in other words, an incapacity to control one's animalistic instincts and feelings (qtd. in I. Ward 75). Brontë takes up shared concerns with the perils of Creole promiscuity—one of the arguments expressed by the antislavery campaign—in her description of Bertha's mother. Mrs. Mason is inflamed with the immoderate sexual desire attributed to black women, which is later genetically transmitted to Bertha through her mother's bloodline, and which, now that Bertha is in England, risks contaminating the English countryside;

thus the need to lock her up in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Bertha embodies the self-indulgence and idleness of the West Indian plantocracy; a class that, at the time Brontë writes, was not popular in British public opinion. She is “a female version of the ‘immoral West Indian planter,’ a literary stereotype that, following the abolition of the African slave trade, was commonly invoked as ‘a useful shorthand for depravity,’” and as a term of comparison to construct proper English national identities (Sharpe 45).

Brontë describes Bertha as the “daughter of Jonas Mason, a merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, *a Creole*—,” foregrounding the mother’s Creoleness as the cause of Bertha’s madness, as Bertha is said to be “the true daughter of an infamous mother...at once intemperate and unchaste” (Brontë 261). In Rochester’s account of his ill-fated marriage to Bertha, he concludes: “*my wife* was mad—her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity,” inferring that she might have contracted syphilis which expedited the development of “germs of insanity” already present in her mother’s Creole blood line; one of the fears expressed by Long in *The History* (Brontë 261). Rochester tells his stupefied audience that “Bertha Mason is mad” because of the Creole blood she has inherited: “she came of a mad family;—idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard!—as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points” (Brontë 249). These are Rochester’s explanations for his wife’s madness, which establish a clear connection between her matrilineal inheritance and Creole blood and her present condition, absolving Rochester from any responsibility in his wife’s mental disorder, and justifying his decision to lock her up like

a beast and his desire—which he perceives as an entitlement—to “seek sympathy with something *at least human*” [my emphasis] (Brontë 249).

Bertha is also described with adjectives that highlight, simultaneously, her liminal condition between human and animal, and her savagery; adjectives that have very strong racial connotations, such as “pigmy intellect,” and that have contributed to critics, such as Susan Meyer, interpreting Bertha’s body as being black or mixed-race (Brontë 261). For example, Reginald Watson argues that Bertha’s depiction follows the model of the tragic mulatto, and that “the mulatto’s mixed blood is linked to his/her personality. From his ‘white’ blood comes his intellectual strivings, while from his ‘black’ blood comes his/her savagery [...] Mulatto figures are depicted as deviant and amoral characters because, historically, they were looked upon as being evil hybrids that retained only negative aspects of the black/white bloodlines within them” (454). Terms such as “dark grizzled hair... purple face... bloated features,” used to describe Bertha, contribute to the critical debate on Bertha’s race, although Brontë leaves this point strategically ambiguous (Brontë 250). But more than the adjectives used by Jane to describe Bertha, such as “thick and dark hair... swelled and dark [lips]... blackened inflation of the lineaments,” it is the resemblance of her “savage face” and behavior to a beast that plays on stereotypes associating Bertha to black slaves and cannibalism (Brontë 242). She is so monstrous that “what *it was*, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell” [my emphasis] (Brontë 250). She is depicted as a clothed hyena, that “grovelled... on all fours ...snatched and growled like some strange wild animal... [standing] tall on its hind legs,” and gifted with “[a] fierce cry, [a] virile force, [and] cunning” (Brontë 250). The adjective “cunning,” in particular, was often used to describe slaves, supporting claims—

like Meyer's—that Bertha might be black, and thus conflating dark skin with the evils of the Creole ruling class, to which Bertha belongs. Moreover, the figure of the hyena, which eats corpses, conjures images of cannibalism, and gender reversal, as it was believed that hyenas were able to change their sex.<sup>91</sup>

While Susan Meyer reads Bertha as non-white, Berman argues that the figure of the Creole wife in *Jane Eyre* represents the convergence of two discourses, one on colonial reform, and the other on domestic mental health reform.<sup>92</sup> Berman argues that the description of Bertha's face as “discolored” and “blackened”—not black—finds a precedent in pseudo-scientific writing on melancholy-mania, which associated melancholia with smoke, and mania (madness) with fire; melancholics, thus, have “a yellowish color,” while “their entire body is dry and burning hot, their face dark” (qtd. in Berman 132). Therefore, based on these pseudo-scientific theories, she concludes that the description of “Bertha's fiery ardor and discolored skin would indicate the alternation of mania and melancholy,” and not necessarily the fact that she was of mixed blood (Berman 132). This purposeful indeterminacy in the racial categorization of Bertha, according to Berman, not only brings together the parallel discourses of colonial and domestic (mental health) reform, but shows that Bertha stands in for the corruption of all Creoles, black and white, and thus of the slavery system that supports them; “Bertha's blackened skin reminds the reader that Creoles of all kinds lacked a capacity for self-governance,” intensified by the warm climate and by the vices of colonial plantation economy (135).

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<sup>91</sup> The hyena (crocotha) was believed to be the mixed progeny of a dog and a wolf and “to be bisexual and become male or female in alternate years, the female bearing offspring without any male” (Pliny, *Natural History* VIII).

<sup>92</sup> See Berman's chapter “Colonial madness in *Jane Eyre*” and the introduction and conclusion of Berman's *Creole Crossings*.

Berman argues that Brontë's conscious effort to make her Creole character indeterminate in her "exploration of racial ambiguity thus draws upon recent history, as it ingeniously combines the bad qualities of different racial stereotypes into one unforgettable literary figure," in order to indict both white and black Creoles for the bestiality that results from illicit intercourse among colonialists, colonized and slaves, brought about by the institution of slavery (135-6). The racially undetermined Bertha and her brother Richard embody contamination and infection—the possibility that Creole degeneracy could spread and corrupt the English way of life—thus, in her depiction of the Mason siblings, Brontë "assembles Creoles of all kinds into a potent combination, condensing the signs of administration gone awry" into the figures of the racially undetermined Bertha, and of her brother Richard (Berman 135-6). If Bertha and Richard seem to encode both white and black Creoles as responsible for contaminating the purity of the English nation, Bertha is simultaneously the victim of a system (i.e. patriarchy and slavery) that has corrupted her and driven her to madness, and an example of a debauched colonial ruling class whose vices and laziness, intensified by the West Indian climate, landscape, and unprincipled way of life, can infect the British citizen all the way to England. The theory of contagion is upheld by Rochester's own moral corruption, which springs from his contact with Bertha and his past experience as a slave owner in Jamaica. As previously discussed, critics have pointed out that Rochester is Bertha's double, as he embodies her sexually deviant behavior and metaphorical darkness, which he enacts through a series of lovers and concubines—such as Céline Varens—he compares to slaves. Rochester's moral darkness "shows itself [also] in [his] relations with Jane," culminating in his intended bigamy (S. Thomas, "Tropical Extravagance" 11). In spite of

the promise of “clear prospects” brought by “a wind fresh from Europe,” upon returning home Rochester brings back with him, not only his mad Creole wife, but also the taint of the Caribbean on his body, which is encoded both in his behavior and in his physical and metaphorical darkness (Brontë 263).

Susan Meyer argues that, by portraying characters that belong to the dominant class (Rochester, Blanche Ingram, and the Reeds) as dark-skinned, Brontë associates “English oppressors with ‘dark races’,” thus blaming the oppressed of “intrinsic despotism” leading to the corruption of the Englishman, and showing “the greatest indifference to the humanity of those subject to British colonialism” (262). Brontë, by this uncanny association, empties the signifier “dark-skin” of its historical significance, and reveals her concern for the effects of slavery and colonialism on British citizen only—in particular British citizen at home—and not for the condition of the “dark peoples”; the true victims of the British imperial effort (Meyer 261). The racially ambiguous mad Creole woman, therefore, never acquires a voice, and although the novel is set during a period of slave revolts and abolitionist propaganda, before and in the aftermath of emancipation, Brontë’s allusions to historical events remain indirect. She, on the other hand, borrows the language of the abolitionist campaign for emancipation to discuss domestic problems, and uses slavery as a metaphor to speak of middle-class white women’s bondage within the patriarchal social structure at home.

#### THE GOVERNESS AND THE CREOLE: CLASS, RACE, LIMINALITY, AND ENGLISHNESS

As cited earlier, Spivak argues that “Bertha’s function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her

entitlement under the spirit if not under the letter of the Law,” in favor of the social climbing governess, Jane (901). In the essays, “The Anathematized Race: The Governess and *Jane Eyre*,” and “*Jane Eyre* and the Governess in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” Mary Poovey writes extensively about the historical, social and political significance of the figure of the governess in the 1840s, and explains the reasons why Brontë’s governess, Jane, is a subversive character who threatens the separation between working class and middle class, and the notion of ideal womanhood. Although Poovey is not concerned about Bertha’s Creoleness, which is not discussed in her writing, it is possible to establish some commonality between these two figures: the Creole and the governess, as they are both—albeit for different reasons—liminal figures who don’t quite fit the ideal of English proper womanhood. Poovey argues that “Brontë’s novel reveals that the figure from whom the middle-class mother had to be distinguished was not just the working-class woman but the middle-class governess as well [...] The governess was the figure who ought to ensure that a boundary existed between classes of women, but she could not, precisely because she was like the woman from whom she ought to have differed”; she seemed undistinguishable from the middle-class mother but, like the working-class woman, she earned wages (Poovey, “*Jane Eyre*” 47). Although Poovey’s essays focus specifically on class-differences at “home”—as she does not consider the differences between the English middle-class woman and the Creole woman of any class—I would like to extend her argument by drawing connections between the figures of the governess and of the Creole wife as, like the governess threatens class separation at home, the Creole wife threatens England’s separation from its colonies. Both are therefore dangerous and, at the same time, liminal figures.



The figure of the governess is subversive in multiple ways. She looks like she belongs to the same social class as her employer; however, she is just *performing* a mother's role for money (often not sufficient to guarantee her financial security), thus removing the distinction between middle-class womanhood and the marketplace. By taking care of middle-class children's education for wages, the governess reveals the lie in the tenets of Victorian ideal womanhood, according to which "women naturally gave love and service without pay" (Poovey, "*Jane Eyre*" 46). The notion that raising and educating her children is the natural role to which the Victorian mother aspires was "central to the representation of domesticity as desirable... along with the disincentive to work outside the home... [and] instrumental to fostering the image of women as moral and not economic agents, antidotes to the evils of competition" (Poovey, "*Jane Eyre*" 46). The demand for governesses disproves these beliefs, as it shows that not all middle-class mothers chose to raise their children. Thus the education of children, undertaken by unmarried women, becomes remunerable by wages, and frees real mothers to dedicate themselves to other activities, threatening the distinction between social reproduction—traditionally a domestic, unremunerated activity—and the market place. Similarly, the presence of Bertha, a Creole woman, in England in the role of wife of an Englishman, threatens social reproduction at home, as Bertha's presence blurs the distinction between colonial economy (the marketplace where social reproduction should not happen), and the homeland, where proper Englishness should be constructed. The fact that Brontë makes Bertha childless is, in itself, an indication of how the Creole wife was seen as a threat to Englishness, especially when she came "home".

Moreover, the young, unmarried governess is seen as a sexual threat to the middle-class family. Although she was supposed to be a guardian of morality, sexually unapproachable, and devoid of any sexual desires, “contemporaries openly worried that the governess was not the bulwark against immorality and class erosion but the conduit through which working-class habits would infiltrate the middle-class home [as] more tradesmen’s daughters were entering the ranks of governesses” (Poovey, “Anathematized” 233). This was especially worrisome because the moral education of young ladies was entrusted to governesses, who might not have been as indifferent to sexual desire as it was presupposed. To illustrate the fear of the sexual threat hidden in the figure of the governess, Poovey argues that lunacy was widespread among governesses because sexual repression was demanded of them and “governesses accounted for the largest category of women in lunatic asylums” (Poovey, “Anathematized” 234). Poovey describes the “connection between the governess and the lunatic by metaphorically tying both to a vitality stunted, silenced, driven mad by denial and restraint,” which, however, was not enough to protect the middle-class family from the threat that their governess “could not be trusted to regulate her own sexuality”; a threat that is dramatized in *Jane Eyre* (Poovey, “Anathematized” 236).

The English governess in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, like the Creole (mad)woman, becomes, thus, a symbol of class erosion and social instability. She is a liminal figure who does not entirely belong to her own class, and who is perceived as a threat to the middle-class family because she is an unmarried woman. The governess is not working-class—and therefore she remains isolated from the other servants in the household—but she is also not a “proper lady” (as she earns wages), and is treated with

suspicion by other middle-class women, as Jane realizes when she sees Mrs. Dent whisper behind her back, and acknowledges that “it was a reminder that one of the anathematized race was present” (Brontë 151). The use of the word “race”—and not class—is interesting here, as it underscores not only the alien place of the governess, but also the impossibility, or at least extreme difficulty, to transcend the barriers imposed by society. Jane Eyre can only succeed in marrying Rochester when his misfortune and her fortune make them social equals. The obstacle—and exposure—of the Creole wife function, not only to prevent Rochester from committing bigamy, but also to prevent the marriage of two persons from different social classes. Miss Fairfax warns Jane that “equality of position and fortune is often advisable in such cases...Gentlemen in [Mr. Rochester’s] station are not accustomed to marrying their governesses” (Brontë 226) and, in all probability, Rochester would not have proposed to Jane if he had been a free man as, Miss Fairfax explains, “he is a proud man: all the Rochesters were proud: and his father, at least, liked money. He too has always been called careful” (Brontë 225).

The use of the phrase “anathematized race” to describe Jane’s class inferiority, and thus alienation from proper middle class, which renders Rochester’s proposal suspicious, shows that Jane shares a condition of liminality with Bertha that should not be undermined, as both are excluded and marginalized by British society. As Berman argues, they are both “liminal figures from the perspective of the British ruling class [as] the governess both marks and unsettles the domestic boundaries of family and class, while the Creole defines and engenders the domestic boundaries of the nation” (139). Jane, because of her liminal condition as a poor governess, is excluded from upward mobility through marriage. Therefore, Brontë strategically places her heroine vis-à-vis

the Creole Bertha, as a path to claiming Jane's membership to the British nation and to the middle-class, by juxtaposing her Englishness to the rich, but racially ambiguous, Creole wife (Brontë 151). Sharpe argues that "the real discomfort of a governess's position...arises from the fact she is undefined...the ambiguous position of the governess [is that] she both embodies the domestic ideal and threatens it" (46). This condition of occupying an "undefined...ambiguous position" within the ruling class is shared by Bertha, in spite of her wealth, as she "transgresses the separation of spheres that ensures Victorian morality" in a different way, being a Creole married to an Englishman, thus straddling the boundary between nation and periphery, being English but not quite English: white, but not quite white (Sharpe 46). These different transgressions relegate both Jane and Bertha to the margins of Victorian middle-class, to which they similarly do not belong; the first because of her poverty and lack of connections, the second because of her (undetermined) race and questionable colonial education.

However, if this is the case, if Jane and Bertha are both liminal female figures who do not fit within proper English womanhood, what do they have in common besides this condition of liminality? Why is the novel using Bertha's Creoleness to make a statement about class ambiguity? Is being born in the New World weighed against the liminal condition of impoverished English middle-class women, in an attempt to broaden the parameters of proper Englishness to include those who, like Jane, have education but not wealth? How does the novel solve these multiple types of contagion (intermarriages between classes and colonial corruption), resulting from the economic upheavals of the 1840s, which threaten the English sense of self and the well being of the nation? How is the liminal condition of the English governess Jane affected by Brontë's choice to make

Rochester's wife a Jamaican Creole? And what are the implications of the juxtaposition of the Creole Bertha and the English governess Jane? By witnessing the performance of Bertha's madness and listening to the horrifying story of her unchastity and intemperance, the Victorian reader is encouraged to condone Jane's misgivings, and to forget that she is far from being a "proper lady"—not just because of her poverty, but also because of her lack of modesty—showing that one of the reasons for making Rochester's wife a mad Creole could be to fashion a new type of 'not quite proper' English womanhood, lifting Jane from her state of liminality.

The novel, therefore, uses a female Creole figure as Jane's literary antagonist, a figure whose role is to stall the gratification of romantic happiness between Jane and Rochester until they become financial equals. The fulfillment of Jane's destiny with Rochester would not have been as easily accepted by Brontë's readership, had Rochester's wife been anything other than a stereotypical (mad and promiscuous) and alienated Creole, a figure who belongs to the periphery of the Empire, and is not truly English. By emphasizing Bertha's promiscuity and sexual deviancy in hyperbolic terms, Brontë simultaneously downplays Jane's own improper behavior, like her indulgence in inappropriate intimate exchanges with her employer, who shamelessly discloses to an unmarried woman his own debauchery, by admitting to having had a string of exotic (non-English) lovers. Rochester's intimate tête-à-tête and semi-confessions to Jane would not be tolerated by a proper Victorian maiden, but Jane's uncommon willingness to listen to him encourages Rochester's infatuation, and suggests that Jane is not as innocent as she portrays herself to be. Like the figure of the governess Poovey depicts, Jane, if not a lunatic like Bertha, often considers herself to be on the verge of madness—a madness

that seems to come from irrepressible sexual desires—and shows that she is far from embodying the purity and a-sexuality attributed to the ideal Victorian governess, as the following description of Jane’s frustrated cravings and metaphor for unrequited love demonstrates:

I regained my couch, but never thought of sleep. Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne; but I could not reach it, even in fancy—a counteracting breeze blew off land, and continually drove me back. Sense would resist delirium, judgment would warm passion. Too feverish to rest, I rose as soon as day dawned. (Brontë 129-30)

Jane’s restless dream seems to express her feelings of unfulfilled desire for Rochester, a desire that is physical as well as spiritual, as is apparent in the dangerous conflict between “sense” and “delirium,” between “judgment” and “passion,” which toss about Jane’s body and soul in an “unquiet sea” where “surges of joy” and “trouble” alternate in her feverish sleep, images that recall a physical, sexual experience.

#### WEST INDIAN SLAVERY AND THE GHOST OF REVOLUTION

The death of Bertha Mason in the fire at Thornfield Hall, which conveniently frees Rochester of the “Creole taint” that has thwarted his progress, has been analyzed as an allegory of the fires, burning down the masters’ estates, during revolts erupting in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean at the time the novel is set. Critics, such as Sue Thomas, and Susan Meyer have reconstructed *Jane Eyre* as an allegory of West Indian slave revolts in the 1820s-30s; such as the Demerara rebellion in 1823, the four alleged conspiracies to rebel in Jamaica between 1823 and 1824, slave unrest in Trinidad and Dominica, and the Sam Sharpe’s Rebellion in Jamaican in 1831 (S. Thomas,

“Christianity” 74). Thomas, for example, argues that Jane’s rendition of the fight with John Reed—which Thomas dates in October 1824 and which results in Jane being locked in the red-room—uses the language of revolution, and alludes to the “August 1823 slave rebellion in Demerara” (S. Thomas, “Christianity” 59). Jane says: “I was conscious that a moment’s mutiny had already rendered me liable to strange penalties and, like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go all lengths” (Brontë 9). The night in which Rochester decides to return to Europe can also be interpreted as an allegory of slave revolts, as this “fiery West Indian night...quivering with the ferment of tempest” (Brontë 262) can be read as an allusion to the “1823 slave revolts in the British Caribbean,” where “black clouds” represent “enslaved peoples” (S. Thomas, “Tropical Extravagance” 8). The strong imagery Brontë uses is suggestive of war, fighting, and blood—the “sea...rumbled dull like an earthquake,” the moon is “red, like a hot cannon-ball”—and Bertha’s demonic shrieks become tantamount with black insurrectionists’ yells (Brontë 262). Meyer, along the same lines, argues that writers “use tropical storms to figure ‘the rage and revenge of the black West Indians,’” which, in Brontë’s novel, are embodied in the figure of Bertha, who Meyer links to the Maroons (248).<sup>93</sup>

If this is the case, and the novel “associates [Bertha] with Blacks, particularly with the black Jamaican antislavery rebels, the Maroons,” as Meyer argues, why would Brontë use the legally white Creole Bertha—a member of the slaveholding plantocracy—to re-enact the burning of white wealth by the hands of rebel slaves, when *Jane Eyre* was written a decade after emancipation and Bertha was the beneficiary of that wealth (252)?

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<sup>93</sup> The Maroons were independent black communities living the highland regions of Jamaica. They obtained independence through a series of wars (Maroon Wars) with British soldiers. In exchange for their independence they pledged to help the British to capture runaway slaves (See Lalla’s *Defining Jamaican Fiction* for an analysis of the topos of marronage in literature). I use the work of Barbara Lalla in my reading of novels by West Indian Creoles in chapter 3.

Is Bertha transformed from oppressor to oppressed, by the hand of Rochester?<sup>94</sup> Who is the real victim in *Jane Eyre*? Can we detect some contradictions in Brontë's final message? *Jane Eyre* makes no direct reference to slavery in the British Empire, although Rochester was a Jamaican slave owner—as was Bertha's family—and he acknowledges, albeit indirectly, that slavery is degrading for the master, as much as it is for the slaves, by telling Jane that “hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading” (Brontë 266). This statement, which comes from personal experience, subscribes to the arguments of the abolitionists in favor of emancipation, who believed slavery corrupted the slaveholder and destroyed his family, even though Brontë never directly condemns British imperialism but maintains a pro-imperialist approach, in her praise for England's missionary efforts and civilizing mission.

The only direct references to slavery in *Jane Eyre* are taken from ancient Rome, as Jane accuses John Reed to be “like a slave driver...like the Roman Emperors” (Brontë 8). Direct references are also made to stereotypical representations of the East, as Jane conjures up “images of despotic sultans and desperate slave girls” to combat “the patriarchal ‘despotism’ central to Rochester's character” whom she compares to a sultan—and herself to a slave—“drawing from a fully developed cultural code implicitly shared with [her] readers” that uses Orientalist images of the seraglio to talk about the condition of women at home (Zonana 34, 40). Although allusions to colonialism and

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<sup>94</sup> Legally, upon marriage, the property of the wife is transferred to the husband and her body becomes his legal property too. Upon confirmation of insanity by “alienists” paid by the family, a person could be locked up by his/her family, as “families were best placed to adjudge the nature and extent of any ‘moral’ lunacy” and the courts did not intervene as long as the family procured a certificate of lunacy, often incarcerating relatives who were “more inconvenient than mad” (I. Ward 70). When someone was incarcerated either privately or in a public asylum for insanity, that person lost all his civil rights and liberties.



slavery pervade the novel, and Jane declares herself ready to “go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved...and stir up mutiny” in Rochester’s imaginary harem, the use of the slave/sultan metaphor serves primarily to comment on Jane’s own feeling of female submission in a patriarchal society, and never directly critiques British imperialism (Brontë 230).<sup>95</sup> By identifying with a missionary and not with a female slave, in effect, Jane identifies with the ideology of imperialism. Jane borrows from the rhetoric of abolitionism to discuss the condition of bondage to which middle-class white women are relegated, and “asserts her equality in the rhetorical terms of the abolitionists,” equating the horrifying realities of slavery to the condition of servitude of white women, an analogy employed by many nineteenth-century female writers, which undermines the real brutality of slavery (Ward 22).

Similar contradictions in Brontë’s rendition of British imperialism can be seen in her treatment of the East and of the missionary efforts in India of men such as St. John Rivers, efforts which are contemporary to the publication of *Jane Eyre*. While, outwardly, Jane takes on the role of a missionary, symbolically inciting mutiny in a seraglio—and, thus, subscribing to Britain’s civilizing mission—and openly praising St. John Rivers’ zeal in following God’s calling to India, she ultimately rejects British missionary work in India. Although Jane tries to please St. John, she realizes that following him amounts to “force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation” (Brontë 339). She realizes that St. John’s Christianity is just a mask to

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<sup>95</sup> Sue Thomas, on the contrary, argues that by describing her role as that of a missionary inciting mutiny in an Easter seraglio, Jane is evoking the work of William Knibb, a Baptist missionary preaching in Jamaica in 1831, who was “charged with inciting mutiny among slave” (58). Knibb’s church was burned down by planters and he was forced to leave Jamaica. Upon his return to England, he contributed to the cause of the abolitionist movement through his campaign with British Parliament resulting in the passing of laws that led to the abolition of slavery (S. Thomas, “Christianity” 58).

justify his patriarchal power as, “in his presence... I fell under a freezing spell. When he said ‘go,’ I went; ‘come’ I came; ‘do this’ I did it. But I did not love my servitude” (Brontë 339). Ultimately, Jane rejects St. John’s offer to follow him to India as his wife, and Brontë ends the novel foretelling his death from the Eastern climate. Ward argues that “if we recall other interventions of nature in the novel, such as the oak tree split by lightning, Brontë asks nature to say what she could not: that Rivers has made the wrong choice and that he did not belong in the East” reversing Jane’s (and Brontë’s) outward support of Rivers’ civilizing mission (23). Brontë’s indictment of colonialism and patriarchy therefore crosses through the entire plot, from Jane’s Roman analogies at Gateshead, to her Eastern analogies at Thornfield Hall, to her treatment of St. John’s mission at Moor House.

However, if Brontë’s use of abolitionist discourse constitutes only the medium through which to talk about white women’s oppression in England, and if Brontë does not care about “native” women like Bertha, as many critics, including Spivak, have argued, how should we read Bertha’s oppression and ultimate suicide? Can Bertha’s leap, and death in the fire, amount to an act of rebellion and re-claiming of her West Indian identity? Can it amount to a speech act and a denunciation of both patriarchy and the colonial means of production and distribution of capital that contribute to Bertha’s ultimate fate? Is Bertha’s death tantamount to a refusal to accept the convergence of intersecting oppressions: patriarchy and colonialism? Although Brontë uses Bertha’s death to affirm the English governess’s new role in the social reproduction of Englishness, the text simultaneously reveals its contradictions in the depiction of Bertha’s suicide, as in death Bertha reclaims her identity and her voice.

My argument is inspired by Jean Rhys's premises for her revision of *Jane Eyre*, in which she strives to give Brontë's Bertha a voice and a historically specific past as "Brontë's melodramatic depiction of Mrs. Rochester exasperate Rhys" (Kamel 1).<sup>96</sup> Jean Rhys argues that Brontë's mad Creole is not given a voice, while I contend that Bertha's actions—and not words—are what gives her an historically specific identity, and that the contradictions between Brontë's intentions and what she ultimately writes in the scene of Bertha's suicide, attest to the importance of the Creole character in the novel, and in the consciousness of the British nation, as "though Brontë could not anticipate her revisor [Jean Rhys], her visionary imagination sometimes spilled beyond *Jane Eyre*'s pages to apprehend the oppression of women motivating even a Creole wife to topple the foundation that imprisoned her," in an act that asserts her sanity rather than her madness (Kamel 1). Such contradictions demonstrate that this canonical British text about what it means to be English is unable to suppress its "dark double"—the Jamaican, racially ambiguous Creole—even if it ultimately resolves to kill her, as the lingering influence of the mad Creole wife on modern readers demonstrates.

Bertha's leap is described by an innkeeper. He tells Jane that after Bertha sets fire to the curtains and to what used to be Jane's bed, and "all was burning above and below," she

...was on the roof; where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off; I saw her and heard her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed Mr. Rochester ascend through the

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<sup>96</sup> Jean Rhys writes about Bertha Mason: "The Creole of course is the important one, the others explain her... Take a look at *Jane Eyre*. That unfortunate death of a Creole! I'm fighting mad to write her story!" (Letters 157)

skylight and then...she yelled, and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement. (Brontë 365)

The image of a tall woman standing on a roof shouting, surrounded by flames, the innkeeper describes, is majestic and confers an aura of regality and potency to the Creole, who has shed her chains imposed upon her by the white master, Mr. Rochester, and can be finally seen and heard by all “a mile off” (Brontë 365). Ultimately, it is Bertha who transforms Rochester through her final speech act, the destruction of Thornfield Hall, and not Jane who, in spite of her preaching and threats to “stir up mutiny,” has no influence and no power to reform Rochester’s amorality (Brontë 239). By destroying Rochester’s property Bertha punishes Rochester not only physically but also economically and socially, as “Bertha institutes the great act of cleaning in the novel, which burns away Rochester’s oppressive colonial wealth and diminishes the power of his gender”; a power connected to the West Indian fortune he appropriates through his marriage to Bertha and her confinement (Meyer 266). Rochester aptly refers to Thornfield Hall as “tent of Achan,” an historical allusion that foreshadows the burning of the English mansion, as well as an admission of his wrongful appropriation of West Indian slave money (Brontë 256).<sup>97</sup> The wealth Rochester takes back to England, as well as the West Indian Creole wife he locks up on the third floor of the “accursed place”—an allusion to Achan’s “accursed thing”—contaminates the purity of the English landscape with the sins of colonialism of which both Bertha and Rochester are simultaneously perpetrators and victims (Brontë 256).

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<sup>97</sup> In Joshua 7, Achan takes spoils wrongfully from Jericho and hides them in his tent. The Lord refers to the spoils as “the accursed thing” and deems that “He that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he hath: because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD” (Josh 7.15 Web. Jun 15. 2014).

Rochester, like the Greek tragic hero whose sin is *hubris*, at the end of the novel is maimed and blinded by Bertha's silent act of defiance and resistance to his patriarchal and colonial power over her. Donaldson argues that "at her death, Bertha's disabling mental illness is transferred to the body of her husband, as physical impairment and blindness," which are signs of "melancholy madness," as they symbolize the inability of the melancholic to function in the real world; blindness indicating "interior vision," mutilation and "hidden hands" symbolizing ineffectuality and grieving (108). Rochester's self-imposed isolation at Ferndean manor house seems also to replicate Bertha's seclusion in the attic at Thornfield, and "the self-neglect and social isolation associated with melancholy madness," which render him akin to an inmate in a mental asylum and to a beast:

But in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding—that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson... he paused, as if he knew not which way to turn. He lifted his hand and opened his eyelids; gazed blank...one saw that all to him was void darkness. He stretched his right hand (the left arm, the mutilated one, he kept hidden in his bosom); he seemed to wish by touch to gain an idea of what lay around him: he met but vacancy still...He relinquished the endeavor, folded his arms, and stood quiet and mute in the rain. (Brontë 367)

The above description of Rochester, by the approaching Jane, seems to echo Bertha's description, as, like Bertha, he is compared to a wild beast. He is lost and metaphorically, as well as physically, blind; he is unable to act and "[stands] mute and quiet in the rain"; an image of moral and physical desolation and uncertainty (Brontë 367). It is only through this temporary insanity and blindness—the result of the West

Indian Creole's heroic leap from the roof that reaffirms her agency—that Rochester can cleanse himself from his own sins, which are the consequence of his proximity—thus contagion—to a corrupted and degrading society whose wealth comes from slavery. Like the Greek hero who, because of a tragic flaw (*hamartia*) loses everything, Rochester must escape from society and live in isolation and woe, which turns him temporarily insane. By immolating herself to escape her fate, Bertha becomes an agent of change in Brontë's novel and, at the same time, denounces British involvement in colonial corruption and slavery (of which she is also a victim), by destroying what colonial money helps to maintain: Thornfield Hall.

Jane's money, which confers upon her the financial independence that allows her to marry Rochester on equal terms, is however also tainted as it comes from her uncle's colonial dealings in Madeira. Mr. Eyre, Jane's only living relative, is "an agent for a Jamaican wine manufacturer, Bertha's brother," thus he is indirectly "implicated in the slave trade" which marks "Jane's economic and literary complicity in colonialism," as she inherits Mr. Eyre's colonial capital (Meyer 267). And it could be for this very reason that Brontë ends her novel in terms that, again, seem contradictory, as she cannot reconcile Jane's needed inheritance with the novel's indictment of West Indian commerce. In fact, although Jane and Rochester have a son who can continue the patrilineal line of succession, and Rochester's vision and sanity are restored—indicating that the English countryside has been cleansed from the Caribbean taint and that the new bourgeois family, based on equality, is born out of the ashes of the West Indian Creole—the choice of Ferndean, a country manor isolated from proper English society, as the Rochesters' marital residence, seems to undermine the progress of the English governess

from liminality to full membership into the British ruling class. Ward suggests that “as with Jews in anti-Semitic Britain or the freed slaves in the West Indies, acknowledging equality did not bring with it economic or social inclusion; it merely indicated the escape from legal restrictions,” a condition that can be extended to Jane, whose ultimate choice of isolation from civilized society—akin to Bertha’s escape in death—renders her still an outsider (Ward 23).

Brontë’s use of stereotypes associated with the figure of the Creole to depict Bertha Mason taps into contemporary fears of West Indian moral contagion, and disintegration of proper English values brought about by slavery, Atlantic commerce, travel and migration, that result in an unwelcome Creole and foreign presence in England. These fears are still present even after emancipation, as works of fiction such as *Jane Eyre* or Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* demonstrate.<sup>98</sup> The presence of marginal and stereotypical Creoles in mid-century fiction also serves to construct Englishness versus the figure of the Creole. These marginal characters respond to the need of the new British bourgeoisie to define and strengthen its place in British society through the medium of literature, using the figure of the Creole vis-à-vis the new British bourgeois nation, and setting new boundaries of British identity by deciding who is to be entrusted with British cultural reproduction; who is in, and who remains an outsider. Although Bertha and Rochester were married for four years before Bertha was taken to England and locked up at Thornfield Hall, Brontë decides to make the marriage childless, and to give Rochester a daughter with his French lover, Celine Varens, a preferable option to

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<sup>98</sup> See Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In *Wuthering Heights* a nameless stranger, Heathcliff, is adopted into an English family and ends up destroying two generations of Earnshaws and their neighbors, the Lintons.

continuing the mad Creole family line. Brontë resolves to substitute Jane for Bertha, as the acceptable choice for continuing the Rochester's family line into the next generation, demonstrating her belief in the inferiority of the Creole wife—the product of slaveholding plantocracy, improper education, unsuitable climate and, at the same time, the victim of miscegenation and corruption—in favor of the upwardly mobile 'not quite proper' governess, Jane. However, in spite of Brontë's indirect condemnation of slavery and imperialism, it is colonial money that renders Jane's progress possible and thus sanctions her marriage to Rochester, attesting to the contradictions inherent in nineteenth-century novels that seek to isolate England from the Caribbean Creole, but remain dependent on colonial capital as a form of resolution to plot upheavals, reflecting the interdependency of England and its colonies. Although Bertha is a marginal character, who is not given a voice, and her presence takes up only a few chapters within the story of Jane's progress, it is Bertha who is the ultimate agent of change, revealing inherent contradictions in the text, and it is through her actions that Rochester is partially reformed, even if his, and Jane's, protracted isolation at Ferndean seems to suggest that it is impossible to separate England from the taint of Empire.



### **Vanity Fair**

#### **“THE RICH WOOLLY-HAIRED MULATTO FROM ST. KITTS”: MISCEGENATION AND THE RE-FASHIONING OF THE CREOLE**

The issue of the relation between Creoleness, race, class identity, and liminality is also approached in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847) through the juxtaposition of Miss Rhoda Swartz, a mixed-race Creole heiress from St. Kitts, and



Amelia Sedley, an English maiden without a fortune, although Thackeray's novel proposes a different solution—consonant with the lighter tone of satire—to the issue of Creole contamination of English spaces, from the solution envisioned by Brontë in *Jane Eyre*. *Vanity Fair*, published in the same year as *Jane Eyre* and also steeped in Empire, is a satire of English society—and, in particular, of the English middle class, although the novel also critiques British aristocracy—and therefore it is considered to be a canonical English novel. Thackeray's satire paints distinguishable Victorian stock types, among whom are the social-climbing governess (Becky Sharp), the Anglo-Indian nabob (Jos Sedley), the Victorian angel of the house (Amelia Sedley), the self-centered, superficial soldier (George Osborne), and the mulatto Creole heiress (Rhoda Swartz). Although the characters in the novel embody the most obvious characteristics of their type, and are “excessively classed, raced, and/or gendered,” the depiction of the Creole Rhoda Swartz, while only a minor character, illustrates the serious realities of a society where a mulatto heiress can infiltrate the British upper class and claim a space within it because of her colonial wealth (Zoli 426). The portrayal of Miss Swartz also demonstrates the influence of Thackeray's own non-English birth and upbringing on his representation of West Indian Creoles.

Thackeray was born in Calcutta in 1811, to a wealthy family of British civil servants. He is an Anglo-Indian—defined as “a white/western English national born or stationed in India”—though he is generally considered to be an English novelist, as he came to England when he was still a child, and as the focus of his writing is English society (Zoli 428). Thackeray, in fact, was sent to school in England, as was customary for the sons of colonial administrators, when he was only six (in 1817), after his father,

Richmond Thackeray, a tax collector stationed in Bengal, died of fever (1815) and his mother remarried another Anglo-Indian.<sup>99</sup> However, his early childhood experiences in India, as the privileged and pampered son of a wealthy civil servant, “kept him connected to India and to its unique ‘Anglo’ institutions,” through formative memories and through his lifelong relations with other Anglo-Indians, among them his mother and his half-sister, Sarah Redfield (Zoli 418). These influences are reflected in some of his themes and characters (such as the nabob Jos Sedley in *Vanity Fair*), and in his preoccupation with analyzing—and often dissecting—British society through his satire, which seems to betray a colonial anxiety of belonging and an outsider’s viewpoint.<sup>100</sup> In my reading of *Vanity Fair*, and of the role of the mulatto Creole Miss Swartz in the novel, I maintain that Thackeray’s colonial birth, early upbringing as a wealthy Anglo-Indian surrounded by servants, and life experiences (including his relationship with his Eurasian half-sister, Sarah), contributed to his representation of the figure of the Creole Rhoda, and to his understanding of Englishness as a fluid signifier and not as an identity limited by a set of geographical coordinates and national borders; a vision also shared by Mary Seacole in her autobiography. Although I do not intend to downplay the differences between

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<sup>99</sup> Benjamin, in his biography of William Makepeace Thackeray, dates Thackeray’s arrival in England after the death of Princess Charlotte (November 6, 1817) as Thackeray writes in one of his early memories: “When I first saw England she was in mourning for the young Princess Charlotte, the hope of the Empire” (qtd. in Benjamin 17). Thackeray’s mother (Anne Becher) was “a descendant from an old Bengal civilian family” (Benjamin 12). She married Richmond Thackeray in 1810, but he died five years later (Benjamin 12). As was customary for the sons of Indian civil servants, Thackeray’s mother sent her son to England to be educated. The abrupt separation from his mother at such an early age, which lasted three years, was very traumatizing for young Thackeray, as well as his early years spent in English boarding schools, even though he kept in touch with his Anglo-Indian family (Benjamin 13-20). Anne remarried Henry Carmichael-Smyth, from the “Royal (Bengal) Engineers,” an Anglo-Indian from a Scottish military family, whom she had loved before marrying Richmond Thackeray (Benjamin 16). Anne and her new husband moved back to England in 1820. Thackeray’s relationship with his mother was always close and “her influence remained with him throughout life,” although they did not agree on religion as she belonged to the evangelical faith (Benjamin 14, 16).

<sup>100</sup> A nabob is “a person of conspicuous wealth or high rank, esp. *hist.* one returned from India with a fortune” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 902).

Thackeray, a white Anglo-Indian male, and Seacole, a mixed-race Jamaican female, I contend that Thackeray and Seacole share a British colonial consciousness that is not geographically limited, and which translates into a definition of Englishness as inclusive and cosmopolitan, opening spaces for characters such as Miss Swartz.<sup>101</sup> Both colonial authors, however, struggle with the idea of race in their broadening definition of Englishness.

Thackeray, like Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), has been accused of being bluntly racist because of George Osborne's racist portrayal of Rhoda Swartz, whom he calls a "Hottentot Venus" (Thackeray 240), and the narrator's repeated and protracted focus on Rhoda's racial attributes, such as her woolly hair, tawny skin, and the "tropical ardour" of her disposition<sup>102</sup> (Thackeray 234). Miss Swartz is the daughter of a "German Jew—a slave owner" (Thackeray 229) who, at his death, left her a fortune in real estate, both in the colonies and in England, as she "was reported to have ...many plantations in the West Indies; a deal of money in the funds; and three stars to her name,

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<sup>101</sup>I refer to the Anglo-Indian Thackeray as a colonial author to indicate that he was born in the colonies, a fact, which, I argue, partly shaped his worldview, although he is normally read as an English author. The term "Anglo-Indian" refers to a person "of British descent or birth but living or having lived long in India," and also to a person "of mixed British and Indian parentage" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 48). The correspondences between the definitions of the terms Anglo-Indian and Creole suggest similarities between the experiences of colonial writers born in India or the New World, in spite of the different historical, political and economic contexts (in particular slavery). The term Creole, as I have at length discussed in the introduction, technically applies only to the offspring of colonizers and/or slaves born in the New World (not to Anglo-Indians), as the definition of the term suggests: "a descendant of European...settlers in the West Indies or Central or S. America; a white descendent of French settlers in southern US, esp. Louisiana; a person of mixed European and black descent" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 317). Although the focus of my project is the figure of the West Indian Creole in novels by American, British, and West Indian writers, I contend that some similarities of circumstances are shared by Creoles and Anglo-Indians as they both struggle with their hybrid identity and identification with England and/or the colony of their birth (as the depiction of Jos Sedley, in *Vanity Fair*, suggests).

<sup>102</sup>The term "Hottentot Venus" was first used to describe the "South African Sara (or Saartjie) Baartman, a Khoisan woman who was brought to England and France for public exhibition between 1810 and 1815, the Hottentot Venus came to symbolize both the presumed ugliness and heightened sexuality of the African race" (Hobson 1). Sara Baartman's body was "exhibited in nineteenth-century freak shows to display her 'large' buttocks" (Hobson 1).

in the East India stockholders' list. She had a mansion in Surrey and a house in Portland" (Thackeray 227-28). While her father's Jewish heritage becomes synonymous for wealth obtained through the exploitation of others, the name Swartz underscores not only Rhoda's German-Jewish heritage but also her blackness, as the adjective "*schwarze*" in German signifies the color black.<sup>103</sup> If the novel extends its satire of British society to West Indian plantocracy's miscegenation, at first sight the focus of such satire seems to be Miss Swartz, the "rich, woolly-haired mulatto from St. Kitts," who paid double tuition as a parlor-boarder at Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, but still could not spell or sing (Thackeray 10). However, alongside the unquestionable humor and the hyperbolic racial stereotyping Thackeray employs in Swartz's description, Miss Swartz is also humanized in the juxtaposition that the author creates between her naiveté and enthusiasm, and the hypocrisy of those who either falsely compliment her, being interested in her wealth, such as the Osborne sisters—to whom "Rhoda was everything they could wish; the frankest, kindest, most agreeable creature" (Thackeray 228)—or disparage her for her skin color, such as transpires from Capt. Osborne's account:

My sisters say she has diamonds as big as pigeons' eggs...How they must set off her complexion! A perfect illumination it must be when her jewels are on her neck. Her jet-black hair is as curly as Sambo's. I daresay she wore a nose-ring when she went to court; and with a plume of feathers in her top-knot she would look a perfect *Belle Sauvage* [...] Diamonds and mahogany, my dear! Think what an advantageous contrast—and her white feathers in her hair—I mean in the wool. She had earrings like chandeliers; you might have lighted'em up, by Jove—and a yellow satin train that streeled after her like the tail of a comet" (Thackeray 227-28).

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<sup>103</sup> The name Swartz derives from the German "*schwarze*" which means black or swarthy. Swartz, also spelled Schwartz (or Schwarz) is also a family name connected with Jewish heritage. Like many 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists, Thackeray had a negative opinion of Jews, and often depicted them as tricksters or crooks, as S.S. Praver demonstrates in *Israel at Vanity Fair: Jews and Judaism in the Writings of W.M. Thackeray*.

The language chosen in Capt. Osborne's description of Miss Swartz draws attention to chromatic contrasts between the darkness of Rhoda's skin and the brightness of her diamonds, and between the blackness and texture of her hair and the lightness (both chromatic and textural) of the plumes she wears, turning her into a grotesque apparition of yellow and black that highlights her inability, in spite of her efforts, to conform to implicit standards of proper English femininity and, thus, her racial and cultural otherness.

The satire of Rhoda's overdone aspect is taken up again by the voice of the narrator who ridicules Rhoda's lack of taste, as she adorns herself with "countless rings, flowers, feathers, and all sorts of tags and gimcracks, [looking] about as elegantly decorated as a she chimney-sweep on a May-day," in order to impress the Osborne sisters, when in fact what impresses them beforehand is precisely her colonial wealth (Thackeray 236). This shows that both Rhoda and her British companions recognize the need for capital and real estate in order for a Creole woman of mixed-race to gain access to British society. As Becky Sharp bluntly sums up, money is the main motivator in *Vanity Fair*: "How they cringe and bow to that Creole, because of her hundred thousand pounds! I am a thousand times cleverer and more charming than that creature, for all her wealth... and yet everyone passes me by here" (Thackeray 20).

However, the narrator also refers to Rhoda as "generous and affectionate" (Thackeray 12), as a "simple and good natured young woman," and as "honest Swartz" (Thackeray 235), implying that "poor Swartz" (Thackeray 256), in spite of her lack of taste and excessive emotions associated with her Creole upbringing, is still more laudable than those who deem themselves superior to her, and that Thackeray's real object of

satire is not the mulatto heiress but the insincerity and artificiality of the British middle class, “for its selfish attentions to Miss Swartz...[and its] worship of wealth” (Davies 329). Both Charlotte Brontë and W.M. Thackeray, therefore, use their literary Creole women to speak about the English middle class, but whereas Brontë’s novel juxtaposes Bertha Mason’s madness and sexual excess to Jane Eyre’s integrity, in order to open a space within proper Englishness for the English governess and to promote the ethics of the burgeoning British middle class, the Indian-born Thackeray’s exaggerated, racialized depiction of the mulatto Creole Rhoda appears, at the same time, sympathetic to his West Indian character, revealing the central target of Thackeray’s satire to be the hypocrisy of the British middle class, through the disparaging of the Creole. Thackeray, thus, uses a stereotyped West Indian Creole figure to critique the very middle-class ideals that Brontë ultimately upholds.

However, the portrayal of Swartz in racialized terms also reflects Thackeray’s—and Victorian society’s—dislike for “dark-skin,” and the perception of racial superiority that ensued from Thackeray’s privileged position as a white child raised in India and accustomed to being waited on by Indian servants.<sup>104</sup> This racial consciousness acquired as a child and confirmed as an adult, however, contrasts simultaneously with Thackeray’s own experience of marginality as a colonial subject and as the half-brother of a dark-skinned woman, Sarah. Although Thackeray is considered white, “many Anglo-Indians, otherwise thought of as westerners in class, status, and ethnicity, could very well be

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<sup>104</sup> Although colonial India did not have plantation slavery like the British colonies in the West Indies, wealthy white civil servants, like Thackeray’s father, surrounded themselves with dark-skinned Indian servants, who catered to their every need. Thackeray describes his arrival in England with his black servant: “I came from India as a child and our ship touched at an island (St. Helena) on the way home, where my black servant took me a long walk over rocks and hills until we reached a garden, where we saw a man walking. ‘That is he,’ cried the black man: ‘that is Bonaparte!’” (qtd. in Benjamin 17).

mixed in their ethnic makeup,” and Thackeray’s awareness that “his maternal grandmother perhaps ‘had some Asiatic blood’,” alongside mid-nineteenth century pseudoscientific theories of race, might have influenced his contradictory approach to race and miscegenation (Zoli 428). Thackeray’s father, before marrying his mother, had an illegitimate daughter, Sarah, with a Eurasian partner, and Thackeray developed mixed feelings of guilt and shame towards this half-sister. He always stayed in touch with Sarah, but when his niece—Sarah’s daughter with a Eurasian husband—came to visit him in London, Thackeray was embarrassed by his “‘black niece’ [and] sent his own family away during her stay,” even if, in his Letters, he “claims Sarah as his ‘natural’ sister” and writes, after her death, that “It is the sorest point I have on my conscience never to have taken notice of her” (qtd. in Zoli 428).

George Osborne’s racist attack on Miss Swartz, when his father orders him to marry her—which prompts many critics, such as James R. Nestey, to consider Thackeray a racist—reveals Thackeray’s mixed feelings about intermarriage and miscegenation. While, on the one hand, he humanizes Rhoda, on the other, he seems to condemn her for her native simplicity, as “Rhoda appears ridiculous precisely because she is a natural, unsophisticated native...in a foreign, European context” (Norton 127). Norton argues that *Vanity Fair* is “double-voiced,” and that the Bakhtinian heteroglossia that characterizes Thackeray’s narrative style makes it harder to determine the author’s ideological position, as “it becomes unclear to what extent he resists or endorses the ‘rejoinder’ of another language he hears in the dialogue of his novel”(127). On the one hand, Thackeray partakes in stereotypical Victorian ideas of race, but, on the other, he seems to critique these very ideas, by turning the satire against those who uphold them,

and thus by showing the absurdity, selfishness and small-mindedness of their behavior. For these reasons, I disagree with critics, such as Nestey, who argue that “Thackeray’s commentary on black people alters his satire to racism” (126). This has also been argued about Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Victorian England’s common views of non-whites generally appear to us as being racist; however, we shouldn’t judge nineteenth century racism according to modern notions of the term. Thackeray’s representation of mixed-race characters is much more complex and multi-layered. In fact, the language used to describe Rhoda and other Blacks—such as Sambo, the Sedley’s servant with “bandy legs”—is undoubtedly filled with racial stereotypes and echoes early notions of scientific racism (Thackeray 7).<sup>105</sup> However, it is in the inherent contradictions in the text, between what the characters say about Rhoda and what transpires about these characters, that the reader should look, for an understanding of Thackeray’s real target of social critique.

When George is given an ultimatum to marry by his father, a self-made merchant of lowly origins who puts money above honor, George responds by casting his Englishness and station as a gentleman against his father’s request that he “marry that mulatto woman” because of her ten thousand a year (Thackeray 240). His objections seem to be based solely on racial grounds: “I don’t like the colour, sir. Ask the black that sweeps opposite Fleet Market, sir. I am not going to marry a Hottentot Venus” (Thackeray 240). George connects his status as English gentleman with his duty to maintain the purity of his race. Forgetting the necessity to have a substantial income to sustain the aristocratic lifestyle he enjoys, George compares Amelia’s English simplicity

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<sup>105</sup>The name “Sambo” denotes mixed ancestry: two-thirds black and one third white. Other terms commonly used to classify mixed-race individuals are mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, etc. Although aspects of *Vanity Fair* anticipate scientific racism, the novel predates its development into a widely accepted theory.



and whiteness—which become markers of class and nationality—with the Creole heiress’s looks: “The contrast of [Amelia’s] manners and appearance with those of the heiress, made the idea of the union with the latter appear doubly ludicrous and odious. Carriages and opera boxes, thought he; fancy being seen in them by the side of such mahogany charmer as that!” (Thackeray 233).

George’s racist attack on Rhoda echoes Thackeray’s concerns for a loss of racial purity following the contamination of Englishness by miscegenation, which—as Phillips George Davis argues in “The Miscegenation Theme in the Works of Thackeray”—is partly due to his mixed feelings about his half-sister, Sarah. Thackeray’s “obsession with ‘Englishness,’” which he meticulously examines in his comedy of manners, may betray his own colonial origins and reflect the “anxiety of belonging” that affects the colonial subject, whether Creole or Anglo-Indian (Zoli 429). Thackeray’s liminality as someone who was born in the colonies and thus is culturally hybrid, having maintained his Anglo-Indian connections, is dramatized in the spectrum of his characters’ diverse ideas about Englishness, which sums up the author’s conception of Englishness as “a mobile and changeable cultural identity and set of values” that extends beyond the motherland, and takes different forms (Zoli 423). While acknowledging the many forms that Englishness takes in the nineteenth century—from the new bourgeois merchant Mr. Osborne, to the nabob Jos and the Creole Rhoda—Thackeray satirizes these stock characters’ idiosyncrasies. This amounts to a critique of British society that extends beyond the confines of England, and that includes the author himself. This more fluid and comprehensive definition of Englishness is influenced by Thackeray’s Anglo-Indian birth, as he sees the nation and London as a place that has become cosmopolitan and

internationalized; extending the classification of Englishness to include colonial subjects—both Creole and Anglo-Indian—even of different races. His satire of racial alterity—best exemplified in his description of Miss Swartz—may be read as both a satire of brown British subjects’ influx into the motherland, and as a critique of the “Victorian racial classifying systems” which Thackeray is able to dissect and capture in his novel (Zoli 424).

While “Mr. Osborne [senior] translates bourgeois class anxiety into nationalistic terms by constantly referring to himself as a ‘simple’ ‘British merchant’” (Zoli 429)—thus demonstrating his fear of being a lesser gentleman than his son because of his lowly origins—he, unlike George, would not object to “a shade or so of tawny” in a wife (Thackeray 261). For Mr. Osborne money is tantamount to upper class, not whiteness, and therefore he wishes to promote a match between his son and Miss Swartz. On the contrary, when Jos Sedley’s father notices his son’s interest in Becky he tells his wife: “Let Jos marry whomever he likes... Better [Becky Sharp], my dear, than a black Mrs. Sedley and a dozen mahogany grandchildren,” fearing that his son might take a Eurasian wife once he returns to Boggley-Wollah, and considering a match with a penniless, but English, governess a preferable choice (Thackeray 61). For Mr. Sedley “racial purity must trump even that Victorian touchstone of female respectability in class” (Zoli 424), so he defends Jos’ attraction to Becky, telling his wife that “the girl’s a white face at any rate,” therefore a better choice than “a black daughter in law” (Thackeray 37-8).

Mr. Sedley’s opinion seems to echo a similar viewpoint as that expressed by Brontë in *Jane Eyre* with the marriage between Rochester and the governess Jane. However, if we consider the end of Thackeray’s novel, and compare it to the happy

ending in *Jane Eyre*, we realize that there is a difference between Mr. Sedley's belief that a "white face" is always a better choice, and Thackeray's awareness, suggested by the novel's ending, that "such a (racialist, classist) basis for choosing one's love object has disastrous and highly unpredictable consequences," as Becky ends up being the ruin of Jos Sedley (Zoli 425). Similarly, Osborne's marriage with Amelia Sedley, who is the "white face" and Victorian angel of the house *par excellence*, is also doomed to failure as, ultimately, she cannot make him happy, and his choice to marry her, instead of Miss Swartz, leads to his death on the battlefield (Thackeray 37). While Amelia, according to George, is "the only person of our set that ever looked, thought, or spoke like a lady," and is preferable to Miss Swartz' West Indian capital, validating Capt. Osborne's belief that whiteness is synonymous with Englishness and class respectability, and that these qualities are paramount in a wife, his final demise—his poverty, unhappiness, and death—confirms that the author does not necessarily share the same world view as his character, George.

*Vanity Fair* approaches the contemporary fear of the contamination of English spaces by Creole, mixed-raced colonial subjects differently from *Jane Eyre*, and this difference in approach is partly due to Thackeray's own colonial roots. The novel's heteroglossia renders Englishness not a monolithic identity, but an identity that continually transforms itself, through transatlantic movement of people and commercial relations, and that is formed by many different voices, with varying standards of what it means to be English, including, in the new standard of Englishness, the Creole Miss Swartz, and the Anglo-Indian Jos, who loves everything Indian but considers himself English. Thus Thackeray's "double-sided Anglo voice, obsessed with details of English

life and highly internally variegated,” depicts a portrayal of Englishness as fluid and internationalized, “whether in the spread of Anglo culture through colonization or by Anglo settler communities” in London, such as the community where Jos Sedley resides when he returns to England (Zoli 429). Thackeray’s novel, moreover, opens a space for the mulatto Creole Miss Swartz, and depicts her in sympathetic terms, very differently from the portrait of Creole madness and promiscuity depicted by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*.

Although Rhoda speaks very few lines of dialogue in the novel, the reader begins to like her through the “interesting comparisons of Swartz to other characters,” which “do a great deal to give depth and to define Swartz” as a kind-hearted, if naïve, young girl who is unaware of the scheming that goes on around her person, and honestly believes that Jane and Mary Osborne, as well as Amelia, are her true friends (Helgar 339). The narrator comments: “The dark object [Rhoda] of the conspiracy into which the chiefs of the Osborne family had entered, was quite ignorant of all their plans regarding her...and, taking all the young ladies’ flattery for genuine sentiment, and being, as we have before had the occasion to show, of a very warm and impetuous nature, responded to their affection with quite a tropical ardour” (Thackeray 234). It is clear from this passage that Thackeray’s sympathies go towards Rhoda. At the same time that he humanizes Rhoda, however, Thackeray uses the language of “scientific” racism, which I discussed in my analysis of *Arthur Mervyn*, in his portrayal of the Creole heiress. The use of a Victorian language “replete with elements of an increasingly ‘scientific’ racial classifying system,” however, in this novel achieves an opposite effect on the readers, who begin to detect the hypocrisy of Victorian society in the overly racialized satire of Miss Swartz, which puts

to light “ordinary Victorian obsessions with race” and demonstrates that the author doesn’t necessarily share all his characters’ ideas, as critics like Brantlinger and Nesteby have argued, but remains conflicted on the question of race (Norton 422).

#### FROM CREOLE MADNESS TO A NEW DEFINITION OF CREOLENESS

In her book *Thackeray and Slavery*, Deborah A. Thomas argues that Thackeray was fascinated by the topic of slavery, and that slavery appears in various forms—New World slavery, Oriental slavery, and penal (galley) slavery—in his major works (3). However, Thackeray “uses the idea of slavery to explore relationships in which people have been reduced to objects [including] not only actual slaves and blacks but also servants and dependents of all races, upper-class women sold into marriage, and children trying to escape parental domination”; thus his depictions of slavery are often figurative rather than literal, as Thackeray is interested in the objectification of people in general (D. Thomas 3). Critics, such as Patrick Brantlinger, have accused Thackeray of racism. Brantlinger argues that “Thackeray relied on racial stereotypes as a substitute—as in all racist thinking—for political analysis and self-criticism,” and that his “views on race [hardened] as he grew older,” and, in particular, after he visited the American South (Brantlinger 106).

Thackeray grew up in a time when the debate on the abolition of slavery in the colonies intensified, becoming the constant focus of British public opinion. The African slave trade was abolished in all British colonies in 1807, and from there on Britain campaigned to convince other nations to pass similar legislation. However, notwithstanding the abolition of the slave trade, British West Indian colonies still

practiced slavery and “absentee plantation owners made huge profits cultivating crops (particularly sugar) with slave labor” (D. Thomas 5). During Thackeray’s formative years, between the 1820s and 1830s, antislavery reformers campaigned to abolish slavery in all the British colonies, and debates on emancipation and the *Negro Question* were widespread, as I discuss in chapter 3. The passage of the 1832 Reform Bill, which reduced the number of “rotten boroughs,” aided the cause of antislavery campaigners because many rotten boroughs, as Queen’s Crawley in *Vanity Fair*, “had been represented in Parliament by West Indian magnates” who opposed the abolition of slavery (D. Thomas 5).<sup>106</sup> The passage of the Reform Bill, thus, paved the way to the abolition of slavery in all British colonies; the Slave Abolition Act was passed by Parliament in August 1833 but only became fully effective in 1838.<sup>107</sup> However, in spite of the extensive debates and public interest on the question of emancipation that must have surrounded Thackeray, his fiction touches upon these contemporary issues only marginally, corroborating the opinions of those critics who maintain that Thackeray supported slavery. D. Thomas, on the other hand, argues that Thackeray refrained from taking an active role in politics, and was not “significantly stirred by what happened in the West Indies between 1833 and 1838,” probably because of his own personal and

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<sup>106</sup> A “rotten borough” is “(before 1832) an English borough able to elect an MP through having very few voters” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1199). These boroughs became depopulated due to the migration of people from England’s rural areas to industrial and manufacturing towns, such as Manchester, where jobs could be more easily obtained. Rotten boroughs were used to influence important House of Commons’ decisions, without being duly representative of their actual population. Single landowners often controlled them. These landowners were peers in the House of Lords, and gave their seats in the House of Commons associated with the borough to their sons, relatives, or sold them. The Reform Bill of 1832 redistributed Parliamentary representation according to actual population distribution, disenfranchising many unpopulated rotten boroughs, and giving more seats to growing industrial and manufacturing centers.

<sup>107</sup> The Slave Abolition Act (1833) came into force on August 1, 1834. However, Parliament decided that the ex-slaves should work as apprentices for a period of six years for field laborers, and four years for domestic servants. These “apprenticeships” were to be rendered under their former masters. However, the West Indian apprenticeship system was deemed to be a failure and resulted in worse exploitation than slavery; therefore, “on 1 August 1838, in response to strong British pressure, the West Indian legislature abandoned apprenticeship in its entirety” (D. Thomas 6).

financial problems, as he was rendered bankrupt by an “East Indian banking collapse” in 1833, which affected his finances and the ability to provide for his family, until the success of *Vanity Fair* restored his economic stability (7).

*Vanity Fair*, besides its portrayal of the mulatto Creole Miss Swartz, hardly mentions West Indian slavery and the raging debates on abolition and, when it does, it is in a satirical tone, and without making a clear political statement.<sup>108</sup> In fact, Thackeray touches upon the issue of New World slavery with the same irony he reserves for all other evils affecting society, and depicts all his characters, not only black characters—Miss Swartz and her brother, the Sedleys’ servant Sambo, and Mr. Quadroon—in satiric terms.<sup>109</sup> The narrator of *Vanity Fair* critiques the efforts of missionaries, who supported emancipation, in his portrayal of the overly zealous Lady Emily Southdown, who “took considerable rank in the serious world as author of some...delightful tracts...A mature spinster, and having but faint ideas of marriage, her love for the blacks occupied almost all her feelings” (Thackeray 381). NESTEBY argues that Lady Emily, who writes poems for the Blacks, is “a misguided maiden who misdirects her energies...into the writing of tracts and the practice of missionaryism [sic],” and that Thackeray’s satire of missionary work is a proof of his racism (129). Lady Emily seems “in her passion for helping the far-off blacks, to have become oblivious to...ordinary domestic feelings,” like Mrs. Jellyby in Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853), who is obsessed with philanthropic work and

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<sup>108</sup>D. Thomas argues that *Vanity Fair* investigates a different type of slavery, Oriental slavery, which is reflected in the characterization of Amelia Sedley and Capt. Dobbin, and which “forms an important substratum in *Vanity Fair*” (40, 42).

<sup>109</sup>Besides Miss Swartz and Mr. Quadroon, who are West Indian Creoles, Thackeray also sketches other black characters, such as Sambo, who works for the Sedleys as a house servant and is, presumably, of African descent, Mr. Swartz, Rhoda’s brother, also a mixed-race Creole, and “that beautiful quadroon girl, Miss Pye, at St. Vincent,” with whom George Osborne had an affair that demonstrates that his “objection to Miss Swartz is as a wife in English society, not as a friend or acquaintance; [while] he was not above an affair with a quadroon when stationed in the West Indies” (Heglar 342).

obscure African tribes, to the point of neglecting her own family and household (D. Thomas 49). However, Thackeray's ironic portrayal of Lady Emily might not necessarily be a proof of his anti-abolitionist agenda. He might also have been inspired, in the sketching of Lady Emily, by the fanatical evangelicalism his mother practiced while he was growing up, a religion he later in life abandoned, rather than directing his satire against abolitionists *per se*.

D. Thomas argues that Thackeray “emphatically objected to his mother’s rigid insistence that all aspects of the Bible were literally true and that anyone who differed from her religious opinions was headed for destruction”(15). Therefore, his critical stance against evangelical religious fervor, as displayed by Lady Emily, might be “understood in the context of his long-standing rebellion against the evangelical doctrines inculcated in him during his youth,” and not necessarily as a proof of his racism or pro-slavery notions (D. Thomas 15). Despite his rejection of his mother’s religion as an adult, Thackeray maintained an open approach to the issue of slavery, one where his Anglo-Indian background of waited-upon privileged son of a civil servant, and the influence of evangelism and of the “evangelical view of the wrongness of slavery which Thackeray absorbed from his mother,” coexisted in a difficult relationship that reflects the contradictions in Thackeray’s life and work (15).

The narrator of *Vanity Fair* also alludes, with the same light irony, to the controversial issue of rotten boroughs, seriously discussed by Thackeray’s contemporaries at the beginning of the 1830s, as I briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter. Sir Pitt Crawley, in fact, owned two seats in Parliament attached to the rotten borough of Queen’s Crawley, one of which he sold to Mr. Quadroon “with carte-blanche



on the slave question” (Thackeray 96). Mr. Quadroon, an absentee West Indian plantation owner, in fact, holds Crawley’s second seat in Parliament, and having been given “carte-blanche on the slave question,” it is assumed that he is not an advocate of legislation in favor of slave emancipation and, probably, he belongs to the West Indian lobby who opposed abolition. The name Mr. Quadroon also stereotypes the fact that he is part-black, as the term quadroon indicated one quarter Negro blood, adding to the irony of his pro-slavery position in Parliament. However, the main target of irony in the passage consists in casting Sir Pitt as a hypocrite. While he had previously been depicted as having taken a “strong part in the Negro Emancipation Question,” and as being “a friend of Mr. Wilberforce’s whose politics he admired,” Sir Pitt readily puts financial interests before principle, as “the income drawn from the borough was of great use to the house of Queen’s Crawley,” because “the family estate was much embarrassed” (Thackeray 95-6).

While, on the one hand, this anecdote shifts the focus of the satire from Mr. Quadroon and slavery, to Sir Pitt’s hypocrisy, on the other hand it is imperative to consider that the only two West Indian slave owners mentioned in *Vanity Fair* are themselves not fully white, and are classified primarily by their race. Miss Swartz is introduced as “the rich woolly-haired mulatto from St. Kitts,” while the name Mr. Quadroon underscores the racial hybridity—one quarter black—of this West Indian slave owner, engendering, perhaps, a critique of both slavery and miscegenation through these figures (Thackeray 10). The irony is not accidental. Both West Indian Creole characters, as well as Miss Swartz’s half-brother, introduced later, who is also a mulatto planter—the progeny of Rhoda’s father and another black woman—are connected to slavery, but on the side of the oppressor, as they are both “on the receiving rather than the supplying end

of slave-produced wealth” and, at the same time, are not white (D. Thomas 54). The apparent contradiction works simultaneously as a critique of slavery and miscegenation, and as a demonstration that the superiority of the (white) slave owner over the (black) slave is nothing more than a social construct, a condition dictated by economic and social opportunities.

By dramatizing contemporary fears of Creole promiscuity and miscegenation, Thackeray makes several social commentaries that are somewhat contradictory and demonstrate his own duality on the subject of miscegenation and on the figure of the Creole. The choice to portray the two West Indian Creole characters, Miss Swartz and Mr. Quadroon, as mixed-race can be read as a critique of colonial miscegenation in India, as well as in the Caribbean. Thackeray, in fact, as an Anglo-Indian, felt directly involved in the consequences of miscegenation, because of his own family history (his father’s Eurasian daughter, and his grandmother’s possible Asian heritage). However, if on the one hand Thackeray critiques the practice of concubinage in India and the illicit relationships of slave owners with their female slaves in the West Indies, on the other hand, he intentionally places his mixed-race Creole characters in positions of authority; Thackeray’s mixed-race characters are no tragic mulatto types. I argue that the conclusion of *Vanity Fair* must be considered in interpreting the significance of black minor characters, such as Miss Swartz and Mr. Quadroon, as it reverses the roles associated with dark skin and, thus, constitutes an undeniable critique of the very stereotypes the novel simultaneously upholds.

MISS SWARTZ' PROGRESS: RHODA'S REVERSAL OF *JANE EYRE*'S  
CREOLE LIMINALITY

The scene in which Capt. Osborne selfishly thwarts Rhoda's hopes, unaware of her infatuation, by telling her that he is in love with Amelia Sedley, noticeably omits Miss Swartz's reaction to his words. After his father prohibits George to speak about Amelia, Capt. Osborne, encouraged by Rhoda's kind words, confides in her: "Miss Swartz, I love Amelia, and we've been engaged almost all our lives" (Thackeray 237). Although Rhoda is repeatedly depicted as having an "impetuous" temperament, and a "tropical ardour" caused by the West Indian climate, which often results in inappropriate displays of emotion—like "crying with... hysterical *yooops*" when Amelia leaves Miss Pinkerton's—and although the narrator tells us that she is "quite in a flurry...to please the conqueror [George]," in this occasion the narrator does not comment on her reaction to George's confession (Thackeray 12, 15,235). Although it can be argued that this omission undermines her character, relegating her at the margins of the story and denying her a voice, to focus instead on a critique of George's selfishness and egotism, the choice to omit yet another display of "hysterical *yooops*" (public or private), can also be read as a conscious juxtaposition between Rhoda's ability to move on, and Amelia's inability to let go of George's love—even after he dies—which causes her lifelong unhappiness. Miss Swartz slowly transpires as being a stronger, freer character than her ideological rival, Amelia. Miss Swartz also rejects the proposal of Mr. Osborne (senior), demonstrating that her family had higher aims for her than "a plain, simple, humble British merchant" (Thackeray 231). The choices made by Miss Swartz with the guidance of her chaperone, Miss Haggistoun, give the mulatto Creole renewed agency, and literally place her in a position of superiority compared to white middle-class bourgeoisie, reversing *Jane*

*Eyre*'s claim to class status and gender equality of the white middle-class woman, against the West Indian Creole. By the end of the novel, Miss Swartz achieves her goals and seems to exert agency in her own life.

In fact, when the reader comes across Miss Swartz again she is married to a Scottish nobleman, and she seems, unlike Amelia and Becky, to have found her "rightful" place in the British upper class, although it is a place bought with her West Indian wealth, which highlights once more the hypocrisy of British society. While Becky and Amelia fail to marry well, "Miss Swartz instead becomes the Honorable Mrs. James MacMull and it is she, rather than Becky or Amelia, who is swiftly moving up in *Vanity Fair*" while the governess in this novel fails in her social overreach (Nestey 145). This conclusion is supported by the narrator of *Vanity Fair* who, by upholding the progress of Miss Swartz, reverses the ideal of English superiority that lies behind *Jane Eyre*'s social ascent of the poor, but English, governess into the ranks of the British middle class, at the expense of the rich, but racially ambiguous, Jamaican Creole Bertha Mason (Nestey 145). Miss Swartz, in fact, rejects the marriage proposal of the middle-class merchant Mr. Osborne (senior) and marries, instead, a presumably impoverished Scottish nobleman, buying a place for herself within the Scottish aristocracy, to which her own quadroon son will inherit the title, as the narrator comments: "Dear Rhoda M'Mull will disengage the whole of the Castletoddy property as soon as poor dear Lord Castletoddy dies, who is quite epileptic: and little Macduff MacMull will be Viscount Castletoddy" (Thackeray 357). In the world of Thackeray, the mulatto Creole's blood becomes mixed with that of the Scottish nobility and "his quadroonness will be forgotten, ironically, for his name

insures it: Macduff MacMull” (Nestebly 145).<sup>110</sup> On the other end, the English governess, Becky Sharp, unlike Jane Eyre, is ostracized from the British upper class, even though she is “as well-bred as the Earl’s grand-daughter, for all her fine pedigree” (Thackeray 20). This is also a reversal of contemporary governess plots in which the English governess marries up the social ladder, and upholds the fears, I discussed earlier, of the infiltration of working-class girls among the ranks of governesses.

D. Thomas argues that Amelia Sedley is the real slave in *Vanity Fair*, not Rhoda Swartz who “despite her background—is literally a free woman” (57). Amelia, who represents the angel in the house, the ideal Victorian lady who has no interest outside her home, her husband and her children, “figuratively becomes an ‘Oriental’ slave,” welcoming the role that Jane Eyre rejects in Brontë’s novel (57). The narrator, in fact, uses a language replete with Oriental references when talking about Amelia, who allows George to abuse her affection, even after she realizes that he no longer loves her: “We are Turks with the affection of our women; and have made them subscribe to our doctrine too...they obey not unwillingly, and consent to remain at home as our slaves—ministering to us and doing drudgery for us” (Thackeray 196-97). George’s attraction to Amelia is also framed in the language of female Oriental slavery and male power, not dissimilar to the language used by Jane Eyre to talk about her relationship with Rochester, as George perceives himself as an Oriental sultan: “[Amelia’s] prostration and sweet unrepining obedience exquisitely touched and flattered George Osborne. He saw a slave before him in that simple yielding faithful creature, and his soul within him thrilled secretly somehow at the knowledge of his power” (Thackeray 221). George promises to

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<sup>110</sup> The name Macduff is an allusion to Shakespeare’s Macduff in *Macbeth*.

himself that he “would be generous-minded, Sultan as he was, and raise up this kneeling Esther and make a queen of her,” but he fails in his good intentions once he possesses the object of his Oriental fantasies (Thackeray 221). While the use of Oriental motifs to describe the relationship between men and women was common in nineteenth-century fiction, Brontë uses the analogy to discuss the plight of English women’s objectification and drudgery in marriage, while in *Vanity Fair* the use of Oriental motifs to describe the dynamics between some of the characters—like Amelia, George, and Dobbin—seems to constitute a commentary, not only on gender roles, but also on the unhealthiness of relationships, in which one of the partners exercises excessive psychological power over the other. Thackeray uses Oriental slavery as a metaphor for the excesses of power of one human being over the other, and their consequences. Neither Brontë nor Thackeray, however, discuss the factual ills of slavery—whether it be Oriental or West Indian—but they use slavery as a metaphor for different power dynamics within British society.

While, on the one hand, George thinks of Amelia as an “angel” and the “only lady” he knows, the failure of the marriage seems to question Victorian models of femininity and proper marriages (Thackeray 229). Although Thackeray’s narrator neither explicitly affirms that Swartz would have made a better wife for George, nor disagrees with Mr. Sedley’s claim that a “white face at any rate” makes a better wife, the demise of the marriage between Amelia and George suggests it (Thackeray 37). All the marriages in *Vanity Fair*, in fact, fail: Amelia and George’s marriage, Becky and Rawdon’s marriage and, at the end, Amelia and Dobbins’s marriage are all unhappy. Even Dobbin, the romantic “hero” of *Vanity Fair*, by the end of the novel is disillusioned by his Amelia and prefers to dedicate his time to writing his *History of the Punjab*. However, Becky’s

“antithetical tendency to enslave,” which Thackeray opposes to “Amelia’s slavishness,” seems also to lead to disillusion and unhappiness—as Becky ends up a lonely and bitter woman—showing that “Becky’s approach is just as undesirable as is Amelia’s extreme passivity,” and critiquing her insatiable greed and selfishness, as much as Amelia’s selflessness (D. Thomas 60-61).

On the contrary, the last glimpse of Miss Swartz that Thackeray provides to his readers embodies a positive image of someone who is confident, strong, and better placed in society than all the other female characters. Even though Thackeray does not renounce the ironic tone in the description of Mrs. MacMull, he creates a place for Rhoda who, although a mixed-race Creole, is no longer a liminal figure, an outcast, in the British social landscape of the novel, reversing once more the roles of slave and master. When Amelia was poor, in fact, no one came to see her, but after she was restored in society, many old acquaintances came, including Miss Swartz:

Our old friend, Miss Swartz, and her husband came thundering over from Hampton Court, with flaming yellow liveries, and was as impetuously fond of Amelia as ever. Miss Swartz would have liked her always if she could have seen her. One must do her that justice. But *que voulez-vous?*—in this vast town one has not the time to go and seek one’s friends; if they drop out of the rank they disappear, and we march on without them. (Thackeray 721)

Miss Swartz, of course, can only claim a place in English society because of the fortune her father made as a West Indian planter and his choice to recognize his mulatto children.<sup>111</sup> This speaks for the historical awareness Thackeray demonstrates in writing

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<sup>111</sup> As I argue in chapter 3, Warner Arundell’s brown siblings also enjoy an egalitarian relationship with their white Creole brother, Warner, because of their wealth. Both novels acknowledge the influence of

his character, and for “the sense of actuality of the early nineteenth century period in which the book is set—a time when...prosperous plantation owners who had begotten racially mixed children in the British West Indies occasionally made their children their heirs and/or arranged to have them educated in England” (D. Thomas 54). The ability to buy her place in society and the success of the Honorable Mrs. McMull, who even has her own “flaming yellow liveries” (ironically intended), shows that Thackeray understood the impossibility to isolate the British island from the influence of the Atlantic world, an influence that is firstly monetary—as Rhoda would have never been admitted in society had she not been rich—but that progressively becomes intertwined with the very tissue of English society, as the birth and peerage of Rhoda’s quadroon son, Macduff MacMull, demonstrates (Thackeray 721).

Heglar argues that, ultimately, Miss Swartz is like everyone else, as she only visits Amelia after her old friend is reinstated into society, showing the “insincerity of her friendship for Amelia—her one evident virtue,” which makes “her blackness both literal and figurative” (343). I disagree with the harshness of this comment. If Rhoda has neglected her friend and has behaved like the rest of society this does not make her “blacker” than anyone else, as Heglar seems to imply; rather, it attests to the constraints to which everyone is forced to abide in *Vanity Fair*, and further confirms Rhoda’s total integration into the British ruling class, with all its unjust rules and social conventions.<sup>112</sup>

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capital over relations between brown and white people. *Arthur Mervyn* seems to imply the same, with the marriage of Ascha and Mervyn.

<sup>112</sup> Rhoda’s ability to adapt and survive the hypocrisy of *Vanity Fair* is comparable to Arthur Mervyn’s marriage with a British-born Jewish woman, Achsa, who does not meet the criteria for whiteness set by American society, but who can provide Arthur with the wealth and lifestyle to which he has become accustomed, which he could only have otherwise earned through commerce with the West Indies. Both Mervyn and Swartz understand the importance of money in a world in which identity can be shaped by one’s fortunes.



On the other hand, the narrator is still partial to Rhoda's fundamental honesty and "[does] her that justice" of setting her apart from the hypocrisy of others, by assuring the reader that she "would have liked [Amelia] always if she could have seen her," but one has to adapt in order to belong (Thackeray 721). It is this very ability to adapt that renders Rhoda a positive character, a survivor, and a success in Thackeray's internationalized version of Englishness, which includes the nabob Jos, the Creole Rhoda, her Scottish husband MacMull, and her quadroon son Macduff. *Vanity Fair's* Creole character Miss Swartz, ultimately, is not a marginal character in the Britain of the 1830s; she demonstrates that Creoles entered English society and modified the meaning of Englishness in a world in which Britain is no longer an island, separate from the rest of the Western Hemisphere and from India, but has become a part of a larger, internationalized, system not only of commerce, but also of cultural reproduction, including both the West Indies (which at the time when Thackeray writes were economically in decline) and the more profitable British Eastern colonies.



### **Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands**

#### THE FLUID IDENTITY OF MRS. SEACOLE: CREOLENESS AND ENGLISHNESS

In the previous sections, I have tried to uncover ways in which canonical British texts (such as *Jane Eyre*), which portray Creole women as marginal to the official narrative and as embodying the stereotypical negative traits associated with the West Indies, present contradictions that open these texts to alternative readings. I argued that these contradictions highlight contemporary fears that Creoles were not as marginal, in

reality, as they were made to appear in novels; fears that they could infiltrate and contaminate English customs and morals. Thus, the nineteenth-century British novel often uses the figure of the Creole as an antithesis to the values and morals it wishes to endorse, which are predominantly the values of the rising middle class that the genre of the novel upholds.<sup>113</sup> These Creole characters, often marginalized in literature, however, also exemplify the contradictions inherent in the ways in which they are depicted. From this what transpires is not only the importance of the Creole to the creation of nineteenth-century Englishness, but also the ways in which England cannot distance itself from the rest of the British Empire and must negotiate a more fluid British identity, in which Creoles are a constitutive part of the texture of a more diverse British social stratum, as Thackeray shows in his satire, and as Mary Seacole (a mixed-race Creole), demonstrates by forging a new literary British-Creole persona in her autobiography, published ten years after the publication of *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*.

So far I have argued that Brontë's and Thackeray's representations of Creole female characters present contradictions, and that these very contradictions open up a liminal space in which these characters' agency and relevance transpire, giving them a voice that is often constructed as speech act and constituted by their actions. However, by this claim, I do not intend to suggest that characters such as Bertha or Rhoda are given an authentic voice, nor that they are fully developed by their authors, who ultimately choose to relegate their Creole characters at the margin of their novels. Portrayals of nineteenth-century West Indian Creoles by nineteenth-century non-West Indian authors reflect the

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<sup>113</sup> As mentioned in my introduction, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that the novel, the rise of the middle class and colonialism are closely linked, and that the genre of the novel has helped shape the culture of imperialism and vice-versa (Said xi-xxviii).

worldview of the authors, and do not approximate a Creole consciousness, although they might highlight the author's awareness of the conditions and possibilities of such Creole identities. Characters like Bertha and Rhoda are still not real characters, properly developed by their creators —Bertha never speaks, Rhoda only has a few lines of dialogue—and their depictions, as I have shown at length, are riddled with the stereotypes associated with Creole hyper-emotionality, overly sexualized behavior, poor education, laziness, lack of taste and propriety, as well as with the physical traits associated with life in the tropics (such as yellowness of skin tone, shape and size of head, facial features, miscegenation, etc.), which attest to the ways in which “proper” British subjects view their West Indian Creole counterparts, and not to the ways in which Creoles see themselves.

The last section of the chapter, therefore, compares these mainstream representations of Creole women in canonical British novels with a unique text, written by a Jamaican Creole of color, who, through the act of writing, constructs her own “exceptional” persona and, to an extent, sheds light on the ways in which mixed-race West Indian Creole women saw themselves and negotiated their identity, at the apex of the Victorian period. However, before I discuss the persona Mary Seacole creates through the pages of her autobiography, I would like to briefly touch upon the socio-historical collocation of her work. Unlike the fictional Creole women depicted by Brontë and Thackeray, Mary Seacole does not belong to the upper-classes of West Indian plantocracy, but she comes from a lower middle-class background.<sup>114</sup> As she tells her readers at the beginning of her narrative, Seacole is a free-born Jamaican, the daughter of

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<sup>114</sup> Mary Seacole's mother is a small business owner. She runs a boarding house.

a Scottish soldier and of a financially independent mother of black ancestry: “My mother kept a boarding house in Kingston, and was, like very many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress, in high repute with the officers of both services, and their wives, who were from time to time stationed at Kingston” (Seacole 12). The combined roles of boardinghouse keeper—an occupation which was commonly the domain of mixed-race unmarried females—and of “doctress” or healer, following a mixture of West-African traditions and western medicine, confirm, from the beginning of the autobiography, the importance of Seacole’s maternal black Creole inheritance, which will define her choices and her “yearning for medical practice,” as she follows her mother’s teachings in both vocations (Seacole 12).<sup>115</sup> I argue that Seacole’s lower middle-class background, and her status as a free-born mixed-race Jamaican Creole after Emancipation, allows her freedoms that would not be possible if she were born in England, or if she were, like Miss Swartz or Bertha Mason, the offspring of a rich West Indian planter before Emancipation. Her independence as a business owner and a mixed-race Creole, gives Seacole the freedom and agency that allow her to first materially embody, and then construct through writing, the emergent black Creole consciousness she comes to represent, despite her identification with Britain.

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<sup>115</sup> The occupation of boardinghouse keeper was generally considered disreputable in colonial Jamaica (and other West Indian colonies such as Barbados), as many unmarried, mixed-race innkeepers (who generally run boarding houses) were supported in their ventures by white lovers and, among other services, they catered to the sexual needs of their male clients. Seacole, in the course of her narrative, strives to defend the reputation of the profession by insisting on the high morality of her establishments (Gunning 957). Paulette A. Kerr, in “Victims or Strategists? Female Lodging-House Keepers in Jamaica,” discusses the role of innkeepers, as it became the domain of mixed-race women, and argues that these women, rather than being victims of racial and gender discrimination, used their position strategically to gain power. Lodging-house keepers offered a variety of services, including medical care but also sexual services, to a clientele made up predominantly by white men, and in doing so gained influence and wealth in their communities by “[turning] their weakness into strength” and becoming indispensable to their male clientele (210). Like Seacole, innkeepers “set the tone for the relationships which they enjoyed with their clients,” showing that they were not victims but “had the upper hand” in their dealings with white men (210). Kerr argues that their “power” might have been the result of “their apparent weakness” that rendered them non-threatening to white men (209).

Seacole's narrative is set after Emancipation (1834), when ex-slaves and Jamaican free Blacks went through a process of re-negotiation of their identity, as they found themselves in a new position, being no longer slaves but not quite British subjects. The thirty years between the Slave Trade Act (1807) and the Slavery Abolition Act (1833) brought about, on the part of slave owners, a tightening of discipline and an increase of cruelty in the treatment of slaves and, on the part of their slaves, a series of revolts incited partly by abolitionists' and missionaries' propaganda, and partly by the slaves' belief that "England had set them free in 1772, and again in 1808"; a belief that "threatened the authority of the planter class [as the slaves] believed [their masters] held them captive against the wishes of the metropole," which engendered a climate of fear among white planters that constitutes the background of novels such as *Hamel, the Obeah Man* I analyze in chapter 3 (Robinson 538-39).<sup>116</sup> During this period, as Amy Robinson explains in "Authority and Public Display of Identity: *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*," it is possible to trace a gradual shift, among West Indian planters and their slaves, in conceptions of what it means to be a British subject, and who belongs to this category. In fact, while the plantocracy slowly rescinded their ideological membership to the homeland, showing the signs of a growing white Creole consciousness based on economic interests, and driven by "the desire of the West Indian planter class to maintain the privileged trading status of a mercantile economy"—a desire translated into debates on the planters' right to own slaves and to obtain colonial self-governance—their black slaves slowly began to identify as British subjects, going against Creole planters and supporting British central government (539). The ensuing abolition of slavery in the

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<sup>116</sup>The 1772 case *Somerset vs. Steward* abolished chattel slavery in England and Wales, but not in the rest of the British Empire (See Hulsebosch's "Nothing but Liberty: 'Somerset's Case' and the British Empire").

British West Indian colonies in 1833, “served the colonizing Mother Country quite well as further evidence of her geographical centrality in the development of a national consciousness in the West Indies” as, whereas the planter class rejected the title of British subject, while seeking economic independence, “one of the signal results of the debate over the slave trade was the slaves’ successful appropriation of the [said] title...abdicated by the colonial plantar class” (Robinson 539), which is echoed in Seacole’s own identification as a British subject and, as a consequence, in what many critics, like Sandra Pouchet Paquet, see as Seacole’s disavowal of her Caribbean inheritance, and her “enthusiastic acceptance of colonialism in the aftermath of slavery” (Paquet 52).

However, by the time Seacole writes, slavery has been abolished in all British colonies for over twenty years and the abolitionist movement is no longer a driving force in British politics and in a Western Hemisphere where new, modern imperial forces are taking shape, alongside Britain and other European colonial powers, and where ex-slaves acquire new liberties. *Wonderful Adventures* is set in the 1850s, a period in which the end of slavery brought increased literacy among non-white British-Caribbean subjects, like Mary Seacole, as well as increased freedoms of both movement and self-representation. As Raphael Dalleo argues in “The Public Sphere Unbound,” Mary Seacole’s autobiography was written during a transitional period that marks the “unevenness of the passage from mercantile slavery to modern colonialism” heralded by the United States, as the railroad project in Grenada, described by Seacole, demonstrates (45). In the second half of the nineteenth-century, Britain was no longer the only colonial referent for West Indian writers, who however still wrote for a metropolitan British audience, and Seacole’s autobiography and “travels reveal her status between empires as she interacts

with both established British control and rising American power” (Dalleo 60). In this period, Dalleo argues, “Europe is no longer imagined as the only potential site of a public or a public sphere...the public sphere becomes unbounded after slavery and new possibilities are open up for its reimagining,” although Caribbean intellectuals still do not see their Caribbean islands as their primary audiences (45).

Critical debate on Seacole’s autobiography is divided into two camps. On one side of the debate are those critics who see Seacole as appropriating Victorian standards of femininity, in an effort to construct her identity as a British subject, eliding her Jamaican upbringing and personal experiences from the text and, therefore, disavowing her own cultural inheritance in a process of mimicry of the colonizer, as “Seacole desires identification with a geographic space—England—that she cannot call home” (Gikandi 126).<sup>117</sup> On the other side of the debate are those critics who read Seacole’s text as rooted in her Jamaican culture, as an act of resistance, and as a critique of the stereotypes associated with the figure of the mixed-race Creole. I argue that neither reading is completely exhaustive of Seacole’s hybrid consciousness, which is ultimately what defines her, and that the contradictions inherent in Seacole’s self-portrayal attest to the liminality of her position and to the impossibility to pigeonhole Seacole in either one or the other category. Even though Seacole strategically appropriates the conventions of storytelling, manipulates literary genres, and uses white middle-class ethics of proper femininity to gain the sympathy of the British public after the end of the Crimean War, and to cast herself as a Crimean heroine and as a surrogate “mother” to British soldiers,

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<sup>117</sup> In “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable, Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference...mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal” (126).

ultimately her autobiography is deeply rooted in both her Jamaican heritage—through her female West Indian ethics of care and her matrilineal inheritance—and in her liminality and agency as a mixed-race Creole, which makes her, in many ways, a precursor of twentieth-century Caribbean black consciousness.

#### VOICE, AGENCY AND THE WRITING OF IDENTITY

“Mother Seacole” is the protagonist of an autobiographical narrative/travelogue, which the author, Mary Seacole, titles *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, a choice that strategically evokes the romantic genre of the picaresque. Like the *pícaro*, in fact, Seacole “writes from the position she has achieved at the end of her trajectory, that of ‘Mother Seacole’ . . . a position articulated through her claim to fame,” and, like the picaresque, her narrative uses some of the genre’s conventions such as the episodic style and the ironic tone (Paravisini-Gebert 81).<sup>118</sup> Unlike Brontë’s and Thackeray’s portrayals of Bertha Mason and Rhoda Swartz, Mary Seacole, as a West Indian author, constructs a fictional character, Mother Seacole, who has a literary voice, a social identity, and who demonstrates her agency and subjectivity as a free Creole woman of color, through her choices and determination, as in her resolution to go to Crimea: “had it not been for my old strong-mindedness . . . I should have given up the scheme . . . I should make no excuse to my readers for giving them a full history of my struggles to

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<sup>118</sup> The picaresque (from the Spanish *picaresco*, from *pícaro* “rough”) is a popular subgenre of prose fiction originated in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain that “tells the life of a knave or picaresque who is the servant of several masters. Through his experiences this picaresque satirizes the society in which he lives” (*Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms* 666). The picaresque novel narrates the adventures of a roguish hero in episodic form and satirical style. English novelists adapted this Spanish genre in the eighteenth century (Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* is a classic adaptation of the picaresque to English prose). The picaresque was subsequently used by nineteenth-century West Indian writers, who chose English seventeenth and eighteenth century genres to discuss West Indian themes, as I will show in my analysis of genres in nineteenth-century novels by West Indian Writers such as *Warner Arundell*, *Creoleana*, and *Hamel*. Like Joseph in *Warner Arundell*, Mary Seacole adapts the genre of the picaresque to dramatize her experiences as a mixed-race Jamaica Creole woman.



become a Crimean *heroine!*” (Seacole 71). The above quotation demonstrates Seacole’s (the character) assertiveness—“I should make no excuse”—her agency (uncommon for white women of her time), and the control the author exercises over the text that is produced from the experiences of her life. Seacole actively seeks the help and patronage of influential members of British society, who corroborate her integrity and honesty (a technique that was used by abolitionists when publishing the autobiographies of fugitive or ex-slaves, such as *The History of Mary Prince*). However, when this help fails, or “her connections are not enough,” as in Seacole’s attempt to join Florence Nightingale in Crimea, she “rather than rely on patronage...is repeatedly forced [and willing] to take matters into her own hands” (Dalleo 65). This demonstrates not only her limitations as a woman of color and a Creole, but also her determination to forge a new space for herself, in a world regulated by the laws of a free market economy, on which Seacole bases her freedom and claim to status as a British citizen.

Seacole manipulates her biography through her writing, highlighting the “struggles” against British racism she must endure to “become a Crimean heroine” (Seacole 71) in spite of the limitations imposed by her race, as when she is rejected by the office of Florence Nightingale as a volunteer nurse: “Doubts and suspicions arose in my heart for the first and last time, thank Heaven. Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here? Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs?” (Seacole 73-4). Seacole is fully aware that it is through her own efforts alone she achieves success, and she intentionally reminds her British readers of this, in a veiled accusation of the factual discrimination she endures by the War Office, in spite of England’s reputation for

liberality, tolerance, and racial enlightenment, at a time (the 1850s) when “England was perceived as a heaven for black people who were ‘relatively free to denounce discrimination when they encountered it’” (qtd. in Hawthorne 319). Seacole is also aware of the power of the written text to create the public persona—the “Crimean heroine”—she strategically constructs through her narrative to obtain social (and financial) recognition in Britain (Seacole 71).

Seacole affirms, from the beginning, that she intends to write her own story as she sees fit, omitting the avowals of modesty and inadequacy that normally precede Victorian women’s writing in the nineteenth century, thus distancing herself from a tradition of female authorship that considers women’s writing inferior to men’s and something one should formally apologize for, at least as a matter of etiquette. Seacole, on the contrary, not only tells her own story in her own way, but decides what she wants or does not want to tell (and do): “It is not my intention to dwell at any length upon the recollections of my childhood,” she declares at the beginning of chapter one, and a few pages later completes her scanty account of her private life in Jamaica by concluding that “it was from a confidence in my own power, and not at all from necessity, that I remained an unprotected female” (Seacole 10, 16). This statement rejects middle-class Victorian notions of femininity (and female dependency) while, at the same time, Seacole manipulates to her advantage Victorian feminine dress codes throughout her narrative, as proof of her affiliation with English white middle-class values, and proper feminine behavior, as when she goes to great lengths to describe her distress as her “delicate light blue dress... white bonnet prettily trimmed, and an equally chaste shawl” are ruined by the red clay of Gatun (Seacole 20). While, on the one hand, Seacole engages in masculine

behaviors, on the other hand, by repeatedly describing her attire as feminine she show that she “knows that the issue of dress is one important signpost that divides the proper lady” from female adventurers, and she “often discusses her dress and how no matter the time or place...she would not be seen in public in other than a deliberately feminine outfit,” like the one she describes in the above quote (Mercer 16-17). Seacole’s manipulation of British feminine dress codes to her advantage demonstrates her awareness of the racial and sexual stereotypes associated with brown women, especially if they are independent from male protection; in her endorsement of a dress code that is tantamount of British virtue and propriety, Seacole simultaneously responds to race and gender based stereotypes that could be addressed against her persona.

In the Crimean section of her narrative, as she acknowledges her “unhistorical inexactness” that causes her to “[jumble] up events strangely, talking in the same page... of events which occurred at different times,” she declares that “unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all” (Seacole 128). Seacole’s refusal to rehearse the official history of the Crimean War, because “the reader must have had more than enough of journals and chronicles of Crimean life, and I am only the historian of Spring Hill,” asserts her agency in choosing what story she wants to tell, and recasts her narrative from the official plane of heroic military deeds, battles and male-centered achievements, to a domesticized representation of war, where the military campaign in Crimea is filtered through a domestic-public space—Spring Hill—and through Seacole’s

daily activities and influence on the lives of the members of Mother Seacole's imagined community, her British "sons" (Seacole 128).<sup>119</sup>

Leonora Sansay's *Secret History*, which shares the genre of travelogue with Seacole's autobiography, although it is set in a different historical context and describes a different conflict, the Haitian Revolution, uses a similar stylistic technique. Sansay filters the public arena of revolutionary struggle in Saint Domingue through the private arena of patriarchal dominance (and domestic abuse), which, in the eyes of the autobiographical narrator, Mary Hassall/Laura Sansay, is not so dissimilar from the violence of conquest and imperialism that dominates the public space in early nineteenth-century Saint Domingue. The displacement of the official, historical narrative with a feminized, public-private narrative of war and patriarchal/imperial abuse of power is a technique shared by Seacole and Sansay, who write fifty years apart. However, unlike Sansay's open critique of the French army, Seacole never directly accuses England of mismanagement in the Crimean war (nor of racism). During the Crimean War, in fact, the British army "lacked the most basic of supplies, including food, clothes, and even lint for bandages. There were very few wagons to transport the wounded and fewer surgeons to tend to the injured. Cholera swept the camps [and] the high death rate was as much the result of mismanagement as of battle," however Seacole rarely explicitly allocates blame (McMahon 9). Seacole's need to obtain financial support from the British public renders her critique of the British Empire and its Crimean campaign more veiled and ambivalent

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<sup>119</sup> Spring Hill is the site of Seacole's British Hotel, which she establishes in Crimea near the front-line, where she provides British soldiers with cooked meals, supplies, domestic comforts, and medical assistance when needed.

than Sansay's critique of French colonialism, creating contradictions within Seacole's text.

The abrupt shifting of the focus of the narrative from the official history of military conflict and imperialism, to the unofficial, unrecorded domestic history of (Creole) women, is a technique used by female colonial writers. Thackeray, in *Vanity Fair*, also privileges private history over official history, although *Vanity Fair* has been read as a historical novel. Thackeray's narrative abruptly shifts from scenes of battles to private scenes, not dwelling on the honor of conquest but casting a satirical eye on the insignificance of it all. By shifting from war scenes to private, domestic scenes Thackeray achieves a similar displacement of the official history of imperial conquest, which becomes secondary to the personal drama of the characters caught up in it, as in his description of George Osborne's death in the battle of Waterloo, which is briskly interrupted to relocate the focus of the narration to the heartbreak of his wife, displacing public conflict as private conflict, and suggesting the insignificance of Capt. Osborne's death in the battle: "No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart" (Thackeray 375).

However, although the "showcasing of the domestic, instead of the 'historical facts' of the war is typical of the narrative demands of female travel writers" and colonial writers, like Sansay, Seacole (and, to an extent, Thackeray), *Wonderful Adventures* does something more with its focus on the heroic efforts of Mother Seacole to comfort and cure British soldiers: it renders public what is private (Mercer 3). Seacole employs what can be described as private history to rewrite a new public history, of which she is the

protagonist. A history that locates her strategically at the center of the British Empire and that “constructs a subject position that reframes the power relations between colonizer/colonized” in which the roles are reversed through Seacole’s written narrative of the Crimean war (Mercier 4). By positing herself as a travel writer and as a Crimean nurse and heroine, rewriting history from her own subject-position (and declaring herself in charge of her own narrative), the mixed-race Creole Mrs. Seacole educates the colonizers—thus reversing accepted power hierarchies—through her actions and her writing; she assumes the role of civilizing force for both Americans and British citizens.

To create this new public persona, Seacole uses different strategies, including the choice of genres normally preferred by male writers. *Wonderful Adventures* is a combination of autobiography and travel writing; both are generally considered traditional male genres, although there are exceptions (like Sansay’s travelogue). Seacole’s appropriation of masculine genres underlies the subversive nature of her work, which disrupts definitions of subjectivity associated with gender and racial cultural codes of behavior—in spite of Seacole’s outer adoption of Victorian feminine performance—to create “a self-empowering story funded on alterity” and hybridity, in which Seacole sets herself as the unchallenged protagonist; a story that celebrates her difference, her strengths, and her victories, rather than dwelling on her failings (Hawthorne 313).<sup>120</sup> The genre of travel writing, adopted by white (mostly male) ethnographers, adventurers, missionaries, etc., was nationalistic and Eurocentric, based on the assumption of the superiority of the observer over the observed. Foreign nations and populations were invariably described as inferior, using European/English social codes of behavior as the

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<sup>120</sup> Given her identity as a non-white Jamaican Creole, Seacole’s performance of white Victorian femininity can also be constructed as a subversive disruption of accepted understandings of English subjectivity.

standard of judgment in the analysis and representation of others. Although travel writing was predominantly a male genre, some travelogues have been written by women. However, these women were, typically, (unlike Seacole) white aristocratic ladies who “considered [travel writing] a genre of ‘gentility’,” or were “connected to high officials or to missionaries”(Hawthorne 313). Although there are exceptions, they were rarely unattached, workingwomen travelling alone like Mary Seacole.<sup>121</sup> Critics, like Emilian Kavalski, have argued that Seacole adopts the point of view of the British colonizer, and that she stereotypes the non-British populations she encounters, especially while stationed in Cruces. Kavalski asserts that, “Mary Seacole’s narrative is replete with negative depictions of others—non-British subjects—who in the context of her claim to be a ‘real British subject’ are seen as threats to her identification” (6). He further affirms that Seacole’s “understanding of her subject-self is driven from her belief in an essential, unchanging tradition at the core of her identity,” to which she aspires to belong (6). I disagree with this claim; although Seacole at times uses travelogue practices like that of describing the people she encounters with an ethnographic gaze—a practice which might appear to stereotype them—I argue, instead, that her subject-position is much more fluid than Kavalski contends.

While Seacole seems to use stereotypes to describe the peoples she encounters in her travels like, among others, the Spanish-Indians, the French-Zouaves, the Greeks, the Sardinians, and the Maltese, who, Kavalski argues, are often “described within her discourse of contrasting difference as ‘plunderers, ‘thieves’ and ‘robbers’” (8), I argue that *Wonderful Adventures*, simultaneously, engenders a critique of racial stereotyping

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<sup>121</sup> In *Jane Eyre*, when Jane agrees to go to India with St. John Rivers, but not as his wife, Mr. Rivers rejects her offer because of the impropriety of an unattached, unmarried woman travelling with a minister.

using irony as a subversive strategy, and engaging in a process that Mary Louise Pratt defines as autoethnography (35). Pratt describes an autoethnographic text as:

...a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts...they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror... Such texts constitute a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture. (Pratt 35)

Pratt continues by saying that “a conquered subject [uses] the conqueror’s language to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror’s own speech,” which, I think, in the case of Seacole does not only refer to speech, but can also be applied to Seacole’s comedic representations of her own racial alterity, which she often parodies, mimicking the dominant language of racial discrimination, as when she relates her attempt to get an interview with the Secretary-at-War (Pratt 35):

I have reason to believe that I considerably interfered with the repose of sundry messengers, and disturbed, to an alarming degree, the official gravity of some nice gentlemanly young fellows, who were working out their salaries in an easy, off-hand way. But my ridiculous endeavors to gain an interview with the Secretary-at-War of course failed...Now I am not for a single instant going to blame the authorities who would not listen to the offer of a motherly yellow woman to go to the Crimea and nurse her ‘sons’ there, suffering from cholera, diarrhea, and a host of lesser ills...it was natural enough—although I had references, and other voices spoke for me—that they should laugh, good-naturedly enough, at my offer. (Seacole 72)

The irony in the above quote, in which Seacole accuses the war Office of racism, demonstrates the ways in which she uses autoethnographic techniques to respond to the official rejection of her services because she is a “yellow woman,” without openly



accusing Britain of racism, which would inevitably backfire against her with her British audience.

Seacole's outspoken stereotyping of non-English others, alongside her critique of the stereotypes of which she becomes a victim, because of her race and gender, represent an example of the contradictions present in this text. The alleged display of "internalized values of a colonial relationship to Britain, with its assumptions of English 'supremacy in taste and judgment,' [which] dominates...Seacole's public account of herself," as Gikandi argues, has induced other critics, like Sandra Paquet, to argue that *Wonderful Adventures* reproduces, at least in part, the point of view of the colonizer (Paquet 56). Gikandi claims that, "colonial subjects...constituted by the culture of empire...often identified with its goals even when they criticized its discriminatory practices," as they can only speak in the language of Empire that defines their identity (124). While Seacole's narrative often mimics the racialized language of the colonizer towards the non-English others she encounters in her wanderings, demonstrating that, to an extent, she shares the English imperialist gaze, *Wonderful Adventures* simultaneously engages in a critique of England's representation of black and brown Creoles, that reflects Pratt's definition of an autoethnographic text. At the beginning of her autobiography, for example, Seacole foregrounds the fact that she is a Creole of mixed descent, embracing her Jamaican-Creole identity, and rejecting the stereotype of the "lazy Creole" by casting doubts on the veracity of the belief:

I was born in the town of Kingston, in the island of Jamaica...I am a Creole and I have good Scotch blood coursing in my veins. My father was a soldier, of an old Scotch family; and to him I often trace my affection for a camp-life...Many people have also traced to my Scotch blood that energy and activity which are not always found in the Creole race, and

which have carried me to so many varied scenes: and *perhaps they are right*. I have often heard the term ‘lazy Creole’ applied to my country people; but I am sure I do not know what it is to be indolent. All my life long I have followed the impulse which lead me to be up and doing. [emphasis mine] (Seacole 11)

Seacole engages in autoethnographical writing as, by using the adverb “perhaps,” in the above passage, in reference to people’s belief that her industriousness comes from her Scottish blood, she disputes the common perception of Creole laziness, putting in question the myth of the lazy Creole, and re-defining her “energy and activity” as distinguishing Creole traits (Seacole 11). One of the reasons for the perceived discrepancies and contradictions between Seacole’s response to British representations of non-white Creoles and her less than edifying depiction of foreigners can be found in her desire to be perceived as a shrewd, but honest, business woman, who knows how to navigate a liberal market economy and, at the same time, can earn respect based on her integrity, which differentiate her from the peoples with whom she comes in contact, including many English people.

The opening lines of *Wonderful Adventures*, cited above, also place Seacole’s narrative within the genre of the autobiography—or memoir—and, simultaneously, allude to the tradition of the slave narrative, which normally begins with the words *I was born*. Although the memoir is an “androcentric” genre, women’s autobiographies, unlike male self-centered texts, were “modest, self-effacing” narratives that shifted the focus from the author’s life achievements to the didactic and moral value of the story, according to specific gender expectations (Hawthorne 313). On the contrary, Seacole “[transgresses] these patriarchal codes and restrictions” by constructing an unapologetic persona, and by combining the genre of the memoir with the slave narrative, engendering

a critique of both gender and of race norms (Hawthorne 313). The opening of *Wonderful Adventures*, “I was born in the town of Kingston...sometime in the present century...my father was a soldier of an old Scottish family” (Seacole 11), evokes not only the opening of fictional autobiographies, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, but also the opening of slave narratives such as Mary Prince’s *History* and Frederick Douglas’ *Narrative*, which begin with “I was born,” to which follows “a specific place but not a date of birth...[and] a sketchy account of parentage often involving a white father” (Olney 153).<sup>122</sup> However, in spite of stylistic similarities, Seacole’s autobiography—unlike the writing of African-American women of the same period (such as Harriet Jacobs, who published her autobiographical narrative under the name of Linda Brent in 1861)—is not read as an antislavery text, as its purpose is not that of promoting emancipation, but that of endorsing the British bourgeois identity of Mrs. Seacole.<sup>123</sup>

Hawthorne argues that the appropriation of the slave narrative, as the genre of choice for the opening of Seacole’s autobiography “is markedly irreverent and highly parodic” (315). By mimicking the conventions of the slave narrative Seacole engenders a critique of slavery and of “the ‘master narrative’ of both the literary and imperial authority systems [by] refusing to inscribe her story in the social coding of racial humility,” while calling attention to the heritage she shares with African slaves (315-16). This manipulation of the slave narrative, in a text in which Seacole takes on the role of civilizing force, in both Panama and Crimea, constitutes another example of an

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<sup>122</sup> See Prince’s *History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* and Douglas’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Seacole’s autobiography also resembles the slave narrative in Seacole’s inclusion of newspaper articles and testimonials by respected members of English society to corroborate her character and the truthfulness of her narrative.

<sup>123</sup> Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* describes the sexual abuses suffered by a light-skinned African-American slave, using sentimental rhetoric to gain the support of a Northern female readership.

autoethnographic response to normalizing representations of the colonized as inferior, as well as another instance of Seacole's refusal to conform to the literary conventions that restrict atypical representations of gender and race. Hawthorne argues that *Wonderful Adventures* "[inscribes] a space for the hybrid, Caribbean subject within the imperial authenticating genre of the war memoir" through the subversion of literary and racial codes (Hawthorne 316). However, Seacole's emphasis on testimonials of prominent British citizen, who vouch for her character, demonstrates the contradictions in this text as *Wonderful Adventures*, like a slave narrative, must partly rely on the corroboration of white witnesses to give credibility to its author.

#### CRUCES AND SEACOLE'S EXCEPTIONAL PERSONA

But how can Seacole, a mixed-race Creole female, take on the role of "civilizing force" in both Panama and Crimea, a role traditionally reserved to the colonizer? Is Seacole (mis)appropriating white English consciousness by embodying the role of civilizer? Does Seacole, as critics argue, erase—and thus reject—her Jamaican identity in her unrealizable desire to be perceived as British, or can we, instead, argue that she participates in what W.E.B. Du Bois has defined as "double consciousness"? (5). As Du Bois argues in "Strivings of the Negro People" about the African-American experience, double consciousness is a process in which the subject lives "in a world that yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other word," which brings about a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," and a "two-ness" that results in a "contradiction of double aims" always at odds with each other, namely the aim of the white "master" and that of the black (or West Indian, if we apply this definition to Seacole's experience) self (5). Seacole's struggle

between her desire to embody Englishness, argued by critics who reproach *Wonderful Adventures* for adopting an imperialist viewpoint, and her veiled critique of the discrimination she is subjected to in England, results in something akin to double-consciousness. However, could it be that, on the contrary, Seacole, by rehearsing the script of the civilizer, is re-visioning the role assigned to her gender and race, and asserting her agency as a Creole subject? To answer these questions, I would like to consider in more detail the section of the narrative set in Panama.

The geographical space of New Granada (as well as the Crimean peninsula), because of the many ethnicities and nationalities present, is what Pratt would call a contact zone, or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contests of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths,” where U.S. hegemony over this Caribbean region represents the very asymmetry of power that Seacole sets to destabilize with her account of her progress in Cruces (34). New Granada, and in particular the town of Cruces, during the construction of the Panama Railroad (1849-55), becomes a contact zone in which many races and nationalities co-exist, in a precarious equilibrium. It is a liminal space in which gender norms are subverted and in which Seacole can construct a different role for herself, as well as financially profit from the proximity of the American railroad project, which brings to the region many temporary workers, including numerous Jamaican free Blacks, and “a labor brigade of ‘brown’ (quadroon or mulatto) Jamaican women operating boardinghouses and shops” (Goudie 300). These female workers, like Seacole, take

advantage of their “mobility in post-emancipation Jamaica” and operate alongside the official white American Company accommodations (Goudie 300).<sup>124</sup>

In this sense, Seacole’s activity as an innkeeper is not unique, but it reflects a reality in which Caribbean mixed-race women have more freedoms than white women, and in which Jamaican workers remain the unrecognized contributors to the railroad project that became “a symbol of Creole ‘American’ exceptionalism,” in the official white American script (Goudie 300). However, by narrating her adventures in Cruces, Seacole does not explicitly insert herself in this unofficial history of black migration, to which she, like many others, participates, but appropriates the American concept of exceptionalism for herself—framing her position in Cruces as unique—and applies it to her work in Panama, reversing, to her advantage, the terms of comparison between her role and that of white Americans working on the railroad project. However, while Seacole critiques Americans for their lack of morals and civilization, she simultaneously participates in the spirit that animates the American project by praising the advancement of technology heralded by the new type of colonialism practiced by the United States in Cruces. As Dalleo argues, Seacole “marvels at the modernity of this project, subjugating nature and technology to man’s rationalizing will...in one breath Seacole rails against U.S. racism and slavery; in the next, she praises the North Americans’ modernizing efforts in Central America” (Dalleo 64) by affirming that “things were much worse,” before the Americans occupied the region (Seacole 18). Goudie argues that *Wonderful Adventures* “gives a voice to the silences of these more expensively produced and widely circulated accounts of a foundational project of U.S. commercial empire in the Caribbean

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<sup>124</sup> Approximately, forty to sixty percent of railway workers between 1849 and 1855 were black Jamaicans (See Newton’s *The Silver Men* 39)

American region” (300). However, if Seacole’s narrative sheds light on the wider context of the Panama project and on the Jamaican presence in New Granada, I also contend that, by describing the contact zone that forms around the railroad construction site, Seacole, on the one hand, forges a new exceptional identity and claims her agency as a West Indian brown-skinned Creole woman, on the other hand, she sets herself apart from other Jamaicans present in Cruces. Seacole disavows that collective voice that is typical of many later West Indian writers, and of slave narratives such as Mary Prince’s *History*, by embracing an individualistic liberal-capitalist role in Cruces.

Additionally, like her “British Hotel” in Crimea, Seacole’s boarding house in Panama—also named “British Hotel”—blurs the distinction between domestic and public spaces, and between the official role of “host” held by Americans, and that of “guests”—and thus subjected to American control— held by migrant workers (Goudie 302). On the one hand, Seacole upholds the codes of white (British) femininity by critiquing female adventurers, who “adopted male attire for the journey across the Isthmus; ... [and] were clothed like men were, in flannel shirts and boots; rode their mules in unfeminine fashion...and in their conversation successfully rivaled the coarseness of their lords” (Seacole 25-26). On the other hand, she distances herself from proper white female domesticity (which would not allow a woman to run a lodging-house), by embracing a public position in Cruces, and thus appropriating the role of innkeeper, but investing it of new meanings. In her public occupation as a lodging-house keeper, Seacole foregrounds her West Indian hospitality and healing powers as symbols of her exceptional subjectivity. In her role as innkeeper she demonstrates her superiority over the coarseness of the Americans she calls “Yankees” or “foreigners,” whom she caters to—in spite of

their racism towards her—and cures, in a region rife with diseases such as diarrhea, yellow fever, and cholera to which Seacole's West Indian body seems more resistant than white American bodies. This is a demonstration of her adaptability (and thus liminality), which renders her superior to Americans, who need her services, and allows her to be at home wherever she goes, unlike white people who demonstrate to be unfit for the contact zone (Goudie 301-2).

It is, thus, her rootedness in a West Indian black Creole female tradition of care, and not only her self-fashioned identity as a British subject, that allows Seacole to assert her superiority over the Americans living in Cruces, and her role as a civilizing force in an uncivilized contact zone, which “marks the geographical and social intersection of Native American, Anglo-American, African, and Latin American Nationalities—that is the complex political life of the American side of the Black Atlantic,” and in which Seacole's hybrid identity finds a unique place (Gunning 952). Seacole sets herself up as a beacon of morality and propriety against coarse Americans, whose railroad project she simultaneously celebrates. She, “rather than the Americans she hosts, imparts a civilizing difference on the chaotic, degenerative conditions in Cruces and across Panama, conditions that inhospitable American guests both aid and impart,” thus reversing the roles of civilized and civilizer that the asymmetrical relations of powers between U.S. employees of the Panama railroad, and migrant workers outwardly establish (Goudie 304). Seacole is at home in Cruces, where she can exercise her autonomy and agency, in spite of American racism towards her because of her “yeller” skin (Seacole 49). On the contrary, the Americans she comes in contact with become dependent on her hospitality and healing abilities, even while they consider her racially inferior to them. It is her West



Indian self, and not her British identity, that endows her with “her ability to travel and recreate home, or the domestic, in any location” in which she chooses to settle (Gunning 962). This incongruity between the ways in which Americans see themselves as civilizers in Panama, and their dependence on Seacole, due to their physical inferiority and unsuitability to the climate—which Seacole highlights by referring to them as “foreigners”—functions as a critique of US imperialism and as an affirmation of Seacole’s superiority through her Creole liminality and exceptional persona, preparing the terrain for the Crimean section, in which she extends this superiority to the British Army.<sup>125</sup>

Like St. Domingue in Sansay’s autobiographical travel narrative, and Philadelphia in Brown’s novel *Arthur Mervyn*, Panama—as it is depicted by Seacole—is a contact zone in which yellow fever decimates white settlers, while dark-skinned individuals are less prone to getting sick. Seacole’s ability to negotiate different spaces is what constitutes her black Creole exceptionality, which she shares with other black characters in her narrative, who also thrive in new environments and demonstrate their exceptional entrepreneurial and survival skills. Thus *Wonderful Adventures* traces an ideological connection between black Creoles across geopolitical spaces in the Western Hemisphere.

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<sup>125</sup> Seacole refers to Americans as “foreigners” intending the term to apply to both their presence in New Granada and in the Caribbean region in general, as she thinks that they did not belong there. The Republic of New Granada was not a part of the United States, but Americans were engaged in an aggressive policy of foreign expansion during the mid-nineteenth century, which influenced their commercial interests in the Isthmus of Panama. The Republic of New Granada (1830-1858) included a territory corresponding to modern Colombia, Panama, part of Ecuador and Venezuela (www.britannica.com Web. Jun 15. 2014). Americans succeeded in winning a bid to construct the Panama Railroad, which was to connect the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans through the Isthmus of Panama, and which would speed travel and transportation between the East and West coasts of the United States. The U.S. became interested in the project, having acquired the territory of Oregon in 1846 and California in 1848 (Mexican-American War 1846-1848). The acquisition of these territories prompted an increased American interest in the Railroad project (1849-1855), as the U.S. needed to find a faster route to California and other Western territories, especially as gold was discovered in this region (California Gold Rush, 1849). The U.S. completed a 49-mile (79-km) transcontinental railroad in 1855 (www.britannica.com Web. Jun 15. 2014).

Seacole, in fact, praises the resilience and initiative of American fugitive slaves, and asserts her common ancestry with the darker races:

...citizens of the New Granada Republic had a strong prejudice against all Americans. It is not difficult to assign a cause for this. In the first place, many of the negroes, fugitive from the Southern States, had sought refuge in this and the other States of Central America, where every profession was open to them; and as they were generally superior men—evinced perhaps by their hatred of their old condition and their successful flight—they soon rose to positions of eminence in New Granada...the self-liberated negroes were invariably found in the foremost rank; and the people, for some reason—perhaps because they recognized in them superior talents for administration—always respected them more than their native rulers [Americans]. So that, influenced naturally by these freed slaves, who bore themselves before their old masters bravely and like men, the New Granada people were strongly prejudiced against the Americans... [as] they feared their quarrelsome, bullying habits...and dreaded their scheme for annexation. (Seacole 51)

The passage clearly challenges and reverses colonial understandings of racial categories, describing freed slaves as brave men and white masters as quarrelsome bullies. By recognizing the exceptional skills of these “maroon figures found across Panama whose acts in defiance of whites she strategically recounts in the context of her own defiance,” Seacole not only claims a connection between her exceptionality and theirs, but re-asserts her condemnation of slavery and her ties with the black race to which she acknowledges membership (Goudie 305). She says, “I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related—and I am proud of the relationship—to those poor mortals whom you once enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns.” (Seacole 21). It has been argued that Seacole openly condemns Americans of racism while absolving Britain of the same crime, or at least effacing it under false pretenses. However, the passages here cited show that she skillfully maneuvers the written text to include Britain—the “you” in the sentence—in the crimes of slavery and racism.

In a confrontation with an American, toasting to her superior medical skills and declaring—intending to pay her a compliment—that “if we could bleach her by any means we would,” Seacole responds by re-asserting her affiliation with a larger Western Hemispheric community of black Creoles—of whom she praises the capacity of self-reliance and entrepreneurialism—who are the victims of stereotypes and racism, perpetrated by both the British and the Americans. In this vein, she answers to the toast by her American admirer: “If [my complexion] had been as dark as any nigger’s, I would have been just as happy and as useful, and as much respected by those whose respect I value; and as to his offer of bleaching me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without thanks” (Seacole 49). By asserting her membership to the black race and her belonging to a transatlantic (black) Creole community that she re-defines as industrious and respected, Seacole reverses the stereotype of the lazy Creole and defies the belief that black people could not self-govern themselves or thrive as free agents. To do this, Seacole appropriates the values of white middle-class industry and re-casts them in a black Creole context, “leading to circum-Caribbean collectives of brown and black Creoles unwilling to sacrifice hard-won freedoms and liberty by accepting a virtual reimposition of the terms and conditions of white dominance under slavery whether in North America, New Granada, or Jamaica,” to which she subscribes, through her entrepreneurialism and the re-negotiation of her identity through the written text (Goudie 305). Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures*, therefore, can be read as a precursor of twentieth-century black Caribbean texts, as it tries to negotiate “identity and citizenship among Black and Creole (mixed-race) communities” and to articulate their position in relation to the rest of the Atlantic World and the “motherland,” England (Kavalski 2).

BOURGEOIS IDENTITY AND THE (BLACK) CREOLE: RACE, CAPITALISM,  
AND ETHICS OF CARE

One of the ways in which Seacole constructs an exceptional persona is through her appropriation of the values of white, middle-class self-reliance and agency, alongside her performance of bourgeois white femininity—a performance which would seem, *prima facie*, in contrast with Seacole’s rejection of female dependency. Seacole, however, recasts these middle-class values in a female Creole context. I am talking about the same values Jane Eyre claims as her passport into British upper classes. In the section on *Jane Eyre*, I discussed the common threat that both the figures of the socially mobile governess and of the Creole wife presented to white British middle class, and how Jane renegotiated her role in society, by casting herself as a preferable choice to the mad Creole heiress, Bertha, whom Brontë depicts as a concentration of the many literary stereotypes associated to the figure of the Creole. By re-writing the common story of the Creole who infiltrates British society, Seacole indirectly responds to literary Creole figures such as Bertha Mason and Rhoda Swartz, and to “her [own] marginalization as a Jamaican of mixed ancestry, a ‘yellow woman’ from the lower middle-class, and a colonial [subject],” with a new narrative that re-casts the mixed-race West Indian Creole as the protagonist of her hybrid text (Paravisini-Gebert 71-72).

Both Bertha and Rhoda threaten an already precarious English identity that sees its colonial subjects as capable of corrupting its values and even the English physical landscape, by eroding the purity of the “English race” through colonial marriages prompted by financial gain. Mary Seacole manipulates such narratives substituting her kind of universal motherhood to the fear of miscegenation that both Bertha and Rhoda evoke in the contemporary English reader “through an inheritance of unnatural size,

genetic contamination (madness, cannibalism) and gargantuan sexual appetite—attributes of racial difference” that Rochester and Osborne reject in a wife (Perera 99). Seacole often discusses the color of her skin in an ongoing discourse that sets up a clear racial hierarchy based on shades of tawny. The importance of the color scale in Creole society is also highlighted in *Hamel* and *Creoleana*, as I discuss in the following chapter, demonstrating that social relations in the West Indies were dictated by racial hierarchies, which often coincided with class hierarchies, where the lighter one’s skin tone the higher their place in society. While, on the one hand, Seacole affirms to be proud of her African ancestors, on the other hand she makes a clear distinction between her “yellow” skin and the much darker complexion of other blacks, as when she admits to be travelling with “a black servant named Mac” (Seacole 19), or when she narrates her encounter with Londoners’ racial attitudes: “Strangely enough, some of the most vivid of my recollections are the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion’s complexion. I am only a little brown—a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much; but my companion was very dark, and a fair (if I can apply the term to her) subject for their rude wit” (Seacole 13). The pun on the word “fair,” Seacole uses to turn an instance of racism into a comedic opportunity, may seem to indicate that Seacole embraces the imperial viewpoint, upholding the distinction between herself and her companion based on shades of duskiness. And she certainly does think that her fair skin is an asset. However, while upholding the racial scale, I argue that she simultaneously critiques discrimination based on one’s skin color, and this scene might be another instance of parody in Seacole’s autoethnographic writing, in which

Seacole critiques imperial distinctions between “a little brown” and much darker, by ventriloquizing the hegemonic voice of the colonizer.<sup>126</sup>

The use of the term Creole to define herself—without the added adjective black—is also misleading as, by the mid-nineteenth century, the term referred primarily to white Europeans, showing how Seacole tries to subvert meanings by purposefully creating linguistic ambiguities, thus critiquing “those European induced anxieties of race and hybridity at the center of their powerful yet ambivalent scripts,” such as appear in works like *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* (Hawthorne 319). Although it might seem that Seacole upholds a social hierarchy based on lighter to darker skin color, I argue that her purpose in creating such distinctions is, on the one hand, a critique of a system of classification that labels people based on their skin color and therefore a parody of such classifications, on the other hand, a manipulative strategy to obtain the sympathy of a white middle-class readership, for whom it is easier to identify with Mother Seacole because of the continual attention Mary Seacole draws to the lightness of her complexion, by the use of adjectives such as “yellow,” “brown,” and “slightly brown”.

Seacole simultaneously underscores and parodies British preoccupation with skin color, as when she recounts that: “I was one of the first to ride down to the Tchernaya, and very much delighted seemed the Russians to see an English woman. I wondered if they thought they all had my complexion... My companions were young and full of fun, and tried hard to persuade the Russians that I was Queen Victoria” (Seacole 161-62). By linking her own dark body to the white body of Queen Victoria, Seacole seems to imply

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<sup>126</sup> Mary Louise Pratt argues that parody and self-parody are often found in autoethnographic texts, and are tools through which a subordinate people responds to the representations of them by mainstream culture (37).

that race is a construct, based on known social codes that might be unfamiliar to the Russians. In this instance, irony allows Seacole to make such irreverent associations, like indirectly comparing herself to the Queen of England. However, for Mary Seacole to become “Mother Seacole” she must continually foreground herself as light-skinned, and, at the same time, use irony to describe herself, “repeatedly displaying her brown, fat, and maternal body to humorous effect” as a manipulative and performative strategy that grants her acceptance by her English audience (Poon 509).

One of the strategies Seacole uses to obtain the favor of her readership is to embrace the same middle-class values that we find at the core of canonical British novels, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*. She goes to great lengths to cleanse her business activity—of innkeeper and sutler—from the negative sexual connotations attached to it, marketing herself as “a purveyor of ‘home’ comforts,” thus literally effacing the distinction between public and private that was at the core of Victorian social identity (Poon 510). She uses an image of domesticity to justify an activity that would not have been acceptable for white middle-class women, thus re-writing it and re-casting it in an hybridized Creole context, in which comfort and order—qualities associated with the English home—are always to be found at the British Hotels run by Mrs. Seacole. Seacole embraces capitalism, hard work and thrift—qualities associated with the rising middle class—by condemning theft as a “model for the exchange of goods,” by rejecting charity, and by linking profit to morally acceptable business practices (Robinson 547). The role of entrepreneur she claims for herself functions on different planes of signification. By portraying herself as a hard-working, independent woman Seacole subverts the stereotype of the lazy Creole, associated with literary figures such as Bertha Mason, as well as the

cult of white domesticity, while rejecting slavery as an acceptable method of economic production, and demonstrating that Blacks—like herself—can be independently successful. Robinson argues that, “as the unacknowledged heir of a British slave system, Mrs. Seacole’s self-employment and entrepreneurial success repudiates the empire’s systematic appropriation of the labor and profit of slaves,” and thus denounces, albeit indirectly, Britain’s slaveholding past (547).

However, for Seacole’s type of capitalism to be accepted it must be connected to an ethic of care, which must go beyond sheer economic interest. Mary Poovey, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, argues that occupations such as that of the governess threaten the separation between the domestic world, in which the wife/mother willingly gives her labor to care for husband and children, and the market, in which the governess performs the job of a mother for wages. In a similar vein, the occupation of nurse can be seen as eroding the boundaries between private and public. Mary Poovey, however, argues that, in the nineteenth century, although the professional nurse holds a public role that guarantees new freedoms to middle-class women, she simultaneously upholds the values of patriarchy and empire as: “the patient (read: India, the poor) is really a brute (a native, a working-class man) who must be cured, (colonized, civilized) by an efficient head nurse cum bourgeois mother (England, middle class women)” (Uneven Developments 196). Mary Seacole, however, by taking on the role of Crimean nurse—in spite of the official rejection of her services, and in obvious competition with



the white, middle-class Florence Nightingale—subverts the parameters of the nurse/patient relationship Poovey explicates in the above quote.<sup>127</sup>

Seacole reverses the equations of colonized (native) = patient vs. colonizer (British) = nurse, as she foregrounds her physical superiority (because of her race) to those she cures, who are “stricken down, not in battle with an enemy that threatened their country, but in vain contest with a climate that refused to adopt them” (Seacole 58). The above quote—although it refers to the yellow fever in Jamaica, where, Seacole thinks, “Nature has been favorable to strangers in a few respects”—can also be applied to Crimea, where British soldiers died of diseases more often than in battle (Seacole 58). Seacole’s Creole liminality allows her to survive in different climates, while “the mother country pays a dear price for the possession of her colonies,” whether in Crimea or in the Caribbean: the loss of its sons to cholera, yellow fever and dysentery, which proves that they do not belong in these regions (Seacole 58). Seacole’s comment about the “dear price” of conquest and colonialism clearly positions her against British Imperialism, which she considers to be “bad” for British people. The appellation of “strangers,” used by Seacole to refer to British colonizers, also supports her critiques of imperialism, and an unfavorable “Nature” confirms it (Seacole 58).

As a black Creole woman taking care of British soldiers, who, as patients, are dependent on her healing powers, Seacole therefore reverses, once again, the roles of colonizer/colonized—nurse/ patient—claiming her superiority, given to her by her Creole liminality, over those she cures. The exceptional persona Seacole constructs in *Cruces*,

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<sup>127</sup> For an analysis of nursing in nineteenth century fiction see Judd’s *Bedside Seductions: Nursing and the Victorian Imagination, 1830-1880*. In her book Judd discusses Mary Seacole, and compares her literary journey as a Crimean nurse to a modern *Odyssey*.

where Americans are drawn to her, in spite of their racism, because of her West Indian medical knowledge, and where she takes on the role of civilizing force in the contact zone, is extended to Crimea and to British soldiers. Both places—Panama and Crimea—are “essentially uncontainable ‘border’ regions of empire...and sites of instability,” where Seacole’s liminality allows her to thrive, and to “negotiate the politics of white crisis very deliberately, making use of the ideological fissures that inevitably come into being to achieve her own economic and social success,” as hotelier, healer, and provider of services for both British soldiers and American railroad employees (Gunning 953). In order to justify her business activity as a sutler to her British audience—a job that presupposes taking advantage of war for profit—Seacole invents the persona of surrogate mother to British soldiers, completing the merging of public and private, and of motherhood (typically unpaid) with economic profit, which Brontë completely effaces in *Jane Eyre*, as she rarely focuses on the fact that Jane is a paid employee of Mr. Rochester. On the contrary, Seacole foregrounds the fact that she gets paid for her services, framing this as something that is fair and that goes unquestioned: “When a poor fellow lay sickening in his cheerless hut and sent down to me, he knew very well that I should not ride up in answer to his message empty-handed. And although *I did not hesitate to charge him*, with the value of the necessities I took him, still he was *thankful enough to be able to purchase them*” [emphasis mine]( Seacole 111).

Seacole, as an independent business owner, appropriates the ethics of the British merchant, coating them in the language of motherhood. However, to secure the financial support of her British audience—it is the very need for financial support which induced Seacole to write the autobiography, as she was made bankrupt by the abrupt end of the

Crimean war—she must separate her type of maternity from actual procreation, embodying the Victorian image of the a-sexual angel of the house. Bertha Mason Rochester is childless, even though she lived as a wife with Mr. Rochester for four years, an authorial choice that attests to the unacceptability of miscegenation by Brontë’s readers, who tolerate more readily Adèle Varens, the illegitimate child of a French actress, to the legitimate heir of an Englishman and a racially undetermined Creole wife. George Osborne openly refuses to “marry a Hottentot Venus,” because he doesn’t “like the colour” of the heiress and the children that would come from such a union (Thackeray 240). Miss Swartz, although she ultimately marries, tellingly marries a Scottish—not an English—impoverished aristocrat. In order for Seacole to cleanse her identity as a (black) Creole from the assumption of over-developed sexuality and promiscuity—present in both Brontë’s characterization of Bertha, and in Osborne’s description of Rhoda as a Hottentot Venus—she must present herself as a-sexual. Therefore, she intentionally constructs the image of a mother figure, Mother Seacole, who is a childless widow, and does not partake in the illicit relationships that customarily went on in boardinghouses run by mulatto females, between these landladies and their white male patrons. In order to achieve the status of Mother of English sons, Seacole elides from the narrative details of her personal life, including the fact that she had a daughter, who followed her to Crimea, as appears from the account of the French chef Alexis Soyer who, in *Culinary Campaign* (1857), describes Seacole’s daughter—he calls her Sally, or Sarah—as an “Egyptian beauty” with blue eyes, and as “the Dark, rather than the Fair Maid of the Eastern War” (qtd. in Gunning 956).<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> William Menzies Calder, a British surgeon well acquainted with Seacole, also mentions Seacole’s

From the account Soyer provides of Sally, it is clear that her relation to Seacole was not a secret in the Crimean British camp. However, it is significant that Seacole decides to erase Sally's presence from her autobiography, and to take on the persona of a childless widow. This choice reveals Seacole's deep understanding of Victorian literary conventions, by which she can impersonate a metaphorical mother, precisely because she declares herself a widow (who, therefore, doesn't have sex) without children. Nicole Fluhr argues that "to represent her mixed-race daughter in the same pages in which she lays claim to white 'sons' would be to ask the British public that was Seacole's audience to accept them as siblings," as well as to acknowledge the history of concubinage that is an aspect of West Indian culture, in which Seacole partakes (108). Seacole realizes that, while the liminal space of Crimea—a British *locus* outside Britain—could accept the presence of a quadroon daughter born out of wedlock, because "war like death is a great leveler, and mutual suffering and endurance had made us all friends," a British readership in time of peace would frown on Seacole's moral indiscretions, no longer seeing her proximity to white British soldiers as a platonic relationship between a surrogate mother and her sons (Seacole 164).

I believe that the act of erasing aspects of her private life from her autobiography does not necessarily constitute a rejection of Seacole's West Indian identity, as many critics have argued, but it might be a calculated move that demonstrates Seacole's ability to manipulate her audience to her advantage—in other words, a Creole strategy of survival. Seacole's decision not to violate racial taboos by declaring the existence of a daughter born out of wedlock from her union with a white man—as the description of

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daughter, Sarah, in his Crimean diary (qtd. in Fluhr 96).

Sally suggests—is dictated neither by a desire to embody the qualities of Victorian white femininity (like she embodies Victorian feminine dress codes), nor by a desire to be perceived as English, but rather by more complex and pressing reasons. Among these reasons are the immediate need for financial assistance, which must not be underestimated as motivator in Seacole’s creative work, as well as her awareness of the difference between “the constraints that governed how [she] could represent herself in her day-to-day existence (her performance of her identity ‘in the flesh’) and those that governed how she could represent herself in her autobiography (her performance on the page),” an awareness that demonstrates Seacole’s cognizance of the power of the written text in shaping a public identity (Fluhr 109). Understanding this awareness on the part of Seacole is important to an accurate interpretation of Seacole’s motives for erasing parts of her West Indian self from her book.

#### ENGLISHNESS, CREOLE LIMINALITY, AND HOMELESSNESS

Simon Gikandi, in his chapter “Imperial Femininity: Reading Gender in the Culture of Colonialism” discusses the issue of the existence of colonial agency within a hegemonic culture whose language the colonized is forced to speak in order to be understood, even when he/she speaks in opposition and resistance to hegemonic discourse. In other words, Gikandi questions the possibility of real agency for the colonized (female) subject. He says: “To be a colonial subject in the nineteenth century, then, is to exist in a cultural cul-de-sac; you cannot speak and exist except in the terms established by the *imperium*; you have to speak to exist, but you have to utter only what the dominant allows you to utter; even when you speak against the culture of colonialism, you speak its language because it is what constitute what you are” (142). Seacole’s

movement “In and Out of Englishness” can be read as a calculated strategy of self-representation that combines a Creole consciousness that is embedded in Seacole’s ethics of care and hospitality (as well as her working-class model of West Indian motherhood), with her awareness and exploitation of the narrative conventions of English femininity and motherhood, which build upon her self-representation as a Crimean heroine and as a loyal British subject (Gikandi 125).

I agree with Gikandi’s claim that the colonized must use the medium supplied by the colonizer—in this case the printed book—to tell her own story in her “own words,” and it is certainly true that Seacole’s text presents many contradictions, as she writes within English literary conventions, which she exploits to make a case for herself, but which at the same time influence the ways in which Seacole sees herself. It is true, as Gikandi argues, that Seacole cannot take her “Englishness” for granted, and because of this she utilizes the testimony of others—letters of recommendation and newspaper articles—to corroborate her story and her personal worth and character; a technique she borrows from the genre of the slave narrative, which serves to authenticate the voice of those who have no authority to speak (see for example the “Supplement” to the *History of Mary Prince* written by her editor Mr. Pringle). It is also true that Seacole has internalized aspects of English culture; for example, proper Victorian dress code, middle-class ethics of entrepreneurialship, honesty, hard work, and thrift, as well as a “British” sense of superiority to other cultures that prompts her display of attitudes, towards others, that have been considered xenophobic by her critics. Seacole, moreover, genuinely pledges her loyalty to England, while simultaneously critiquing its discriminatory practices, and ultimately considers herself to be a dutiful British subject, even though she can only

successfully embody this role in contact zones like Crimea, and by borrowing—both consciously and subconsciously—from the dominant culture, in order to obtain the sympathy of a metropolitan English audience. However, in spite of the fact that Seacole might be forced to borrow from the dominant culture to write her autobiography (one of the aspects of what Pratt defines autoethnographic writing), she simultaneously displays a Creole consciousness and what I consider to be an acute sense of her condition of Creole dislocation, which is comparable to the West Indian sense of displacement and permanent exile, as it is described by twentieth century Caribbean writers, such as George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile*.

Lamming writes that the condition of the West Indian colonial is a condition of perpetual exile. This condition followed from the appropriation by black Creoles of the title of British subjects, abdicated by white plantocracy in the nineteenth century, and from colonial education (and brainwashing) continuing into the twentieth century, resulting in the substitution of the West Indies with Great Britain as the authentic home-place; it continues, in the first half of the twentieth century, with a West Indian consciousness of exile, both at home and abroad. Lamming writes:

We are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we can't alter, and whose future is always beyond us...When the exile is a man of colonial orientation, and his chosen residence is the country which colonized his own history, then there are certain complications. For each exile has not only got to prove his worth to the other, he has to win the approval of Headquarters, meaning in the case of the West Indian writer, England. (Lamming 24)

Lamming argues that the condition of the West Indian writer is one of dislocation, as he lacks his own unique history, because his past merges with the history of his exploitation,

and with his condition as colonized. Because of this, the West Indian writer must continually seek the approval of the motherland; but doing this is often equivalent to negating the value of his colonized self, always measured by the standard of the motherland, which is, by definition, always superior. This feeling of dislocation and exile “begins with the fact of England’s supremacy in taste and judgment; a fact that can only have meaning and weight by a calculated cutting down to size of all non-England. The first to be cut down is the colonial himself” (Lamming 27).<sup>129</sup>

Mary Seacole’s black Creole identity, in the nineteenth century, is also linked to a sense of dislocation, to a continuous condition of exile, and to the impossibility to fill the gap between the actual and imagined home-place; Jamaica and England. Seacole, like later Caribbean writers, must write for a metropolitan audience, using the language of the colonizer to describe the experience of the black, female, colonized self, a process that produces feelings of alienation, similar if not identical (as she is a woman and must add gender to race discrimination) to what Lamming describes. Seacole’s British identity can only function at its best in geographical regions that embody the same state of liminality that pervades Seacole’s hybrid self: New Granada and Crimea. When the war in Crimea ends abruptly, Seacole writes:

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<sup>129</sup> George Lamming is part of a first wave of Caribbean writers who wrote in the 1950s-1960s about the experience of colonialism and its effects on the psyche of the colonized. Lamming, in his novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), and in the collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), discusses colonialism and exile. In particular, the Caribbean writer must write from a condition of exile (in England) about the Caribbean landscape and West Indian way of life (which remain his source of inspiration) for an English audience and using the “language of his colonizer” (Pleasures 35). This self-imposed exile in England that characterizes the condition of Caribbean writers of the 1950s-60s is caused by the “intolerable difficulties” to write within a West Indian society that is either illiterate, too busy to read, or that ridicules the work of local writers, and privileges works by English writers. Thus, to achieve success, the Caribbean writer must first obtain recognition from an English audience, in England, where he has no choice but to live in exile (42). However, in England, the Caribbean writer experiences feelings of alienation. Living in a state of displacement, both at home and abroad, is what constitutes the paradox of exile for the Caribbean writer. Lamming writes: “the dilemma of the West Indian writer abroad [is] that he hungers for nourishment from a soil which he (as an ordinary citizen) could not at present endure” (Pleasures 50).



And yet all this going home seemed strange and somewhat sad, and sometimes I felt that I could not sympathize with the glad faces and happy hearts of those who were looking forward to the delights of home, and the joy of seeing once more the old familiar faces remembered so fondly in the fearful trenches and the hard-fought battle fields. Now and then we would see a loungee with a blank face, taking no interest in the bustle of departure, and with him I acknowledged to have more fellow feelings than with the others, for *he, as well as I, clearly had no home to go*. He had no home... Was it not so with me? [emphasis mine] (Seacole 164)

Paquet argues that Seacole's sense of homelessness—a condition common to twentieth-century West Indian writers, such as George Lamming and Jean Rhys—makes the autobiography “an exemplary text of colonial migration, both as an ideological positioning and as a sociohistorical feature of colonial life,” as Seacole confirms in the conclusion of her autobiography, talking about herself and her business partner (Paquet 55). Seacole says, “One of us started only the other day for the Antipodes, while the other [herself] is ready to take any journey to any place where a stout heart and two experienced hands might be of use” (Seacole 69).

While Crimea during the war becomes “a ‘contact zone’ where peoples, classes and genders which are normally separated, encounter each other and establish power relations that are apparently characterized by racial, gendered, and social equality,” Seacole is aware that Britain's social stratification does not allow for the same freedoms she enjoys in Crimea (Salih 176).<sup>130</sup> Crimea is a locus of liminality where Seacole is accepted, although she has a daughter out of wedlock, where she can break gender, race and class boundaries and forge intimate relationships with soldiers (which include lending them her gowns to perform as amateur actors in the role of women), and where

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<sup>130</sup> Crimea and Panama become contact zones because the war, in the case of the Crimean Peninsula, and the Panama Railroad project, in the case of New Granada, bring to these areas an influx of peoples of different ethnicities and social classes who must learn to grapple with each other, and to survive in a tense environment. The two regions share similarities because of the exceptional historical circumstances that break down normal class, gender, and race relations.

she can “substitute for ‘England’ a war zone where the expected barriers to someone of her class, race and colonial origins can be temporarily lifted” (Paravisini-Gebert 74). That is why at the end of the hostilities, unlike her British sons, Seacole feels that she does not have a home to go back to—Crimea being her “English” home outside England—a condition that anticipates the feeling of dislocation and marginality of twentieth-century West Indian writers, like Jean Rhys expresses in her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please*.

Seacole’s feeling of homelessness demonstrates that “the phenomenon of the colonial ‘return’ to the metropole, most often identified as an early to mid-twentieth-century practice, was already under way during the Victorian period,” inscribing Seacole within a tradition of Caribbean dislocation and liminality (McMahon 183). However, what makes Seacole’s text remarkable is that she demonstrates an awareness of England’s class, gender and racial stratification in times of peace, which does not allow for the same freedoms she enjoys in Crimea, and she consciously (and unconsciously) manipulates her narrative and her fictional persona to her advantage, demonstrating her understanding of how the written text can shape identity construction. Seacole literally forges her Crimean identity through the writing process, purposely treating her life like a canvas, re-interpreting it and editing it. She elides, for example, aspects of her Jamaican identity, which she sees as being in contrast with the British identity she wishes to construct. She does this—at the risk of being accused of replicating the imperialist worldview—partly to fit the role expected of her by British society, from whom she needs sympathy to recuperate some of the losses incurred during bankruptcy, partly because as a colonial subject she has internalized the values of the colonizer, which she

replicates while she engenders a veiled critique of British racism. She sets out to obtain the sympathy of her readership by writing *Wonderful Adventures*, which capitalizes on her fame in Crimea and demonstrates Seacole's awareness of what her audience is willing and unwilling to hear, an autoethnographic technique that Seacole shares with the genre of the slave narrative.<sup>131</sup>

Paquet argues that "the intersection of travel, adventure, and ordeal as substantive components of Seacole's autobiographical consciousness projects a precursory image of the restless, rootless, wandering West Indian colonial that becomes a distinctive feature of modern and post-modern West Indian consciousness"(55). However, unlike colonial writers like Jean Rhys, Seacole is not the victim of her condition of rootlessness but uses her liminality to re-create herself again and again.<sup>132</sup> The persona that emerges from her writing is a strong, independent mixed-race Creole woman who is not afraid to speak back to the figure of the voiceless literary Creole of nineteenth-century canonical novels, or to manipulate Britain's social and literary conventions to her advantage. Seacole's literary persona embodies black female strength, determination and independence. It re-writes the image of the over-sexualized fictional Creole, like Bertha Mason and Miss Swartz, and, at the same time, sets a new model of black Creole working-class agency and motherhood. This is a practical motherhood, based on skills passed down from generation to generation, like healing and hospitality, which form the core of Seacole's

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<sup>131</sup> For example, in narratives by female slaves, sexuality is often elided from the text, or justified as unavoidable, in order to elicit the sympathy of a white female audience (see Prince's *The History of Mary Prince*, and Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*).

<sup>132</sup> In her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, Jean Rhys explores the sense of dislocation and loss of identity that comes as a result of colonialism. Rhys is a white Creole who struggles with her identity after independence, as she feels that she does not fit both in her original homeland, England, and in her colonial homeland, Dominica.

unique Creole identity and are transmitted from her mother, to herself, to her daughter Sarah.

#### SEACOLE, MOTHER SEACOLE, AND CREOLE MOTHERHOOD

In contrast with Bertha Mason's sterility and Rhoda Swartz's assimilation, through her mixed-race offspring with a Scottish nobleman, Seacole embraces a type of motherhood that is informed by her Jamaican upbringing and that is passed down through matriarchal lines of inheritance typical of slave societies, from her mother, to herself, to her daughter. Although, on the surface, Seacole seems to subscribe to white middle-class ideals of femininity and motherhood, by analyzing what she partially effaces in her narrative, as well as her relationship to her "British sons," it is possible to detect a different kind of maternity, lying underneath the performance of white middle-class motherhood Seacole puts up in her literary role as a childless, a-sexual widow, surrogate mother to British soldiers in Crimea. As Alexis Soyer documents in his memoir of the Crimean war, Seacole refers to British soldiers as her "Jamaican sons," as she knew many of the British soldiers stationed in Crimea when they were stationed in Jamaica. She says to Soyer: "all those fine fellows you see here are my Jamaican sons—are you not? ... 'We are Mrs. Seacole, and a very good mother you have been to us'" (Soyer 232). Soyer reports that Seacole repeatedly referred to the soldiers as her sons, to publicly claim the role of surrogate mother. However, while Seacole goes to great lengths to gather witnesses to her domestic, maternal labor among British soldiers, she never mentions her daughter Sally (or Sarah), of whom I spoke previously and who is described not only by

Soyer, who attests that Sally called “Mother, mother!” to Seacole, but also by William Menzies Calder, a British surgeon stationed near Seacole’s British Hotel in Crimea for a period of at least eight months (Jul 1855-Mar 56), who writes in his diary that “the celebrated lady Mrs. Seacole [sic]...had a daughter about 16, called Sarah” (qtd. in Fluhr 96).

Seacole’s maternal labor, both in New Granada and Crimea, has its origins not in white middle-class notions of motherhood but in the practical teachings of her black, Jamaican-Creole mother from whom Seacole learns both her West Indian medical healing practices and her hospitality skills, which place both women within a West Indian tradition of care that distances them from white middle-class motherhood. As Seacole explains at the beginning of her narrative, she follows her mother’s example in both her professions: “My mother kept a boarding house in Kingston, and was, like very many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress...It was very natural that I should inherit her tastes; and so I had from early youth a yearning for medical knowledge and practice which has never deserted me...I saw so much of [my mother] and of her patients, that the ambition to become a doctress took firm root in my mind” (Seacole 11-12). Although Seacole, as a child, lives with an old lady she refers to as her “patroness” (Seacole 12) and not with her mother, she spends a lot of time helping her mother, from whom she learns, by imitation, to become a doctress, “[grounding] her medical authority not in formal British training or recognition (she came to the Crimea without either) but in her Jamaican mother’s practice,” and in a relationship between mother and daughter Fluhr refers to as being akin to an apprenticeship (Fluhr 102). And it is precisely her ability to heal diseases such as yellow fever, cholera, and diarrhea, which are typically incurred in

Caribbean climates by Europeans, which places her West Indian healing skills, from the beginning of her narrative, in a position of preeminence over Western medicine.

As Hawthorne points out, Seacole travels to Cruces with a “little girl,” she refers to as “my little maid”(Seacole 19, 46), also named Mary, who follows her to New Granada but is not mentioned in the Crimean section of the autobiography, and who could be the daughter Soyer discusses in his memoir (324). Mary performs simple tasks for Seacole, and the two share intimacy and a relationship of apprenticeship similar to the one Seacole had with her own mother, in which Seacole teaches the “little girl,” Mary, practical skills. The fact that the girl and Seacole share the same first name could be, as Fluhr argues, “a metonymic displacement of Sarah” (102), a claim supported by the fact that she too is described as having a “yellow face,” and as being the victim of American racism like Seacole (Seacole 56). Whether Mary is, in fact, a displacement of Seacole’s daughter Sarah or not, the relationship between Seacole and Mary illustrate a working-class Creole model of motherhood, in which “Mary receives practical instruction rather than sentimental affection from a woman who treats her as an apprentice and expects her to make herself useful at an early age”; the same type of relationship Seacole had with her own mother (Fluhr 102).

While Seacole performs the role of a working-class mother towards Mary—a role that focuses, rather than on unconditional maternal sentiments, on the need of a parent to teach practical skills to her children, who will later be able to contribute to the family’s income—her relationship with her British sons seems, *prima facie*, to be modeled on a white, middle-class mother’s relationship with sons. However, I argue that Seacole’s Creole upbringing is also fundamental in her ability to effectively take on the role of

surrogate mother to British soldiers and that, in fact, her skills as a doctress put her in a position of superiority to the real English middle-class mothers she substitutes, as she is capable of curing their children while they would not be, had they been there. It is her ability to heal that first gains her the respect of British soldiers in Jamaica and Crimea, as well as the admiration of American workers in New Grenada. Her superior healing skills are complemented by her ability to supply her clients with the goods they desire, but cannot get anywhere else—in other words, by her acute awareness of market rules of demand and supply—which combines a capitalist business model, with a West Indian type of hospitality coated in the language of maternal labor. While Seacole covers up her merchant business acumen in appropriate feminine codes of behavior, ultimately it is her West Indian healing skills, and not only her performance of Englishness, that allow Seacole's entry in British society as a Crimean heroine.

While the role of governess, which impoverished but educated English girls performed for upper-class families in exchange for wages, results in the effacement of the distinction between public and private, between marketplace and family, in Seacole's autobiography motherhood becomes a commodity readily available to British soldiers, which however exceeds the rules of the market. Fluhr argues that “[as] a mother of the British troops, [Seacole] counters the idea of mothering-as-exchange with the notion that commerce itself can be a form of maternal care, figuring her store as a giant kitchen that supplies the multiple wants of her needing sons,” and thus she rejects profit as the sole motivation for her efforts, and combines it with a duty to help British soldiers, which prompts her to travel to Crimea without government subsidy (103). However, Seacole's literary performance of motherhood—which employs a white, middle-class rhetoric of

sentimentality—should not ignore the more pressing motive of Seacole’s presence in the Crimea, as in the other venues where she runs boardinghouses, which is chiefly to make a profit, and not solely to fulfill a desire to embody Englishness *per se*. Seacole strategically manipulates her text constructing a literary persona, Mrs. Seacole, that consciously utilizes white, Victorian feminine codes of behavior to forward the business success of a mixed-raced Creole woman, Mary Seacole, based on skills that she could only have developed in the environment of post-emancipation Jamaica, where free, financially independent, mixed-race Creole women had larger freedoms than middle-class white English women and white Creole women could have. Mary Seacole’s autobiography debunks the literary stereotypes of the lazy Creole—and of the indolent black ex-slave unfit for independent workmanship—by depicting the picture of a business woman who intelligently takes advantage of the historical conditions in which she lives to make an independent living for herself. In the construction of her character ‘Mother Seacole,’ Seacole “presents her ‘maternal’ labor as a public service, rather than a private chore,” demonstrating that she rejects Victorian notions of white femininity, and that, instead, she shapes a new type of British identity that incorporates a nascent black and brown Creole subjectivity grounded in female independence, ultimately rejecting white middle-class motherhood, for a notion of Creole hybrid womanhood passed on from mother to daughter (Fluhr 104). Although Seacole’s West Indian female independence allows her to travel extensively, resulting in a feeling of homelessness, Seacole comes across as a strong, independent woman, who does not reject, but embraces, her West Indian heritage and who sees her Creole hybrid identity as part of a larger, more fluid, British transatlantic identity.



### Chapter 3

#### **WHITE CREOLE PERSPECTIVE AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CARRIBEAN NOVELS: *HAMEL*, *THE OBEAH MAN*, *CREOLEANA*, AND *WARNER ARUNDELL: THE ADVENTURES OF A CREOLE***

J.W. Orderson, in the Preface to his short novel *Creoleana: Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore* (1842), inserts his work within a tradition of “West Indian Literature” to which, he affirms, “Barbados has contributed her share, with no unlavish hand” (21). Although Orderson deems himself “incompetent to decide on the extent or general merit of West Indian Literature,” the very fact that he considers *Creoleana* to be part of a larger body of works by West Indian writers is significant in terms of establishing a link between literary representations of Creole life by Creole authors and the emergence of a Creole consciousness in the nineteenth century. Orderson proceeds to explain that his narrative will provide his intended audience, which is the “British public,” with a glimpse into Creole life in the Barbados of the 1780s-90s, the historical period in which he sets his story (22). Orderson explains: “[The Author] does not profess to give an extended view of the customs, manners, and habits of Creolean society; yet, in the progress of his tale, there will be found many little apertures (if he may so express himself) through which a discerning eye may catch a glimpse of each, as they existed in the time of yore, rather than as they exist at present” (21). This “Creolean society” Orderson talks about—and which Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite will discuss at length more than a century later in his seminal work *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica; 1770-1820*—is the focus of my reading of three nineteenth-century novels written by white West Indian authors: Cynric R. Williams’ *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (1827); E.L. Joseph’s *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* (1838);

and J.W. Orderson's *Creoleana: Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore* (1842).<sup>133</sup> Although only Williams' novel was written before

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<sup>133</sup> In this chapter I don't follow chronological order of publication to discuss these novels, but I analyze *Hamel* and *Creoleana* side by side, due to their thematic similarities in the treatment of race relations. As some readers might be unfamiliar with the plot of these novels, I include here a brief synopsis of the three texts, in the order in which they will be discussed in the course of the chapter. Williams' *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, set in Jamaica before emancipation, tells the story of Oliver Fairfax, a white Creole whose plantation has been seized by executors of his father's estate. Fairfax comes back from Europe to reclaim his ancestral inheritance and the love of the white Creole Joanna Guthrie, daughter and sole heir of another planter, an old-timer Creole gentleman. Fairfax disguises his identity as Sebastian, a mulatto adventurer, with the help of Hamel's magic potion that darkens his skin. At Sebastian's arrival in Jamaica, the English missionary Roland and the black rebel Combah are planning a revolt to take the island from the white planters and make Combah the first black King of Jamaica. Roland and Combah are aided by Hamel, who is respected by the African population, as he is an obeah man. Roland and Combah plan to kidnap Joanna to make her Combah's queen. However Roland secretly conspires to keep Joanna for himself and to use Combah for personal gain, as he wants to lead the church on the island. At the arrival of Fairfax, Hamel changes sides as he has a debt of loyalty to his old master (Fairfax's father) and helps Fairfax to suppress the revolt, to free Joanna from her kidnappers, and to reestablish peace under white Creole control. Orderson's *Creoleana*, is set in Barbados, also before emancipation, and tells the story of Jack Goldacre and Caroline Fairfield, the heirs of two Barbados planters. Jack, who loves Caroline, leaves home to pursue an education under the alias Mr. Brushwood. In the meantime the Irish MacFlashby becomes engaged to Caroline. MacFlashby is a cowardly man who seduces Caroline's mixed-race half-sister Lucy, while engaged to Caroline. Lucy becomes pregnant, her free-colored fiancée, Pollard, discovers her love affair and leaves town. Lucy becomes crazy from grief, loses her child and dies. In the meantime Goldacre/Brushwood embarrasses MacFlashby by whipping him in public and exposing his cowardice in front of the entire town. The engagement between Caroline and MacFlashby is broken because of Lucy's demise. Jack returns home a changed man, confident and refined, to court and finally propose to Caroline. Caroline inherits an estate from the Chrichton sisters and she becomes very wealthy, uniting her wealth to that of Jack Goldacre in matrimony. Joseph's *Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* is the story of the eponymous hero, the descendant of a very respectable and ancient Creole family of Antigua. The story is said to be the true autobiography of Warner Arundell, edited by Joseph. Warner is a gentleman, but he is a poor white Creole as his father has lost his fortune. Warner's estates are in the hands of lawyers and executors, who exploit the slaves. The narrative begins with the story of Warner's father, Bearwell Arundell, who fights in the Grenadian Revolution (Fédon's Rebellion) of 1795, and ends before emancipation in Trinidad with the marriage of Warner and Maria Josefa, a Castilian Creole lady of noble ancestry, who helped cure the wounded during the Latin American war of independence where she met Warner, a prisoner of the royalists. The novel's cast includes many historical figures, such as Julien Fédon, the mulatto leader of the Grenadian Revolution, Sir Ralph Woodford, Governor of Trinidad between 1813 and 1828, Victor Hugues, a French Jacobin and former Governor of Guadeloupe, and Simon Bolivar, who led South America's war of independence against Spain. Having no fortune, Warner must earn a living; so he decides to study law in Venezuela. After his aunt's death, he goes to England to enter the medical profession, but returns to the West Indies without a medical license, determined to practice medicine anyway. He travels extensively throughout the Caribbean archipelago, living in many lands including Grenada, Trinidad, Antigua, St. Kitts, Venezuela and Colombia. He joins the rebel army of General Bolivar as a military doctor, runs a medical practice in Trinidad, meets Fédon who is an old man hiding his true identity, has some disagreements with Governor Woodford who distrusts him, and clashes with Victor Hugues, who has become a blind and spiteful old man. In the course of his adventures, Warner meets for the first time, and then he is reunited with, his father's illegitimate children with a black woman, who are wealthy free coloreds, and offer to help him. Although Warner does not accept their financial help, he welcomes them as brothers and sisters. At the end of many adventures, during which Warner finds and returns Maria Josefa's family treasure that had been stolen, Warner wins a claim on his father's estates and is reinstated as a good planter, who treats his

emancipation, all three novels are set before the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which ended slavery in the British Empire, and the repeal of the apprenticeship system in 1838, when ex-slaves became *de facto* free men and women. The three texts I analyze in this chapter present other similarities that call for a comparative reading, as they are all written by West Indian Creoles who demonstrate first-hand knowledge of the Caribbean.<sup>134</sup> In “Creative Literature of the British West Indies during the Period of Slavery” Kamau Brathwaite defines West Indian literature as “poetry and prose fiction written...by persons, not necessarily native, but creole to the extent that they had intimate knowledge of and were in some way committed by experience and/or attachment to the West Indies. Creole in this sense is perhaps the most satisfactory criterion to apply to a consideration of this literature, since not all the writing of native West Indians concerned the West Indies” (47). The novels I am going to study in this chapter fit the criterion set by Brathwaite for works by West Indians about the West Indies that display a West Indian sensibility and a concern with West Indian political and social issues. These three novels also present thematic similarities as they are all, albeit in different ways, contributing to the debate about slavery and abolition that is at the center of West Indian relations with Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century, a debate connected to fears of insurrection and to the specter of the Haitian Revolution.

The novels in question also partake in a taste for descriptions of the Caribbean natural environment and landscape, and in a preoccupation with race relations between

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slaves kindly as his father did. The novel ends in Trinidad during Carnival, and after Warner and Maria Josefa are reunited.

<sup>134</sup> A West Indian Creole writer is someone who was either born in the West Indies and/or spent a considerable part on his life in the West Indies, who had financial interests in the colonies and was familiar both with the territory and with its laws, customs, and peoples. Many non-Creole writers produced second-hand accounts of the Caribbean, or wrote about the West Indies following short sojourns through Caribbean colonies.

white Creoles, European outsiders, black and mixed-raced slaves, and free people of color, to mention just some of the common themes and concerns of the texts under discussion.<sup>135</sup> These novels are set in different parts of the British Caribbean, in diverse historical contexts, as Williams' narrative is confined to Jamaica in 1822, Orderson's novella describes life in Barbados in the 1790s, and Joseph's travelogue and picaresque narrative—which presents some similarities to Seacole's autobiography discussed in chapter 2—is set in various British West Indian colonies, such as Trinidad, Antigua and Grenada, in the Spanish Main (Venezuela and Colombia), and in England.<sup>136</sup> Joseph's novel covers an extended historical period including the Woodford Era (1813-1828).<sup>137</sup> However, in spite of the differences in topics and genres, and the varied geographical and historical contexts the texts span—which I don't intend to erase or downplay—these three novels depict a Caribbean society that sees itself as distinct and separate from Europe and even England. The Creole communities portrayed in the novels, although steeped in racial prejudice and social division based on skin color and class, ultimately consider European and English newcomers as outsiders and interlopers, often unwelcome, and even threatening to the Creole way of life (as in *Hamel, the Obeah Man's* depiction of Roland). This accomplishes a reversal of the idea of otherness,

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<sup>135</sup> As I discussed in chapter 1, natural science was used in West Indian literature to describe the Caribbean environment (See Iannini's *Fatal Revolutions*).

<sup>136</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* shares the genre of the picaresque with *Warner Arundell*. As I will discuss in this chapter, other themes these texts share include a commentary on the adaptation of the profession of medical practitioner to the West Indian environment, and the issue of the rootedness and/or cosmopolitanism of the West Indian Creole. Obviously, as I will argue in this chapter, the subject positions of Mary Seacole and Warner Arundell are vastly different, as she is a woman of color writing after emancipation and he is a white Creole narrating his adventures before emancipation.

<sup>137</sup> Sir Ralph Woodford, whom I will discuss in my analysis of *Warner Arundell*, was Governor of Trinidad from 1813 to 1828. He was a pro-slavery governor and a Catholic sympathizer. He played a major role in the reconstruction of Port of Spain, after a fire destroyed the city in 1808, and worked to ameliorate the

expressed in British and American canonical novels. While in novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Arthur Mervyn* the Creole character is always depicted as an outsider and as other—vis-à-vis proper English and American heroes and heroines—in narratives by West Indian Creoles it is the European character who is often described as a foreigner, while the relationship between white and colored Creoles is one of close proximity, fluidity, and of shared cultural codes and understandings, even though it is often fraught with racial stereotypes, injustice, and even violence.<sup>138</sup>

The three texts that are the focus of this chapter depict a detailed picture of life in the Caribbean, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, in which interactions between classes and races are still fluid, and in which the three Creole authors present a portrayal of slavery as benign, although simultaneously denouncing its evils. In my reading of Williams', Orderson's, and Joseph's texts I focus on the authors' white Creole point of view and I demonstrate that the three white Creole characters, Fairfax/ Sebastian, Goldacre/Brushwood, and Warner Arundell, are shape-shifting individuals whose identity is fluid, and whose "proper places" in society—threatened by outside forces, and foreign presences—are ultimately regained, often using disguises to fight enemies (as in the case of *Creoleana's* Goldacre), or by assuming different personae in order to reclaim social status and patrimony, as is the case for Fairfax in *Hamel*. By "proper places" in society I mean the ways in which Creole plantocracy sees itself in relation to slaves and free black people, as superior to all other social classes, and as

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city's infrastructures. He favored the planter class and his policies contributed to cement class and race hierarchies in Trinidad (For a discussion of the Woodford Era see L.M. Fraser's *History of Trinidad*).

<sup>138</sup> Although the novels I analyze in this chapter reflect the point of view of white Creoles and planters, in opposition to English outsiders, abolitionists, lawyers, and missionaries, the contradictions present in the texts demonstrate the effects of creolization on white, black and brown Creole characters. Occasionally, the point of view of black Creoles transpires, in different degrees, as I will show in my reading of the novels.

embodying the role of father figures to their slaves. This view is reflected in the words of Mr. Guthrie, as I will show in my reading of *Hamel*. The novels' plots, more or less openly, seem to function as a way to counteract a pervading sense of insecurity and loss that affected white West Indian plantocracy, to which the three characters belong. As white male Creoles, the three characters must negotiate their future in an uncertain and unstable pre-Emancipation West Indian society, in which the status of white Creole plantocracy is threatened in many directions, giving often way to a sense of doom. However, the characters' ultimate marriages become symbolic of the reacquisition of their status quo, and a way to ideologically forestall the inevitable social changes that form the subtexts of the three novels. Only in *Warner Arundell*, the marriage of the white Creole protagonist, Warner, with a Spanish Creole lady, and of his brown cousin with a white woman, seem to open up new possibilities for a post-emancipation Creole society in which race is no longer an insurmountable divide between people, and rich brown Creoles can intermarry with white Creoles.

GENRE AND THE ABOLITION/AMELIRATION DEBATE IN WEST  
INDIAN NOVELS BY WHITE CREOLES: *HAMEL*, *WARNER ARUNDELL*, AND  
*CREOLEANA*

Before I analyze *Hamel*, *the Obeah Man*, *Creoleana*, and *Warner Arundell* individually, providing the reader with my own original contributions to scholarship on these texts, I would like to discuss genre. To do this, I consider the three texts in terms of their generic similarities and provide a comparative reading of Williams', Orderson's and Joseph's novels that begins by covering existing scholarship, but expands on it by

drawing new connections.<sup>139</sup> Scholars who have written on Cynric Williams' novel, such as Barbara Lalla, Tim Watson and Candace Ward have discussed at length the link between the author's choice of European eighteenth-century genres, such as the romance and the gothic, and the debate on slavery. *Hamel* and other novels, written by white Creoles at the beginning of the nineteenth century, take up the debate on slavery as white planters felt increasingly threatened by the approaching end of plantocracy's power and of civilization as they knew it, which they believed would come, along with the inevitable end of slavery. In this section, I expand on what Watson, Ward, and Lalla have persuasively argued, and demonstrate that *Warner Arundell* and *Creoleana* partake in the same associations between genre and white Creole ideology.

Ward and Watson, in their introduction to the Broadview edition of *Hamel*, describe Williams' novel as "generically a novel of romance and of the gothic" and, at the same time, as "a novel of polemical support for the slave-owning plantocracy of the West Indies" (9). *Hamel* shares the same ideology as the anonymous *Marly; or, a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (1828) I reviewed in my introduction, which is also a text that ultimately privileges the viewpoint of white Creole plantocracy, at a time when Jamaican planters realized that their world and privileges were being threatened from the outside by abolitionists and missionaries alike, and from the inside by the menace of slave revolts incited by English propaganda, and by some slaves' belief that England had set them free in 1807. However, while *Marly's* plot seems to function just as a frame to expound the two side of the abolition debate through lengthy monologues by various speakers,

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<sup>139</sup> The following sections will analyze the three novels individually, making however many cross-section and cross-chapter connections between texts, whenever relevant. Due to the many thematic similarities between these novels and in the history of slavery in British colonies, I have opted for a comparative reading, in spite of the geographical and historical differences that the texts present, rather than a separate reading of Williams', Orderson's, and Joseph's novels.

*Hamel*'s storyline and characterization give a unique voice not only to white planters, but also to black characters, such as the Obeah man, Hamel, and the quadroon slave, Michal.<sup>140</sup> *Hamel* engenders contradictions between the author's intentions (promoting a pro-slavery agenda), his depiction of black characters—that Ward and Watson refers to as “[coming] closest to representing black consciousness”—and his awareness of the existence of a pervasive Afro-Caribbean culture, which influenced white Creole society (Ward and Watson 9).

*Hamel, the Obeah Man, Warner Arundell* and *Creoleana*, share similarities with some of the novels I described in the section of my introduction titled “The Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Novels by West Indian Creoles,” and in particular with *Montgomery; or, the West Indian Adventurer* (1812-13), *Marly; or, a Planter's Life in Jamaica*, and Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log* (1833), which partake in a similar ideology and demonstrate the workings of a white Creole consciousness, distinct from colonial loyalty to England. These texts participate, in different degrees, in the debate on the West Indian Question on the side of the planter class, advocating amelioration and gradual, rather than immediate, emancipation. *Hamel, Warner Arundell*, and *Creoleana* also use European literary models and genres to put forward West Indian concerns and ideals. *Hamel* and *Warner Arundell* loosely follow the eighteenth-century genre of the picaresque, in which a gentle-born, but poor, hero recovers his inheritance, which had been usurped by outsiders (often lawyers), and ultimately marries a wealthy aristocratic lady, generally a landowner's daughter, and takes up his “rightful place” in society. The genre of the picaresque—which originated in Spain in the sixteenth century, and was best adapted to

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<sup>140</sup> The figure of the quadroon Michal will be discussed in more depth in the following pages, alongside the mixed-race character Lucy in *Creoleana*.



the English novel by Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones* (1749)—is episodic, contains many digressions and a loose storyline, is ironic or satirical in tone, and describes the adventures of a roguish hero, who, however, has a good heart. The adaptation of the European genre of the picaresque to West Indian novels is exemplified by *Warner Arundell* and *Tom Cringle's Log*—as well as by Mary Seacole's *Wonderful Adventures*, discussed in chapter 2—which are models of the nineteenth-century West Indian picaresque and travelogue. However, the genre also loosely fits *Hamel* and *Creoleana*, whose “picaresque” heroes must meet a series of challenges and live through many adventures before they come into their wealth and marry the ladies they love, who contribute with their dowry to recover or reinforce the white male protagonists' social status as estate owners.<sup>141</sup>

Lise Winer, in her introduction to *Warner Arundell*, writes that although this novel was published at the beginning of the Victorian era (1838), it follows eighteenth-century models such as the picaresque, British Romanticism, and the eighteenth-century Gothic tradition.<sup>142</sup> She argues that Henry Fielding's character, Tom Jones, shapes the portrayal of Warner Arundell. Like Tom Jones in Fielding's novel, Warner acts before he thinks and his hot temper lands him in many difficult situations, such as unwarranted duels. However Warner, like Tom, is ultimately honest and considerate, as the ending of the novel, with the restitution of the treasure to its rightful owner, demonstrates. Another

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<sup>141</sup> Although the white Creole planter, Mr. Fairfax, is not the protagonist of Williams' novel as the title, *Hamel, the Obeah Man* indicates, in my reading of this novel I might occasionally refer to him as protagonist as Fairfax embodies the prototype of the good planter and is the main character representing the white planter class.

<sup>142</sup> Popular eighteenth-century authors at the time E.L. Joseph writes were Henry Fielding, Alexander Pope, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Laurence Sterne, Thomas Gray, William Cowper, Oliver Goldsmith, and Anne Radcliffe; also popular were the seventeenth-century masters Shakespeare and Milton, largely quoted in *Warner Arundell* (Winer xxvii).

characteristic of the picaresque shared by both *Tom Jones* and *Warner Arundell* is a taste for digressions, of which both novels abound; a stylistic choice also embraced by *Creoleana*. Lise Winer observes that the title of Joseph's novel alludes to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, as Sterne's long title, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, seems to be mirrored in the long title of Joseph's novel: *The Life, Adventures and Opinions of Warner Arundell, Esquire* (Winer xxix). Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, like *Tom Jones* and *Warner Arundell*, is the story of the life of the title character, and it contains extended digressions, which have educational, as well as entertainment value, and which are treated not like interruptions of the main plot, but as an integral and important part of the text. *Warner Arundell* shares this focus on digressions, as its many anecdotes, characters, and historical commentaries, including a history of the Buccaneers, demonstrate. Joseph's use of extensive allusions and citations—especially of seventeenth and eighteenth century authors, among which, in particular, Shakespeare—is indicative of the nineteenth-century Creole writer's impulse to demonstrate to metropolitan audiences his erudition and sophistication, by citing seventeenth and eighteenth-century masters of the English canon.

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *Sentimental Journey* depict male heroes who are endowed with sensibility, or a capacity to feel and to sympathize with the emotions of others; a quality connected to education and refinement, but also to a "quickness of sensation" and a "quickness of perception," as Samuel Johnson describes sensibility (qtd. in Carey 4). J.W. Orderson, in *Creoleana*, adopts an eighteenth-century model of sensibility to describe its protagonist's reactions to events, a "discourse which celebrated

the passions over the intellect” (Carey 4).<sup>143</sup> Jack Goldacre’s sensibility, after he acquires an education, thus imitates the English sentimental novel, and celebrates sentiment, emotion, and a capacity to empathize with the suffering of others, which however does not extend to the suffering of slaves, as in *Creoleana*, black people are confined to the margins of the novel and, but for a few exceptions, are not given a voice.<sup>144</sup> As Carey explains in *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility*, “central to the rhetoric is a belief in the power of sympathy to raise awareness of suffering, to change an audience’s view of that suffering, and to direct their opposition to it” (2). In *Creoleana* the author uses the rhetoric of sensibility to demonstrate his white Creole protagonist’s affinity to the English readership—who knows what it is like to suffer for love—to which Orderson aspires. While in the slave narrative the use of sensibility humanizes Blacks, in *Creoleana* sensibility is used to demonstrate the white Creole protagonist’s refinement, and thus affinity to the English character. For example, the narrator appeals to his metropolitan audience, who as gentlemen and ladies of sensibility can understand Goldacre’s emotions upon meeting Miss Fairfield: “—but all who have hearts will know what his feelings were, without any description” (Orderson 97). Later in the story, as Goldacre is assailed by jealousy, “he most wished to conceal his feeling; for Mr. Fairfield saw Jack’s perturbation, but being *a man of feeling*, as well as discernment, [Jack]

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<sup>143</sup> Among the models of sentimental literature we find: Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) and *Sentimental Journey* (1768), and Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771).

<sup>144</sup> Sentimental literature, as Carey argues, was generally used in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, by abolitionists to forward the cause of emancipation. In particular, slave narratives, such as *The History of Mary Prince* and Harriett Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* adapt the genre of the sentimental novel to both demonstrate the humanity of the slaves whose life is being described and to appeal to the emotions and sensibility of a female readership. Carey defines this adaptation of sensibility to the cause of abolition as “sentimental rhetoric of antislavery” which he places at the “intersection of the three discourses of sensibility, abolition, and rhetoric” (1). Beside the slave narrative, the “sentimental rhetoric of antislavery” is used in novels by female authors, generally directed to a female readership, such as Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. *Creoleana*’s use of sentimentality, however, does not serve as antislavery discourse.

apologized for his hasty departure”[emphasis mine] (Orderson 102). In another scene, Jack “overcome by his emotions...burst into tears!” in front of his mother, as he regrets being a burden to his parents (106). A few pages later, the narrator describes Jack’s parents’ response to his apologies, with words that demonstrate that an English notion of sensibility is the underlying principle shaping this Creole novel: “The tear of tenderness will ever flow when awakened by the *influence of sympathy*, and it was a tear of tenderness that bedewed the cheeks of each [parent]” [emphasis mine] (113). The unspoken declaration of love between the two protagonists, just before Jack proposes, is described as the “first electric shock between two *sympathizing hearts*” [emphasis mine] (128).

This romance between the children of two Creole planters set in the Barbados of the 1790s, thus, adopts conventional eighteenth-century clichés of sentimental literature, as well as depicting life in the Fairfax (and Goldacre) household by modeling it on the lifestyle of a typical English manor house which, according to Brathwaite, renders the story “unreal because Orderson asks us to believe that the life of his country squire and family proceeded in approximation of an English shire, rather than in St. George Parish, Barbados” (Brathwaite, “Creative Literature” 48). Although Brathwaite’s critique is justified, I would argue that Orderson’s reasons for adapting known English conventions to a West Indian romance should be read as confirmation that white Creoles wrote to give credibility and status to their society, and to the West Indies, which was considered by England to be a non-place, where proper cultural reproduction could not happen. By portraying Jack as a sentimental hero and Caroline Fairfield as a model of purity, virtue and domesticity, Orderson claims an elevated status for his heroes, and the white West

Indian society he describes. Beside the use of recognizable conventions of sentimental literature, *Creoleana*'s plot is also interspersed by digressions, like *Warner Arundell*, which function to fill in the readers on contemporary historical events and Creole society's ways (through anecdotes, descriptions, and reflections), and which are more realistic and indicative of the socio-political reality of Barbados in the 1790s than the main romantic storyline.<sup>145</sup> I will discuss some of these digressions in detail in the section of this chapter dedicated to Orderson's romance, alongside a discussion of the sense of nostalgia for the "Days of Yore" which thematically links *Creoleana* and *Hamel, the Obeah Man*.

Generic similarities between the three texts I analyze in this chapter are not limited to the reworking of the episodic picaresque form, and to the genre of sentimental literature, but include the adaptation of romance, as mentioned in the above paragraph—and, in the case of Williams' and Joseph's novels, of the gothic—to a West Indian context, as many scholars have pointed out.<sup>146</sup> Nineteenth-century West Indian prose fiction's models can be found, rather than in the Victorian tradition, in eighteenth-century works and, in particular, in British Romanticism and in the Gothic, a genre that takes on a central place within Caribbean and early American literatures. The gothic, in fact, becomes associated with the fear of slave revolts and violence—as in the rendition of the Haitian Revolution in Sansay's *Secret History* and Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*, discussed in

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<sup>145</sup> Among the historical references found in *Creoleana*, are: the Bridgetown fire of 1766, the great hurricane of 1780, the economic crises brought about by the American War of Independence, and the capture of Martinique by the British in 1794. Orderson conveniently sets his novel prior to the rebellion of 1816.

<sup>146</sup> I will discuss the use of the gothic in West Indian literature, and the figure of the Obeah man, in more depth in my analysis of *Hamel*.

chapter 1—or with depictions of the horrors of slavery, as in the genre of the slave narrative.<sup>147</sup>

The historical figure of Julien Fédon in *Warner Arundell* resembles the Byronic hero of British Romanticism. Fédon is a Gothic villain, who “combines ruthlessness with a kind of honor, and whose mysterious, often sinful past enhances his attractiveness”; like the Byronic hero of British literature, Fédon is brooding and moody (Winer xxvi).<sup>148</sup> The qualities associated with the conventional Romantic figure of the Byronic hero, which seep into West Indian literature, are not limited to the depiction of brooding, melancholic, and enigmatic characters, such as Fédon, who are “plagued by a remembered past sorrow or crime,” but include a more positive type of individualism, embodied in figures that display independence and “an elegiac attitude towards personal and historical past,” and who are simultaneously acting autonomously and demonstrating concern for the welfare of the community, while expressing a desire for freedom, both individual and political (Winer xxvii). These attributes—individualism, concern for the community, and political activism—are found not only in *Arundell* but also in other characters, such as Mr. Fairfax and, to an extent, Mr. Guthrie, both planters in Williams’ novel. These characters display traits typical of later West Indian novels, which show a concern for community and for West Indian affairs.

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<sup>147</sup> For examples of eighteenth and nineteenth-century West Indian slave narratives see Ottobah Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Commerce of the Human Species* (1787), Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), and *The History of Mary Prince* (1828).

<sup>148</sup> Julien Fédon was the leader of a slave revolt in Granada (1775-76) against British rule, which is known as the Fédon Rebellion. Fédon was a free colored planter (For a complete discussion of Fédon’s Rebellion see Cox’s “Fédon’s Rebellion 1795-96: Causes and Consequences”).

Mr. Guthrie, who, alongside Fairfax, exemplifies a model of morally virtuous planter, asserts Jamaica's—and the West Indies'—ideological independence from England by calling the mother country “old stupid world,” and juxtaposing it to “the better informed, better-educated, more liberal and enlightened *people of the great Antilles*” [emphasis mine] (Williams 100). Unlike British novels like *Jane Eyre*, discussed in chapter 2, in which the West Indian Creole is always “other,” for Mr. Guthrie—and for the author of *Hamel*—what is “other” is not Jamaica but England and those who, like the missionary Roland, come from England to meddle with Jamaican affairs. A similar repositioning of the construct of otherness can also be found in *Warner Arundell* and *Creoleana*, as both novels see Trinidad, Barbados, and the Caribbean archipelago in general, as central to economic and social relations, showing concern for their communities, while England remains distant and unfriendly, or is depicted as a site of displacement, as in the description of Warner's sojourn in London. Although these novels do not go as far as advocating political independence from the motherland, Guthrie's remark in *Hamel* demonstrates the working of a Creole consciousness based on social responsibility, which posits the New World in opposition to the “old stupid world,” and in which all three novels partake in different ways (Williams 100).

Tim Watson, in “Caribbean Romance and Subaltern History,” discusses the connections between genre and socio-political concerns in pre-emancipation Jamaica. Watson argues that there is a correspondence between nineteenth-century white Creole writers' adaptation of the genre of imperial romance to the West Indian context, and the sense of doom that characterizes the first decades of the nineteenth century, and precedes the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. Watson persuasively claims that texts written in the

1820s by white Creoles, such as *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, appropriate the genre of imperial romance to “validate a world they believed they would imminently lose” because of the advancements of both abolitionist and evangelical propaganda against slavery (Watson 67). More specifically, Watson contends that Williams’ West Indian novel *Hamel, the Obeah Man* shares a similar sense of doom as we find in Walter Scott’s historical novel *Waverley*; a commentary on the loss of Scotland’s Highland clan culture in 1745 and on the realization that an era has come to an end. However, although both Scott and Williams create “national tales,” and *Waverley* and *Hamel* share the understanding that an era is coming to an end, Scott’s novel treats events that are already past and confined to the historical record, while in *Hamel* slave revolts are ongoing and will not end with the end of Williams’ novel (Watson 73).<sup>149</sup>

Watson shows how West Indian authors responded to abolitionists’ accusations directed against slave-owning planters, and affirmed the validity of the West Indian model of production (plantation slavery) and way of life, through the appropriation of the genre of the imperial romance. However, the use of the imperial romance in West Indian literature written by white Creoles at the beginning of the nineteenth century, such as Williams’ novel, becomes a double-edged sword. While white Creoles use the imperial romance to validate their culture and way of life as it is coming to an end, and to demonstrate that the institution of slavery is not as cruel as it is portrayed, and that slaves are not yet ready to become emancipated, they run the risk that “romance might instead be the appropriate form for representing and validating African-Jamaican culture, folk knowledge and insurgency” (Watson 67). Watson argues that *Hamel*, in particular, but

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<sup>149</sup>For more on this comparison, see Watson’s “Caribbean Romance” 66-103.



also Williams' *A Tour through the Island of Jamaica*, unintentionally recognize the presence and significance of a black Creole culture, which, in *Hamel*, is represented primarily by the enigmatic figure of the Obeah man through the genre of the imperial romance.<sup>150</sup>

This African-Caribbean culture seeps into white Creole culture, and influences white planters—such as Fairfax—and the ways in which they are portrayed by West Indian authors, showing how pre-emancipation Caribbean society, although conscious of race divisions, is still fluid and white Creoles (and to an extent black Creoles), are constructed in fiction as shape-shifting individuals who can cross culturally imposed borders, an argument I am going to take up in more depth in the following sections. The character Hamel in Williams' novel is one of the first Africans who are given a voice in a white Creole text; and this voice, although it is consciously used by Williams to express the pro-slavery views of white plantocracy, occasionally breaks away and—presumably unintentionally on the author's part—declares black men's equality while denouncing slavery and its atrocities, engendering contradictions in our reading of this text. Hamel, in fact, foresees an uncertain future for white planters, evoking the ghost of the Haitian Revolution, as his speech shows: "I would have revenged myself on the buckra...to teach the buckras that black men have courage, and strength, and right, as white. They will repay one day on all your heads. There is justice upon the earth though it seems to sleep; and the black men shall, first or last, shed your blood, and toss your bodies into the sea" (Williams 357). The parallel depictions of the white Creole Fairfax and the black Creole Hamel, both shape-shifting individuals who can cross racial boundaries, and the use of

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<sup>150</sup> For Watson's complete argument see "Caribbean Romance" 66-103.

the imperial romance as the preferred genre for this novel to talk about both black and white Creole culture, highlight the contradictions inherent in Williams' text, and the fluidity of Creole society, in spite of the social divisions the novel tries to maintain, a fluidity that is not found in any other text, except *Warner Arundell*.

Alongside the genre of the imperial romance, West Indian novels by white Creole writers use the gothic to give voice to fears associated with slave revolts. The connection between revolution and the gothic has been briefly explored in chapter 1, in my analysis of *Secret History* and *Arthur Mervyn*. These early American novels use gothic motifs and imagery to reflect on the terrors associated with the Haitian Revolution—which “becomes the obsessively retold master tale of the Caribbean’s colonial terror”—and to express the fear of contagion linked to the movement of refugees from Saint Domingue to the United States (Paravisini-Gebert 4). The European eighteenth-century genre of the gothic, which is “the art of exciting surprise and horror,” often describes foreign and exotic settings, ancient castles, and noble genealogies (Scott 87). This genre was adapted to the New World context in eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction by American and West Indian authors. In West Indian literature, a wild and dangerous, but exotically luxurious and enticing Nature provides the setting for gothic novels, such as the opening of *Hamel* with the description of the unbridled force of a hurricane that threatens the life of the missionary Roland, who must surrender to

the violence with which the increasing vapors were hurried across [the canopy of heaven], and the flashes of fire which seemed to flit along the summits of the Blue Mountains ... accompanied with a sort of stifled thunder, not bursting, as it is wont to do, during a tornado, with a crush that threatens to render heaven and earth, but rumbling and confused as if its echoes were overpowered by the wind, which became every moment more powerful and contentious. (Williams 61)

The description of the storm in *Hamel* assumes gothic significance, anticipating his meeting with the Obeah man in a cave containing objects of fetish and sorcery, and echoes the violence of the storm, “beautiful yet terrific,” in which Frankenstein meets his monster, when he visits the spot where little William had been murdered in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: “the darkness and storm increased every minute, and the thunder burst with terrific crash over my head...vivid flashes of lightening dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire ” (Shelley 50, 49). The emphasis on the power of Nature and on desolated landscapes, which is a shared feature of eighteenth-century Romanticism and European Gothic, is reworked into West Indian novels, as in the scene of the hurricane that precedes Roland’s meeting with Hamel, whom he describes as “the very figure of the demon of his dream” (Williams 70), echoing Shelley’s description of Dr. Frankenstein’s sighting of the monster as “the filthy dæmon to whom I had given life” (Shelley 50).

Novels such as *Hamel*, *Warner Arundell*, and *Tom Cringle’s Log*, as well as the many travelogues written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by West Indian and British authors, share a sustained attention to Nature, which is exoticized, romanticized, and described alternatively as indomitable and deadly—a substitute to the castle of European gothic—and luxurious and enchanting, like a tropical paradise.<sup>151</sup> The genre of colonial gothic is used to talk about racial fears, miscegenation, and the rape of white women by dark-skinned men; it is linked to cannibalism, disease and contagion, and to the horrors connected to slave revolts, resulting in white planters’ sense of loss and insecurity, nearing the end of plantation slavery. In particular, Paravisini-Gebert argues

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<sup>151</sup> Many British authors of gothic novels, such as William Beckford and Matthew Gregory Lewis, owned plantations in the West Indies.

that African-based religions, such as Obeah in the British colonies, Santería in Cuba, and Vodou in French-Caribbean colonies such as Saint Domingue, are associated to revolutionary unrest and “appropriated into the gothic, where they are used to reconfigure the standard tropes of the genre, either by the colonizer to be used in the ideological struggle against the colonial subject him/herself, or by the colonial in order to address the horrors of his/her own condition” (3). Obeah, in fact, was deemed dangerous by white planters as it helped preserve the cultural heritage of African-slaves, and for this reason was made illegal in most British colonies. White planters feared that magical-ritualistic practices would be employed by Obeah men, like Hamel, who assumed the role of revolutionary leaders to incite violence and revenge among slaves, as in the rendition of the Tacky’s Rebellion in Jamaica (1760) by Edward Long.<sup>152</sup> Gothic remains a fluid genre that has been used to express a variety of fears both in the colonies and in the motherland, where it voices the anxieties brought about by colonization and the influx of dark-skinned people migrating to England, as in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Colonial gothic is used both in support of slavery and abolition. West Indian planters, like Williams, in fact, use the gothic as a cathartic technique to respond to the fear of slave revolts, racial violence, and miscegenation, while English abolitionists borrow the genre of colonial gothic “to dramatize the horrors and tortures of enslavement,” as in the *History of Mary Prince* which focuses on scenes of whipping and violence perpetrated by white slave-owners against Mary and her fellow slaves (Paravisini-Gebert 2).

As I discussed in chapter 2, after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, white Creole planters ideologically distanced themselves from England over the question of

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<sup>152</sup> Long in his *History of Jamaica* describes the involvement of Obeah men in the rebellion of 1760 in Jamaica (vol. 2, 451-52).

slavery and mercantile free trade, while slaves began to see themselves as British subjects, and believed that Britain had made them free in 1807, but their masters kept them in bonds against English rule. Humanitarian propaganda against slavery intensified in 1822, after British abolitionists understood that the end of the slave trade did not mean the end of slavery. Novels such *Hamel* and *Marly* are born out this period of agitation, in which slave revolts intensified plantation owners' fears, which, as discussed above, are often rendered in gothic overtones. The Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery through the British Dominions (later called the Anti-Slavery Society) was funded in 1823, and it rapidly expanded throughout Britain, under the leadership of William Wilberforce. The request for speedy emancipation legislation made in Parliament in 1823 by Thomas Fowler Buxton, with the motion that slavery "is repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution and of the Christian Religion," did not meet sufficient support from the West Indian lobby (*Substance of the Debate* 21). George Canning proposed an amendment to Buxton's resolution requesting "effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the conditions of the slave population" in order to achieve "a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population, such as may prepare them for participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty's subjects" (*Substance of the Debate* 90). Canning's amendment was met by unanimous approval, and the idea of amelioration as a long-term strategy to prepare slaves to self-discipline and wage labor was taken on by West Indian planters, as the only possible response to abolitionists' and missionaries' push for immediate emancipation in the British colonies. The planters realized that the end of slavery was inevitable, but they worked to postpone it as long as possible.

*Hamel*, as well as *Marly* and *Warner Arundell* (written after emancipation), partake in this belief for the need of a gradual and prolonged process—leading to the eventual emancipation of West Indian slaves—which would consist in a slow change in the condition of Blacks in the British colonies, following the natural progression of history. *Creoleana*, also written after emancipation, seems to affirm that the condition of black Creoles had improved from the times in which the story is set, as the narrator affirms “we now live not only in a Christian country—but are a free people—and who does not rejoice at this happy change?” (Orderson 44). However, the elegiac tone of the narrative—similar to *Hamel*’s—demonstrates Orderson’s nostalgia for the “Days of Yore,” and the novel seems to suggest that slavery was not as bad as abolitionists made it out to be, as the anecdote of the young African named Prince suggests (Orderson 91-2). In this anecdote, Prince’s owner sends the boy on a voyage to the Gold Coast to visit his Royal African parents and offers him manumission, should he decide to stay in Africa. However, Prince chooses to remain a slave as “he liked the white people’s ways, and their victuals and dress, and all that something in backara country, which he no have in he own” (Orderson 92). This anecdote supports a pro-slavery, conservative attitude and a belief that conditions under slavery were preferable to freedom in an uncivilized society. *Hamel*, *Creoleana* and *Warner Arundell* advocate amelioration as preferable to emancipation, and portray slavery as a paternal relationship between the slave owner and his slaves, in which the white man (father) takes care of his slaves (children). However, while *Hamel* and *Creoleana* are nostalgic of a past which they see as being forever lost (*Creoleana*), or in the process of being lost (*Hamel*), *Warner Arundell*—although it also supports the interests of slave owners—presents a more positive attitude towards a future

in which white Creoles and free coloreds can forge new relationships based on shared economic interests.



### *Hamel, the Obeah Man*

*Hamel, the Obeah Man*, was published in 1827 anonymously, but it has been attributed to Cynric R. Williams, who also wrote a travelogue titled *Tour through the Island of Jamaica, from the Western to the Eastern End, in the Year 1823*, published the year before *Hamel* and presenting an apologetic view of Jamaican planters, depicted as targets of abolitionist campaigners, misrepresented to English public opinion (a position Williams reaffirms in the novel). *Hamel* received positive reviews from contemporary publications, such as *Westminster Review*, *London Magazine*, *The Atlas*, and *The Scotsman*; however, the novel never went into a second printing.<sup>153</sup> Contemporary reviews also serve to confirm the authorship of *Hamel* as they directly associate the anonymous novel with Williams' travelogue. The *Westminster Review* states that the author "last year published an amusing Tour in the Island of Jamaica" (*Westminster Review*, April 1827), and the *London Magazine* discusses the anti-missionary polemic in the two works and concludes: "That this was his [the author's] creed we saw in his *Tour of Jamaica*; but then he was not so angry but that we could laugh with him"<sup>154</sup> (*London Magazine*, June 1827).

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<sup>153</sup> For excerpts of contemporary reviews on *Hamel* see *Appendix A*, on p. 429-440 of the Broadview edition of the novel edited by Candace Ward and Tim Watson (2010).

<sup>154</sup> Tim Watson, in his chapter "Caribbean Romance and Subaltern History," discusses the literary identity of Cynric R. Williams as coinciding with that of a white planter and long-term resident of Jamaica, named Charles White Williams. Watson writes that Cynric R. Williams was likely Charles White Williams, who

*Hamel, the Obeah Man* has recently been republished in two editions, one by Macmillan Caribbean (2008), and one by Broadview (2010), edited by Tim Watson and Candace Ward, which I will use in my reading of this novel. Recent critical attention has focused on this novel for its depiction of its black protagonist, the Obeah man Hamel, who is given a voice and a consciousness, which is uncommon for black characters in nineteenth-century works by white Creoles. In my reading of *Hamel*, I expand on recent scholarship by directing my analysis, not only towards the eponymous protagonist, who has been the focus of recent articles on this text, but also by discussing the significance of shape-shifting in the novel, the fluidity of the white Creole character Fairfax/Sebastian, and its significance in a reading of nineteenth-century Creole society.

#### RACE, GENDER STEREOTYPES, AND MISCGENATION IN *HAMEL, THE OBEAH MAN*

*Hamel, the Obeah Man* has been read as one of the few works by a white Creole to give depth to a black man, who, according to Braithwaite, delivers “the first Black Power speech in our literature” (Braithwaite, “Creative Literature” 71). However, this novel remains very race conscious, achieving some depth in the portrayal of Hamel, while simultaneously stereotyping the mob of slaves following King Combah as a mass of drunken cowards who are unable to think for themselves, and are only driven by lust and revenge rather than by a coherent political agenda. The farcical tones, with which Combah and his men are painted, in particular during the scene of the coronation, serve

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wrote the *Tour* not as an impartial English outsider (the persona his fictitious narrator assumes), but as a spokesperson for the planter class in defense of the white Creole way of life and of slavery, and as a response to abolitionists’ and missionaries’ interference with colonial affairs. Charles White Williams was the owner of the Duckworth Estate in the parish of St. Thomas-in-the-East, and of almost 300 slaves, who lived in Jamaica for most of his adult life, but moved back to Britain in the mid 1820s (Watson 67). In “Caribbean Romance and Subaltern History,” Watson explains the reasons for his identification of Cynric R. Williams with Charles White Williams (Watson 70-73).



to strengthen the anti-abolitionist argument that slaves were not ready to govern themselves, an argument Hamel takes on, when speaking for white planters:

...what will be our freedom? What are we to do—the ignorant, nasty, drunken Negroes, who were born slaves in Congo, and Cromantin, and Houssa, and Mundingu. Some will make the others work: there will be slaves forever, unless the white men stay with soldiers and cannons to keep the strong ones from beating the weak ones, and making the women do all the work... Ah! You great men in England must be very silly or very wicked, or all must be wrong here: for they will make Jamaica ten times worse than my own country was ever made by war, and fighting, and robbery and murder. (161-2)

While, on the one hand, Williams romanticizes the figure of the Obeah man—who remains a mysterious, unique character, superior and unlike other black men, including the “King”—on the other hand, he represents a slave society in which skin-color dictates social position (Hamel is the only black character who can cross racial and class barriers). Williams plays with racial stereotypes in the depiction of the sexual attraction between the quadroon Michal and the mulatto Sebastian (who is no other than Fairfax in disguise), by simultaneously reversing, and at the same time upholding, these stereotypes. Michal, like Hamel, is not a realistic character; she is romanticized with the purpose of glossing over the reality of sexual abuse and concubinage which characterized Creole society (a reality more accurately portrayed in *Creoleana*, as I will show later), in order to reject the accusation, put forward by both missionaries and abolitionists, that slavery was “repugnant to the principles of...the Christian religion” (Substance of the Debate 21). Michal is a light-skinned house slave who, because of the fairness of her complexion, is depicted as having the same sensibilities as her mistress, Joanna Guthrie:

[Michal’s] feelings were as delicate and as refined as those of her mistress, as to the endurance of any personal insult [read: rape by the black rebel, Combah]; although the recollection of that impression [read: sexual

attraction] which she had received from her acquaintance with Mr. Fairfax as a mulatto, came over her mind now and then with rather a melancholy foreboding that this calamity [her kidnapping by Combah] was a sort of judgment on her. Yet she could escape...but to leave her mistress was impossible. (371)

In this description of Michal's sensibilities and renunciation of Sebastian's love—once she realizes he is a white man and her mistress' fiancée—Williams intentionally reverses the stereotype of the sexual promiscuity of brown girls, depicting Michal against contemporary notions of mixed-race women's hyper-sexuality. However, his intentions for portraying Michal as chaste and loyal are primarily to counter the accusation of the licentiousness of white planters, and to serve the needs of white plantocracy's image-rebuilding, through the positive depiction of the loyal quadroon to her white mistress, Joanna; loyalty being the primary reason for Michal's forbearance of love, alongside her acknowledgment of Joanna's racial superiority. However, her forbearance comes only after Fairfax's moral refusal to take advantage of her:

The mulatto [Fairfax] saw but too clearly that the pretty damsel had taken a fancy to his dingy face; and had he been at all the character which he had just represented he would no doubt have taken advantage of the disposition she had betrayed towards him. Sebastian was but a young man—the Quadroon was young and beautiful; and it requires perhaps considerable fortitude to steer clear of such temptations as these, which Fortune, or the Enemy of Mankind, lays in the way of men of honour, to lead them into mischief. He could not but reflect on the danger of the charming girl...*yet he could not approve of her derogating from the pride of her sex in descending, although in his own favor, to one beneath her in the scale of colour...* 'I must not love you,' thought he; 'I must not adore you; but I must and will like you...I will not wrong you, nor deceive you, nor take any advantage of you'. [emphasis mine] (Williams 174-76)

In the above passage it is clear that the author plays with racial stereotypes and the expectation that a brown girl should abide by "the scale of color," and "look upwards as the rest of [her] sex do," to white or lighter-skinned men (Williams 175). In fact, in

Fairfax's opinion, Michal's biggest fault is, paradoxically, not that she is attracted to her mistress' lover (a white man), but that she likes a man whose complexion is darker than hers (Sebastian). However, as the reader already knows, Sebastian is white, and the stereotype that brown girls "look upwards" in the scale of color is, in fact, confirmed. Although Sebastian's skin is magically darkened with one of the Obeah man's potions, he exudes 'whiteness' from every pore, especially in his manners and speech, which make him appear incongruous in the eyes of those who, like Mr. Guthrie, observe his ways, and which explains Michal's attraction to his inner whiteness. The adjective "white," thus, acquires connotations that go beyond the color of one's skin; and becomes synonymous with language, education, and manners, as Guthrie—who treats Sebastian like a white man—suggests: "Why, you are none so white yourself, though you speak as if you had lived only with white people. You are a very mysterious personage, Mr. Sebastian, and I have set my wits at defiance" (Williams 113). Mr. Guthrie's reaction to Sebastian's behavior (which contrasts with his looks) suggests that the author—albeit unwittingly—seems to imply that racial differences are a social construct and that, in reality, differences are the product of a combination of factors not related to skin color such as education, rearing, and manners, and that racial identity is nothing other than a performance.

When Sebastian/Fairfax asks Michal, during their tête-à-tête in the cave, if she is a slave, she responds in the affirmative and adds, echoing Hamel's words, "for my freedom—my master has provided for that in his will; and my mistress, my young mistress, would make me free tomorrow if I were to ask her. [But] I have no want of freedom: what should I do with myself? A time may come when such a change may

make me happier; but now it would be useless to me” (Williams 175). This rejection of freedom as something not naturally wished for by all slaves is a rebuttal to England’s denunciation of slavery’s horrors, and simultaneously serves to depict a picture in which masters and their slaves live in a symbiotic relation of care, rejecting the reality of slavery’s unequal power dynamics, in which the masters have absolute power over their slaves, and substituting it with a romance of slavery as another type of patriarchal father/sons relationship (a colonial extended family). The depiction of the triangular relationship between Joanna, Michal, and Sebastian/Fairfax serves to depict a Creole society modeled on honor and loyalty, instead of violence and duress; a “new-world feudal idyll,” as Nordius describes it, “a model system of labor organization where planters care for the material welfare of their dependents, to the mutual benefit of both,” and where a slave, like Michal, would risk her life and her virtue to remain at the side of her mistress who has been kidnapped by a black rebel, even though she knows that not enjoying the respect that whiteness grants her mistress, she will likely be raped by Combah’s men (Nordius 687). In this idyllic feudal world created by Williams, in which relationships between masters and their slaves are painted using the language of romance, Sebastian/Fairfax takes on the disguise of a Maroon to rescue the two captive women from abduction by slave rebels, and the rebel/Obeah man, Hamel, renounces his revenge against white men in general, to exercise his loyalty to one white man, his master and friend, Fairfax.

However, the longstanding mutual loyalties between slaves and their masters, which Williams illustrates in his depiction of the relationship between Michal, Joanna and Fairfax, have been destroyed—or are at risk of being destroyed—in the Jamaica of

the 1820s, by abolitionists' and missionaries' propaganda, which has "render[ed] the ties of gratitude and affection that have for ages united the hearts of the blacks and the whites" as Williams laments in his *Tour of Jamaica* (Williams, *Tour* 90). Williams' novel depicts a world that, he fears, is about to end, in which honor and loyalty are still the driving forces among white Creoles like Guthrie and Fairfax, alongside strict adherence to social rules dictated by the racial scale. According to these rules, Michal "is blocked by racial difference from lovers either too dark or too white for her, [but] accepts the loss of the (white) man she loves, satisfied to 'see him happy, contented, with his *white* and beautiful wife,'" thus upholding the societal dictates that solidify the notion of white Creoles' natural superiority (Lalla, "Dungeons" 10).

#### OUTSIDER FIGURES, REBELS AND LOYAL SLAVES: GOTHIC AND FARCE IN *HAMEL, THE OBEAH MAN*

This system of colonial feudalism based on honor, hospitality, and an ethic of care from which both masters and slaves benefit, as everyone knows his/her proper place in society, is threatened by outsider figures who disrupt this social order by infiltrating the "home space" of Jamaica, from the foreign space that England represents, characters such as Fillbeer, the lawyer who exploits Fairfax's plantation, and the missionary Roland. Both these characters are dishonestly trying to divest property from those to whom it rightfully belongs. In fact, in this novel, the only two characters depicted as abusing power, mistreating slaves, and molesting black (and white) women are also the only two foreign—read English—strangers, turning the accusation of cruelty and debauchery back onto the motherland and its emissaries of greed and hypocrisy. *Hamel, the Obeah Man* shares its distrust for English lawyers with other West Indian novels, such as *Warner Arundell*. In both works, West Indian protagonists, who are the rightful heirs of

plantations and owners of slaves, must fight unscrupulous lawyers and administrators, such as Fillbeer, to re-gain access to their seized ancestral properties and their proper place in society. Fillbeer, who has been appointed to run Fairfax's plantation, is cruel to the slaves and is driven only by greed, as are the executors and lawyers who have taken over Arundell's plantations in Antigua. When the slaves hear that their master's son— young Fairfax—is back from his exile in Europe, they revolt against the lawyer Fillbeer, expressing their desire to see their rightful owner rather than being free. This is how a slave addresses Fillbeer:

I tell you what you must expect. We know what is right, as well as white men; we know who we belong to, who gives us clothes and grounds, and houses...I say *cha*, master attorney, when you say you want to be free: what's the use of *free* to me? Who will give me a house and grounds, and take care of my children? I want nothing but to see my own poor master again, and for him to enjoy his own. I don't like you, master Fillbeer; that is the truth; I like my own master better; I love him, poor thing; all the slaves love him, and pray *Garamighty*, to send him home safe. And now, master attorney, you can flog me when you please. (Williams 247-48)

In the reaction of the slaves to the news of the return of Fairfax, shown in the above passage, Williams voices a white Creole consciousness opposed to England's meddling with Creole affairs, which is expressed through the medium of the slaves' own words; words that unequivocally reject those who speak of making them free and instead subscribe to a model of colonial paternalism, which Williams simultaneously celebrates and mourns, words that echo Michal's and Hamel's rejection of freedom.

On the other hand, Roland—the missionary preacher who teaches equality to the slaves in order to gain personal power and control—is depicted as a gothic villain and a sexual predator. In contrast to Fairfax's sexual restraint and forbearance, notwithstanding his professed attraction to Michal, Roland has no restraint. Besides inciting the slaves to

rebel, this corrupted preacher has raped Joanna's mother by taking advantage of her while she is unconscious, has murdered the child he had with a mulatto woman, and shows no scruples in his plan to marry Joanna against her will. In his portrayal of Roland's vices, Williams attributes to the preacher the very sexual degeneracy of which white slave-owners were accused by English missionaries, reversing once more the stereotype of Creole immorality and English purity. Nordius argues that Roland is not a realistic character, and "the novelist's excessive portrayal of Roland's vices should rather be seen as a generic marker [of the gothic] than proof of his failure to produce a realist, true-to-life story" (685). Roland's crimes and sexual deviancy are juxtaposed to the honor of men like Fairfax and Guthrie to illustrate the danger that missionaries pose to white Creole society, and "within the generic parameters of the Gothic they rather function as an index to the phobia about Protestant 'radicals' harbored by many planters in Williams' pre-emancipation Jamaica," than as a true picture of the corruption of Wesleyan missionaries (Nordius 685).

While I have argued that the characterization of Hamel and Michal is not realistic, the other black characters in the story are also used to illustrate either the point of view of Jamaican planters or the dangers of abolitionist propaganda. The mass of rebels and slaves who participates in "the absurdest of all absurd processions," the coronation of King Combah, is depicted as a mob of ignorant, malleable, drunkards (Williams 149). Combah's coronation, in which the King tries to imitate a real coronation in the courts of Europe, is portrayed by Williams more like a farcical theatrical performance than like a serious event, ridiculing the absurdity of the event and the ignorance of the participants:

the holy oil was produced by Hamel... It was contained in a small glass phial, and was handed round among those who might perhaps be denominated the King's courtiers, and who in turn peeped into it like so many parrots into a marrow-bone, and then applied it to their flat noses for further information as to its sacred or divine qualities. However it came back without having caused any audible remark, to the hand which had first produced it, every Quashie being sensible that silence would at least save him on exposing himself on a point of which he was as profoundly ignorant as the high priest who was about to perform the ceremony. (Williams 148-49)

In spite of the absurd ceremony, the crown modeled “in the fashion of that of Lombardy” and the sacred oil with which he is to be anointed, Combah needs both Roland's and the Obeah man's interjection to be taken seriously and to command his men's respect (Williams 148). Many of Combah's “subjects” are just there for the rum; however, when Sebastian yells “Maroons!” from the hilltop, the crowd of drunken and sleepy subjects cowardly flees abandoning their new King: “the drunken became sober, the sleepers awakened, the brave became cowards, and nine out of ten run away as fast as their legs could carry them” (Williams 156). The “Brutchie” himself is represented as vain and self-centered; he is motivated not by a political agenda but mostly by a desire of self-aggrandizement, revenge, “natural ambition, and the prospect of sexual gratification” with the daughter of a white planter, something that plays on white Creoles' fears of black men raping their women (Williams 147).<sup>155</sup> Williams humanizes the Brutchie, Combah, only when he experiences remorse for his deeds and an awareness of his inferiority to the white—and culturally superior—Joanna, for whose suffering he feels “real sympathy” (Williams 369).

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<sup>155</sup> The term “Brutchie” (or “brechie”) used to refer to Combah by his men, derives from an Igbo word meaning “gentleman, or the eldest son of one”; it also refers to black men who had “the greater portion of the skin on the brow and forehead removed” as a marking of nobility that distinguishes a King or Prince (qtd. in note #3, p. 116 of Broadview edition of *Hamel*).



After kidnapping Miss Guthrie, in fact, Combah feels “woefully ashamed of himself”; he realizes that “among the Negroes he fancied he felt a superiority; but in the train of even a beautiful and elegant white maiden, an accomplished European, and a Christian (for there was something in the conviction of that idea which confused him) he sank even in his own estimation into nothing, or worse than nothing . . . he despised himself for what he had done” (Williams 369). Williams’ technique to use black characters to convey the point of view of white planters is illustrated, once again, in Combah’s admission of the superiority of Whites, even over an African King. Combah is humanized and endowed with feelings of sympathy only when he acknowledges that “his heart revolts” at the thought of what he has done to the helpless, innocent, and white Joanna (369). The moment in which Combah is humanized, he is no longer a realistic character; the real political motives that caused blacks to revolt—in St. Domingue in 1791, and Demerara in 1823—against their masters are effaced in this fantasy of sexual lust and remorse of an African “King” who, for a brief moment, deludes himself that he can be King of Jamaica and that he can make the white Joanna his Queen.<sup>156</sup> However, while, on the one hand, Williams minimizes and ridicules the importance of Combah’s revolt—effacing its political significance, reducing it to the influence of false propaganda by missionaries responsible for slaves’ malcontent, and glossing over the real reasons behind uprisings—on the other hand, Williams acknowledges planters’ fears that the end of their world is coming. These fears are only too real, and Guthrie expresses them in a reflection that highlights the sense of doom, which underscores Williams’ novel:

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<sup>156</sup> Tim Watson argues that Combah’s uprising is modeled on the Demerara Rebellion of 1823 (See *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World* 74-90).

his mind [was]now reverting to past days; now looking to the future; sometimes recalling the comfort and independence in which both families [the Guthries and Fairfaxes] had been wont to live, then contemplating the broken society in which, with impaired fortunes and blighted hopes, they were now struggling; and then imagining the horrors which he thought, must inevitably, soon or late, dissolve for ever the influence and authority of white men among a set (as he expected them to become) of fanatical and infuriated Blacks. (Williams 252)

Brathwaite argues that *Hamel* is an “anti-missionary tract,” which shows that “of the two forms of Obeah present in the slave society of the West Indies, the Missionary-Christian variety was the more pernicious; the greater threat to the establishment” (Brathwaite, “Creative Literature” 67). In the anti-missionary speech Hamel delivers to the white planters after the rebels have been defeated, he accuses them of being “afraid of the white Obeah men”—the missionaries who preach freedom amongst the slaves—and says that if he were a master he would “hang or shoot” those (the priests) who “tamper with the passions of [his] slaves” (Williams 421). Hamel’s speech—which takes up again the point of view of white plantocracy, and possibly of the author, Williams—foreshadows more revolts if missionaries like Roland are allowed to deceive the slaves, echoing Guthrie’s awareness that Combah’s revolt will not be the last. These words, spoken through the filter of the black Obeah man, can be read as Williams’ critique not only of missionaries’ involvement in West Indian affairs, but also as a critique of other white Jamaican Creoles.

#### SEBASTIAN/FAIRFAX, HAMEL AND THE DUPPY: SHAPE-SHIFTING FIGURES IN WILLIAMS’ JAMAICAN CREOLE SOCIETY

Williams’ novel, as scholars have argued, juxtaposes the white Obeah man, Roland, to the black Obeah man, Hamel, in order to argue the danger that missionary propaganda poses to white Creole society and plantation economy. Williams does this by

choosing the gothic genre to describe the missionary's growing guilt, and by turning the preacher into a monumental gothic villain, so corrupted that, according to Nordius, "whatever horrors the activities of Hamel might have suggested...when Williams translates the current fear of conspiratorial radicalism to the colonial context of the 1820s, it is above all the 'white Obeah' practiced by the enthusiastic Roland that is demonized, and this to an extent that makes the machinations of his black colleague appear as mere child's play in comparison" (683). It is the very necessity to demonize Roland and to prove that there existed honor and loyalty between masters and slaves prior to the arrival of missionaries that compels Williams to create black characters who are more than just artifacts. He accomplishes this through the romanticization of Hamel, Michal, and to an extent Combah, and through an attempt to explain their motives and their thoughts, even at the risk of engendering contradictions as, in fact, happens for the title character, Hamel, who, while generally conveying the point of view of the planters, occasionally seems to condemn slavery and its injustice, and to seek revenge: "On such a revolution [Hamel's] own soul was bent, his arts, his influence, his every energy, were devoted to the extermination of the Whites" (Williams 133). These occasional affirmations of what Ward and Watson define as "black consciousness" (Ward & Watson 9) have been the focus of critical readings of this text, and are examples of contradictions and incongruities in Williams' otherwise anti-abolitionist ideology (often expressed through his black characters), as when Hamel denounces the injustice of slavery: "You have happiness and plenty there [in England], and no man works but when he likes; why do not the white men stay in their own country and leave the Negroes to themselves here?" (Williams 75). However, if Williams risks being accused of having created literary

characters endowed with a rebellious black consciousness, it is because in his attempt to condemn outsiders and missionaries, Williams demonstrates his knowledge of Blacks' grievances, and depicts a fluid Creole society in which black culture and white culture are not separate and distinct opposites, but infiltrate each other. African-Creole culture, for example, influences the depiction of the white Creole Fairfax, who is a shape-shifting figure able to cross racial barriers, and metaphorically represents the fluidity of pre-Emancipation Jamaican Creole culture.

Kamau Brathwaite, in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, argues that by the 1820s Jamaica had undergone a process of creolization, or “a cultural process that took place within a creole society—that is within a tropical colonial plantation polity based on slavery”—during which Jamaica became “a viable, creative, entity” with its own creolized cultural practices (306-7). Brathwaite’s analysis of a Creole culture forming in the nineteenth century, presents a picture of Jamaica as much more than just a site of business, as is suggested in B.W. Higman’s account of colonial economy in *Plantation Jamaica*. Higman describes Jamaica as a capitalistic “colonial economy,” constituted by an agglomerate of self-standing plantations, often owned by absentee planters and run by administrators, whose management was based on exploitation of a voiceless work-force “reduced to the tools of capital and themselves literally human capital” (Preface xiii). On the contrary, in Brathwaite’s portrayal of Creole culture, Jamaica is described as an island with “its history, an Establishment of governmental and social institutions” and, most importantly, with “a way of seeing the society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole” (Brathwaite, *Development* 307). Although slavery was

often a harsh reality, it also brought into confrontation two cultures—the English and African cultures—that shared the necessity to adjust to a new environment. Brathwaite contends that “the friction created by this confrontation was cruel, but it was also creative,” and it is as a product of this friction that a new Creole society is shaped (307). However, Brathwaite also maintains that this Creole culture, which formed in the contact zone of the Jamaican plantation polity, was not developed to its full potential because, on the one hand, white planters refused to completely embrace creolization, preferring to imitate metropolitan cultural models, (as I have partly shown in my reading of genre in *Creoleana*), on the other end, black élite and free coloreds “failed or refused to make conscious use of their own rich culture (their one indisputable possession) and so failed to command the chance of becoming self-conscious and cohesive as a group” (308).

According to Brathwaite, while white Creoles imitated European cultural models, black élite and free coloreds imitated white Creoles—engaging in “an imitation of an imitation”—and rejected their own culture, becoming, likewise, “mimic-men” (308). Moreover, the American Revolution—and the difficult times that led to it—affected Jamaican economic diversification and society negatively, as the War of Independence (and the months building up to it) increased Jamaica’s separation from its American neighbors, due to the economic and trade sanctions imposed by England on its American colonies, which prohibited other British colonies to trade with them, and consequently increased Jamaica’s isolation and dependence on British mercantilism and British imports.<sup>157</sup> These sanctions continued to be enforced after Independence, and led to

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<sup>157</sup> On the consequences of the American Revolution on British West Indian colonies see O’Shaughnessy’s *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean*, which discusses the cultural, and economic differences between Britain’s North American and Caribbean colonies, which dictated the West

piracy as shown in Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*. Simultaneously, the barriers imposed by slavery within Jamaica created a cultural dichotomy dividing Creole society into white, brown, and black people, although these barriers, as *Hamel* shows, remained somewhat fluid. In fact, at least in Williams' novel, white Creoles' relations with black and brown Creoles appear to be more positively portrayed than relations between white Creoles and English "foreigners," in spite of the fear of Blacks (and miscegenation) associated to Combah's insurrection. As Ward and Watson argue, in Williams' depiction of Jamaica's Creole society, although the white planter's point of view is privileged, "the colonial setting is so strongly and persuasively drawn that it ceases to be other and instead becomes the place where people in the true sense of the word, make and remake worlds for themselves" (Ward & Watson 14). This colonial setting includes white, brown and black people living in close proximity, in a society where cultural reproduction happened every day, and where hospitality was extended to "all persons in the island, in the case of need at least," including black *persons*, and where the mulatto Sebastian is conferred the honor of "breakfasting in the piazza of the white man," in spite of his skin color [emphasis mine] (Williams 89, 101). Again, stereotypes are, simultaneously, broken and maintained (as Sebastian *is* a white man).

Both *Hamel* and *Fairfax* cross racial barriers in different ways. *Fairfax* physically disguises his appearance to return to the island undetected and to take back his property from the English usurper, *Fillbeer*. He turns himself into a mulatto first, by using *Hamel's*

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Indies' decision not to become involved in the American War of Independence, and not to oppose imperial legislation between 1763 and 1774, which effectively isolated the North American lobby in Parliament. O'Shaughnessy analyzes both the West Indies' dependence on the British military for protection, the closest cultural ties with Britain, and the development of the sugar industry in the Caribbean colonies, as causes of West Indian non-involvement, alongside the economic consequences of the Revolutionary Wars for British West Indian colonies.

Obeah magic to darken his skin, and later takes on the persona of a Maroon to help Joanna escape. Fairfax's ability to comfortably fit the role of a mulatto, without being detected, is not only due to the complexion of Sebastian's face, but it demonstrates Fairfax's knowledge of African culture, including the practice of Obeah, as well as his capacity to negotiate both white and black Creole cultures. Fairfax's ability to cross racial boundaries, his understanding of Michal's social position and dangers as a fair-skinned brown girl (in other words, the rules of the scale of color), and even his flirtatious conversations with the quadroon, support Brathwaite's claim that, in the Jamaica of the 1820s, a process of creolization was under way, in which blacks and whites interacted in modes that went beyond the master-slave relationship, sharing an hybrid Jamaican-Creole culture born out of the inevitable mixing of different cultural roots. In spite of the unavoidable racial divide of a slave society in which slavery is based on racial differences, the process of creolization was still going on, whether white Creoles learned from this process of acculturation—like Fairfax, or Warner Arundell—or they feared it, like Edward Long. Fairfax is able to manipulate race at his advantage and to assume the persona of a mulatto to gain the social invisibility he needs to freely move in Jamaican society since, as a mulatto, he can infiltrate both black and white cultural spaces.

Although Hamel and the duppy, as black men, cannot pass for white, they are also shape-shifting individuals who can manipulate the fears and stereotypes associated with race.

As Paravisini-Gebert argues in "Colonial and Postcolonial Gothic," the practice of Obeah was outlawed in most Caribbean colonies, as it was associated with slave revolts and was generally considered to be dangerous, since it kept alive African religions and cultural practices, encouraging slaves to form new Afro-Creole communities (4). Whites

feared that these Afro-Creole communities could strengthen slaves' resistance against their masters. However, in *Hamel*, Williams reverses the stereotypes and fears associated to the practice of Obeah among slaves, and puts Obeah at the service of a white man, Fairfax, and of an entire community of white planters by choosing an Obeah man, Hamel, not only as the deliverer of anti-abolitionist speeches but also as the savior of the white planter class from the threat, and actual danger, of a slave revolt incited by an English preacher, Roland. Candace Ward, in "“What Time has Proved’: History, Rebellion, and Revolution in *Hamel, the Obeah Man*” emphasizes Hamel's qualities as a shape-shifter, “a fluid character, one who plays whatever part is necessary to forward his revolutionary aims. For Roland he is a demon; for Combah...he is a policy advisor; for Oliver Fairfax...he is a trusted and loyal slave” (62). She argues that “[all] of these roles... are shaped by Hamel's position as an obeah man,” and, consequently, by the contemporary understanding of the cultural associations between Obeah and revolutionary leadership, which elevates *Hamel* from the mass of the slaves (62).

Hamel, in fact, uses his superior skills as an Obeah practitioner—and as a judge of characters—to influence both Blacks and Whites, who either respect him as a revolutionary leader or, like Roland, fear him as a wizard, whether or not his magic is real or he is just a trickster who manipulates other people's minds; a possibility which Williams leaves open to his readers' judgment. Hamel is described by Nordius as “a protean shape-shifter, sometimes appearing as an expert in the occult, and brimming with diabolic hatred, sometimes assuming the role of practical realist” (681), and by Ward as embodying the qualities of the “trickster figure in African diaspora writing, a character that relies on disguise and the manipulation of racially based stereotypes to survive



and/or achieve subversive ends”(Ward, “Duppy Know” 222).<sup>158</sup> Overall, however, Hamel remains a mysterious character, who is highly intelligent and who embodies many contradictions, which result from the tension between the author’s necessity to produce a believable black character, and, at the same time, his need to put forward an anti-missionary agenda. Moreover, the depiction of Hamel—the novel’s black hero—seems to mirror the depiction of Fairfax—the novel’s white hero—as I will explain after looking briefly at the third protean character in Williams’ novel: *the duppy*.

Hamel, in fact, is also linked to the figure of the duppy who hides near his cave. The mysterious duppy who—it later turns out—is not a ghost but a living man, the fugitive ex-slave Samuel, is also a fluid character, “identified as ‘proteus,’ assuming different identities in different situations. To some he is Hamel’s duppy...to others a water spirit...to still others, he appears as an old blind man” (Ward, “Duppy Know” 222). In Afro-Creole culture duppies, like obeah men, were subversive figures as they defied white control; they could be “called” against white men, “summoned as helpers in the process of revealing mysteries, affording protection or inflicting harm” (Olmos 141). Duppies, in fact, can assume different forms, including human form, animal form (lizard, snakes, etc.), and fantastic forms (supernatural beings), and they are “the conduits of numerous charms—particularly evil spells” (141). Ward explains that “although a duppy, according to African Caribbean belief, is the spirit of someone who has died, whose time has passed, it remains an active (often characterized as malevolent and mischievous) and forceful actor in the present...through the act of haunting, the duppy exposes a dialectical

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<sup>158</sup> “Anansi is a complex and intriguing figure who has woven a fine tapestry of tales across the New World. Born in West Africa, Anansi survived a cultural metamorphosis and became symbolic of the struggles of the black slave. Like Anansi, the slaves worked at overturning the structured hierarchy of their environment and, from their harsh experience, coded strategies of survival” (See Marshall’s “Liminal Anansi: Symbol of Order and Chaos”).

relationship between past and present” (Ward, “Duppy Know” 217). Fairfax is skeptical about this particular blind man/duppy as he tells Michal: “He is no spirit, Michal, but a man like me. I can hear the tramp of his feet as he walks along the shore of the lagoon: who ever told of a duppie whose step was audible?” (184). His conversation with Michal—with whom Fairfax shares cultural referents—indicates not necessarily white skepticism and rejection of African beliefs, but rather a clear understanding of what a “real” duppy should look (and sound) like, showing that the white Creole Fairfax—like the author Williams—is knowledgeable in Afro-Creole cultural practices. Fairfax is not saying that duppies are not real *in general*; he is just saying that this particular duppy is not a real duppy. Many critics have described the duppy, Hamel, and Fairfax by using the same adjectives, such as “protean” and “shape-shifting,” and I think that this choice of adjectives suggests similarities that are more than random. But what do these figures have in common besides being shape-shifting characters?

Fairfax’s decision to conceal his presence under the disguise of a mulatto and a maroon suggests that, as Ward and Watson point out, “Fairfax has greater mobility as a man of color and a black man than as a white man” (Ward and Watson 27). However, the novel does not specify what would have happened, had Fairfax returned to Jamaica as himself after Roland had accused him of many crimes—most of which Roland himself had committed—including setting fire to Guthrie’s estate, being a heretic, a robber, a pirate, and perpetrating “the deed of a villain”(rape) against Joanna’s mother. This last crime is a secret between Roland and Mrs. Guthrie who is not aware of her attacker’s identity, and Roland takes advantage of this by accusing Fairfax of rape. The preacher’s words cause Mrs. Guthrie to reject Fairfax as suitor for Joanna, while in reality the culprit

is Roland himself (Williams 206-7). However, in spite of Roland's rumors, it is obvious that Fairfax's slaves know best, as they are ready to revolt against Fillbeer to reinstate their legitimate owner, Master Fairfax, in his father's property, demonstrating their loyalty to a good master. Hamel also displays the same loyalty to Fairfax (supporting Williams' argument in his *Tour of Jamaica*), when he says:

I was wrong...for it had been better that Combah had died on the scaffold than that my friend—my friend?—yes, yes, he has been my friend—my friend Mr. Fairfax should be injured in life, or property, or happiness, or hope. Combah was a minister of my revenge, but Master Fairfax redeemed me from a tyrant. For his sake I had forgiven—I forgive—the white man, and will do for them all that can be done by Hamel before he dies.  
(Williams 355)

This moment in the narrative constitutes the turning point of the rebellion, as Hamel changes sides for the sake of his master's son. It is, however, essential to point out that, even as he declares undying loyalty to Fairfax, Hamel has doubts, expressed in the question mark after the word friend—"my friend?"—which seems to unsettle this otherwise powerful declaration of loyalty not to his master but, rather, to his *friend* Fairfax, whose father "redeemed [Hamel] from a tyrant"—interestingly the tyrant in question is a black, not a white, slave owner, separating therefore the charge of tyranny from the actions of white planters like Fairfax (Williams 355).

Whether Fairfax is compelled to disguise himself to avoid prosecution is unclear; however, his disguise allows him to become privy to Roland's and Combah's plans regarding Joanna, and to meet with Hamel without raising suspicions. By infiltrating enemy lines, Fairfax gathers information he uses for the benefit of his friend, Mr. Guthrie, showing Creole solidarity and comradeship. He does this by continually crossing

racial borders and warning Mr. Guthrie of the rebels' intentions; by gathering information and relating it to the appropriate person to counteract threats; by swaying the minds of the rebels and the Whites alike with his impressive deeds; and by impersonating a Maroon, as Maroons were capable of intimidating slaves far more than Whites, a fact of which Fairfax is aware, and which he uses to his benefit.<sup>159</sup> Fairfax, in other words, acts not dissimilarly from Hamel to attain his goals. Fairfax and Hamel, in fact, have more in common than just their skills as shape-shifters. They are both operating like guerrilla soldiers who know the enemy's ground; they observe; they manipulate individuals and circumstances; they act heroically and show flexibility in their choices; they are fluid characters who understand how to perform in a society that is not stable but that is undergoing tremendous change. They can both foresee the future based on past events—as Hamel's warning, "look at Hayti," demonstrates—and they do as much as they can to delay it (Williams 351).

Hamel and Fairfax are the products of a creolized society and are, themselves, creolized. Because of this they can cross racial barriers; whether physically by manipulating their appearance like Fairfax does, or psychologically by winning a leading role in both white and black communities like Hamel does (and the foreigner Roland fails to do). The novel's contemporary English readers (who were Williams' audience, although *Hamel* was also sold in Jamaica), follow Fairfax and Hamel (who, half-way through the novel, teams up with the common goal of protecting Joanna and minimizing the havoc caused by Roland), becoming complicit in Williams' white Creole agenda (and consciousness), which is shown to these readers from the inside, and which the author of

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<sup>159</sup> For a discussion of Marronage in Jamaica see Lalla's *Defining Jamaican Fiction*.

this novel presents to them from as many points of view as possible, including the point of view of black characters. Williams' anti-abolitionist agenda is therefore expressed through a text that is multi-vocal, in which a community made of white, brown, and black people joins forces to rid itself of the two English outsiders: Fillbeer and Roland.

The third shape-shifting character in the novel and catalyst to the narrative's resolution is the duppy. Ward argues that the function of the duppy is that of "exposing a dialectical relationship between past and present," through haunting, or coming back; and that is exactly what Roland's duppy does, although he is not a real duppy but an ex-slave named Samuel (Ward, "Duppy Know" 217). Samuel is believed by Roland to be dead or gone forever but through the intercession of Hamel he comes back to haunt the preacher and to cleanse Fairfax's reputation. In fact, the "duppy" Samuel, after meeting Fairfax, collaborates with the white planter by revealing the truth about the fire and the death of the mulatto child, and thus haunts Roland, as he represents the preacher's gothic past, which Roland has taken pains to conceal. It is revealed that, instead of leaving town as directed by Roland, Samuel has remained close to Belmont to be near his enslaved children. Thus, he has lived in hiding, passing for a duppy whenever he is spotted, and changing his shape by imitating a blind man or disappearing in the lake like a water sprite.

Although he has not received a lot of attention from critics, the duppy, who is the sole witness to Roland's sexual attack on Mrs. Guthrie and to the fire, is the link between Roland's (and Fairfax's) past and the present, and for this reason he is a central character in the novel. He is the agent, and catalyst, who restores justice, as he accuses Roland, and reinstates Fairfax's good name by appearing "at the summons of Mr. Fairfax; to prove his

innocence...to save his fame” (Williams 234). Like Fairfax and Hamel, Samuel—as a duppy—also changes shape to influence people’s perception of him in order to remain undetected, to survive, and to manipulate Roland into repenting his crimes. Roland follows the duppy on his horse thinking he is following a demon because of the speed of Samuel’s steed: “The Missionary’s brains began to falter. He fancied that it was a demon that conducted him, and his memory revived a train of long-forgotten lore... His horse came up at the same moment abreast with that of his conductor, who turned upon the missionary, and exhibited the features of him he dreaded,” where “him he dreaded” can be read as both Samuel, and the devil (Williams 339).

Fairfax, Hamel, and the duppy are highly intelligent protean figures who change shape—through physical and psychological alterations—to negotiate a hostile environment and influence people, in order to pursue their ends. However, as the plot unravels they come together around a common goal, in line with the goals of white planters and of Oliver Fairfax; that of punishing the actions of the preacher Roland, who has usurped the rightful place of white Creoles, such as the young Fairfax and his bride-to-be Joanna. Both the duppy and Hamel are agents who facilitate the end of Combah’s revolt, the reinstatement of Fairfax’s fortune, and the marriage that symbolizes the continuation of the planter class, represented by the joined families of Guthrie and Fairfax.

#### WHITE CREOLES: A DIVIDED CONSCIOUSNESS

*Hamel, the Obeah Man* assumes an elegiac tone when it extrapolates, through its characters, on the future of Jamaican Creole society, as Williams recognizes the fact that

historical circumstances are rapidly changing and that more revolts, like Combah's, will follow. At the end of the novel, the Obeah man, in his role of protector of white Creoles, warns the planters of the danger that will inevitably come back, if they don't get rid of preachers like Roland:

Your Missionaries have persuaded the Negroes that they are free; and they believe the King proclamation, telling them they are still slaves, to be forgery! It will not be long, therefore, before they rise again; and they will take the country from you, except the King of England, and the governor here, keep these preaching men in better order...If you let any other people turn their heads, believe me, they [the slaves] will twist off yours.  
(Williams 420)

In the above passage, as in other speeches, Hamel warns white planters of the actual and ongoing threat of slave revolts incited by missionaries.<sup>160</sup> He often brings up the ghost of Haiti as a reminder of what could happen: "look at Hayti...Look still at Hayti" (351). He analyzes recent history to make predictions about the uncertain future of Jamaica, by tapping into contemporary fears brought on by the example of Saint Domingue, as "the slaves' triumph rendered the previously unthinkable a source of terror in the minds of Whites," even though the Haitian Revolution increased Britain's profits, as it improved a declining sugar cane industry by eliminating French competition (Ward, "What Time Has Proved" 64).

However, while depicting a society in danger of extinction, *Hamel* simultaneously celebrates white Creole culture, embodied in the honorable characters of Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Fairfax, even as it acknowledges its approaching doom. This produces

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<sup>160</sup> Clearly the historical referent for this speech is the Demerara Rebellion of 1823, a failed slave uprising in which a missionary, John Smith, was accused of conspiracy and of helping the rebels and was arrested, court martialed and condemned to death, although his sentence was later revoked. Tim Watson in *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World* discusses the use of the Demerara Rebellion as a model for Combah's revolt (74-90).

contradictions, and the reader is left with the suspicion that what is achieved in the end is only a temporary reprieve. There are contradictions, for example, between the sense of loss pervading the novel and the more positive and celebratory ending, with the union through marriage of the two landholding families—the Fairfaxes and the Guthries—that ensures the continuation of white plantocracy’s power. The narrator explains that Fairfax and Joanna “were united by ties of kindred, friendship, community of interests, and affections, of country, and even of locality. They were the last heirs of two honorable families, whose fortunes had within the last twenty years been woefully depreciated by the cruel and fatal policy of the mother country, and were now endangered, in addition to that depreciation, by the interference of the Emancipators” (Williams 206). The “community of interests, and affections, of country, and even of locality,” the heirs share, clearly defines a Creole cultural identity, based on local interests and contrasting with the mother country’s unjust—“cruel and fatal”—interference (206). There are also contradictions between the depiction of close personal relationships based on trust between white Creoles and their slaves (like the relationship between Michal and Joanna), and a plot centered on a slave revolt and on the kidnapping of a white woman by a black man, which raises the specter of miscegenation and of rape of white women by hyper-sexualized black males.

However *Hamel*, above all, celebrates a white Creole consciousness, and a culture based on honor, hospitality, and reciprocal care within a rigid social hierarchy built on race; a colonial feudal ethos upheld by the two main slave-owning families—the Guthries and the Fairfaxes—by the faithful Michal and Hamel, and by Fairfax’s slaves, who cheer their true master’s return. There are many instances within the text where



Creole culture is defined in opposition to English culture, as for example, Guthrie's statement on the immorality of England's customs—an accusation also found in *Warner Arundell* when the hero visits England—which is clearly a response to accusations by Englishmen of the immorality and degeneracy of Creoles. To the statement by Roland that “in this country [Jamaica] all ranks and colours admit of greater licence in matters of gallantry than it would be admitted in England” (Williams 259), Guthrie responds:

The devil they do!...Then all I read of must be false. I have never been there, it is true; but I have always heard that no set of human beings on the face of God's earth can compare with the English in moral depravity, and the misery that attends it; that the metropolis swarms with prostitutes—swarms; that a young man cannot possibly (nor an old man, nor any man) walk along the principal streets after dark, without being literally besieged by women of this class, who feign, fawn, flatter, try to cajole—nay, almost to drag him by force into the most filthy, horrible, and dangerous dens of vice. (Williams 259)<sup>161</sup>

As this passage demonstrates, Guthrie often declares Jamaica's ideological—if not economic and political—separation from “the old stupid world” (Williams 100), which he describes as amoral and corrupted. Guthrie, moreover, associates strangers, and in particular Englishmen, with wickedness, as when he reproaches his slaves after the hurricane, by saying: “you are as bad as the white people in England; you left your master and mistress, and your young mistress—your benefactors—your natural lord, myself—to perish in the wind: what could the white varlets in England do worse?” (Williams 98). In this speech Guthrie appeals to Nature as justification for slavery, and to a code of honor based on mutual care between the “benefactors” and the slaves, which

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<sup>161</sup> Like Guthrie, Warner Arundell also denounces the loose customs of London; in particular the immorality of London theatres: “I had read, both in the West Indies and in England, of the open immorality practiced in the colonies. The censures, although a little overdrawn, were true in the main; but after perusing them, in the simplicity of my heart, I conceived that the morals of England were pure as the unsunned snow of the climate. This error was removed on my entering the saloon of a London theatre...the profligacy I there beheld shocked me more than any Englishman was ever shocked by contemplating any scene of libertinism in our part of the world” (Joseph 161).

should compel the slaves to help their “natural lord” before they help themselves (98). By not abiding to this code the slaves behave “as bad[ly] as the white people in England,” who obviously lack the qualities of Creoles (98).

The dichotomy between Creoles and Englishmen is made clear in Guthrie’s speech. Guthrie, probably more than all the other characters, voices a white Creole consciousness. Like Mary Seacole in her autobiography, Williams uses his characters—and in particular Guthrie—to “[write] back to the center . . . as a white Creole from a margin that is at the same time the center of ‘other’ oppressed subjects,” in order to counter the stereotypes associated to white Creole customs and manners, and to defend the practice of slavery (Ward, “What Time Has Proven” 54).<sup>162</sup> However, unlike Williams’ *Tour of Jamaica, Hamel* never goes as far as considering independence from England. On the contrary, in his *Tour*, Williams on the one hand advocates for gradual emancipation and on the other hand uses one of his characters to suggest the possibility of Jamaica’s political independence from England. The *Tour*, like *Hamel*, expresses the idea that emancipation should be the result of the natural progression of time and not an event violently brought about by revolutions or by English legislation:

slavery has existed in all countries; it existed in some parts of great Britain a very few years ago, and it exists still in many parts of Europe: its extinction has always been gradual. . . . A dispassionate review of history will teach [men] that revolutions in the manners and conditions of mankind are the result of ages, the mind being gradually and most imperceptibly prepared for them. . . . but [the slaves’] immediate emancipation would be destruction to us all, masters and slaves. (*Tour* 75-6)

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<sup>162</sup> Obviously Mary Seacole writes back after Emancipation and from the subject position of a mixed-race Jamaican Creole. Although Seacole identifies with her motherland, and she considers herself to be a British subject, she responds to the stereotypes that circulated about Creoles of mixed blood, as I argue in chapter 2.

However, in his *Tour* Williams simultaneously suggests more radical possibilities, through the voice of one of his characters, the planter called Mathews, who wishes for Jamaica's independence from Britain: "According to [Mathews] Jamaica is to be wholly free, to be emancipated from the tyranny of England and the humbug of the *Saints*. He acts up his doctrine by having nothing in his house which is the produce of England...all his provisions are transatlantic" (Williams, *Tour* 65).<sup>163</sup>

Although Mathews is described as a "very original gentleman," his fear that "the government of England are bent on ruining the colonies before they abandon them either to the negroes or to the Americans; for their destruction...is inevitable, if the system of tampering or trifling, with the feelings of the slaves is persevered with," is a fear shared by Guthrie, and an outlook very much present in *Hamel*, and reflected in the words of white planters like Guthrie, and slaves like Hamel (Tour 65). This outlook clearly identifies England—and not the slaves—as the main threat to the welfare of its own colonies. After Combah's revolt has been quashed with the help of Hamel—who has given up his desire for revenge to pay his debt of gratitude and loyalty to his master—the Obeah man warns the planters that the revolt could have succeeded: "'My Comrades,' said Hamel, 'the subjects of King Combah [are] going back to the land of freedom—Haiti—with some of the wretches it vomited forth for your destruction, at the recommendation of the Obeah Christians in England. They will make up a pretty tale, no doubt—but they might have conquered'" [emphasis mine] (Williams 425-26).

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<sup>163</sup> The planter Mathews is identified with Simon Taylor (See Watson's *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World* 24-37).

However, after American Independence, Jamaican planters did not follow the example provided by Mathews in Williams' *Tour* and remained simultaneously dependent on their mother country's colonial and mercantile economy (only marginally diversifying their local production), and at the mercy of Abolitionists in the English Parliament, as discussed by O'Shaughnessy in *An Empire Divided*. As Brathwaite argues in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, after the American Revolution,

the white élite was, to a large extent, thrown back upon its own resources and forced to think of the possibility of some measure of economic independence and internal self-government even though the logical goal of these considerations—constitutional independence—was never seriously examined. What happened, in fact, was that with the break-up of the American system, the island became more than ever dependent upon its other major cultural connections—that with Britain and the British mercantile system. (244-45)

This is reflected in Williams' novel, as the planter class (in spite of Fairfax' heroism) is depicted by Hamel as incapable of independent thought, lacking stamina, and the courage to defend themselves and their own from the missionaries, and from British laws that resulted in economic losses for white Creoles who, like Fairfax's father, were often forced to mortgage their estates. Hamel boldly accuses planters of being cowardly in his final speech: "But you are no worth—(forgive me gentlemen—I spoke without caution)—I mean you are afraid of the white Obeah men" (Williams 421). Through the words of his black protagonist, Williams accuses other white Creole planters of being weak and incapable of defending themselves from England's interference in their affairs. Is this an appeal to his own countrymen delivered through the filter of the Obeah man's words?

At the end of the novel *Fairfax*—who becomes the emblem of a Creolized Jamaican society in which Obeah and Christianity coexist—is handed down the secrets of the Obeah man’s cave: “‘It’s all yours,’ said [Hamel] to Mr. Fairfax. ‘Use it, and defend your property, and your wife that shall be. No Negro, no man but myself, knows the intricacies of this cave at all’,” words suggesting that there will be more revolts and that Fairfax will be left with the responsibility of defending himself and his people, once Hamel has gone (Williams 425). The narrator explains that “the wizard...laid open to his guests all the natural and artificial contrivances of his dwelling,” handing down part of his African wisdom to his white friend, Fairfax (Williams 425). While Hamel, in the end, leaves the island forever in a canoe, as he has failed in his revenge and has “ruined [himself] in the estimation of those [the fellow rebel slaves] to whom he had sworn fidelity” to save Fairfax and Joanna, and he is “never heard of more,” Fairfax, and Guthrie are left still wondering about the mysterious Obeah man, as “they watch him without regarding the time they so misapplied” until his canoe disappears on the horizon (Williams 427). The novel conveniently disposes of all the characters who have led the slave rebellion—not only Combah and Roland, who both face their death, but also Hamel, who had contributed to the onset of the revolt—and restores order under the leadership of honorable white Creoles, such as Fairfax and Guthrie. However, although Williams sends Hamel off to “the land of [his] birth—his mother’s country”—in a small canoe, or maybe to join his brothers in Haiti, or to his death at sea (the novel remain open about Hamel’s fate), it remained uncertain whether the peace returned to the island by Hamel’s influence on the minds of the rebels will last, and for how long, notwithstanding Combah’s and Roland’s biblical deaths. What also remains is the bitter taste of Hamel’s

power—a power that could have cost many white lives—on the planters’ lips (and in the readers’ minds), as they “misapply” their time watching, and wondering, about the mysterious Obeah man.



***Creoleana; or, Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore***

*Creoleana or, Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days of Yore*, was published after Emancipation (in 1842); however, the story and Caribbean setting it depicts go back to the “days of yore,” before the Emancipation Act was passed, and at the time of the American War of Independence. The novel, in fact, is set in the late 1770s to 1790s, as some of the historical events it touches upon—such as the food crises in Barbados as a result of the American War—indicate.<sup>164</sup> This text presents many similarities with *Hamel*, and for this reason I will discuss it before *Warner Arundell*, even though Joseph’s novel precedes it chronologically. Like *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, *Creoleana* is a romance and it is highly concerned with race relations in a colonial setting. It describes an island community based on plantation economy and slavery, and although it upholds some of the stereotypes associated with mixed-race women, it shares with *Hamel* the distinction between Creoles (both white and black) and European strangers, like the villainous MacFlashby, who seduces the brown-skinned Lucy.

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<sup>164</sup> The first historical event mentioned in the novel, which helps place this text in the late 1770s, is the Bridgetown fire; “the lamentable catastrophe which in May 1766, reduced Bridgetown to almost one general heap of ciders and ashes,” coinciding with Mr. Fairfax’s retirement from trade and purchase of a country estate in St. George parish (Orderson 24). In spite of some inconsistencies in the chronology, the main story line is set in the 1780s and early 1790s, a time when Barbados was recovering from the effects of the hurricane of 1780, and from the repercussions of the American War of Independence (Gilmore 10).

While *Creoleana* is mainly a novel about white Creoles, the author uses its title-word—Creoleana—to refer to all Creoles, comprising a society—Creole society—formed by the interaction of people of European and African descent.<sup>165</sup> The term Creole, as I have argued in the introduction to my study and in my reading of British and American novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Arthur Mervyn*, is generally understood to be a derogative term. However, Orderson's choice to title this novel *Creoleana* seems to reclaim the word and to give it a new meaning. Like *Hamel*, *Creoleana* depicts in elegiac tones a past that is gone forever, and the nostalgia for bygone days seems to contradict the author's claim that life is better in the present days. Like Williams, Orderson writes from the point of view of the white Creole planter class forwarding a conservative political and social message. However, at times, the text engenders contradictions and unintentionally takes on positions that appear at odds with the author's intended message. This novel, like *Hamel*, reveals a white Creole consciousness at work, and represents an example of a nineteenth-century West Indian novel, as the subject matter and setting are West Indian, and the author is familiar with Barbadian customs and society, of which he gives an accurate picture.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, as a precursor of later Caribbean texts—and unlike *Hamel*, which is written in Standard English—*Creoleana* provides the reader with “the lengthiest passages extant of black speech behavior recorded by a Barbadian during

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<sup>165</sup> In “British Sojourners,” O’Shaughnessy argues that Barbados was one of the first British colonies to develop a creole society, due to, among other factors, the “high proportion of Whites,” and lower absenteeism, as Barbados had “the largest proportion of small and middling planters, numbering some four thousand resident landowners in 1765” (6). Moreover, Barbados had better infrastructures than other colonies, including schools, a printing press, and a strong Anglican Church, which contributed to the development of a “creole mentality in the eighteenth- century British Caribbean” (6).

<sup>166</sup> J.W. Orderson (his real name was Isaac Williamson Orderson) was born in Barbados on May 28, 1767. His family is traced back to the 1715 census in Barbados. His father John Orderson owned the *Barbados Mercury*, and J.W. Orderson edited the newspaper from 1787. After the death of his brother John Edward, J.W. Orderson became sole proprietor and editor. He lived most of his life in Barbados, returning to England twice in 1797, when he married his first wife, and in 1812, when he married his second wife and remained until 1816. (For Orderson’s biography see Gilmore’s “Introduction”).

the slave period,” and it is the first novel to be written by a Barbadian about the island (Handler 41-42).<sup>167</sup>

#### RACE, GENDER STEREOTYPES, MISCEGENATION, AND CREOLE IDENTITY IN ORDERSON'S *CREOLEANA*

*Creoleana* presents some thematic similarities to *Hamel*, as it depicts two parallel love stories; one between a white Creole lady and a white planter's son, the other between a mixed-race Creole and a white man. If in *Hamel* Michal and Sebastian forbear their mutual attraction for the sake of the white Joanna, in *Creoleana* the mixed-race Lucy—half-sister, maid and companion of the white Creole heiress Caroline—falls in love with Caroline's fiancé (the Irish MacFlashby) but, unlike Michal, succumbs to her desires. Unlike the romanticized depiction of the quadroon Michal, and of her infatuation with Sebastian in *Hamel*, Orderson's *Creoleana* is more realistic when it comes to its brown-skinned characters. Although this novel has been faulted for the clichéd sentimentality of its main plot—the romance between the white Creole heirs, Jack and Caroline—when it comes to Lucy and MacFlashby, Orderson does not elevate his brown-skinned heroine to a white standard of conduct, as Williams does with the quadroon Michal. In Orderson's rendition of Lucy's sub-plot, *Creoleana* moves away from

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<sup>167</sup> Barbados was first explored by an English expedition in 1625. Prior to European colonization Arawaks and Caribs inhabited the island. Sixteenth-century Spanish slave-trading missions decimated the Amerindian population of the island. The Amerindians were either captured by the Spanish or they fled the island. England was the first European colonial power that established a permanent settlement in Barbados starting in 1627. By the 1650s the population of Barbados had grown exponentially, due to immigration of indentured servants from England. Rebels and criminals were also transported to Barbados. The introduction of sugar cane to the island in the 1640s (prior to that, colonists cultivated tobacco) transformed Barbados' economy and society. By the 1680s the island became one of the richest sugar colonies in the Caribbean, and this resulted in a large increase of the slave population, working for a minority of white planters who owned large plantations. The poor whites gradually moved out of the island, especially to Jamaica and the Leeward Islands. The Barbadian planters owning large estates, who remained on the island, had great influence in the British Parliament. For a complete history of the island's British colonization see Beckles's *A History of Barbados* 1-52. Also see Handler's *Plantation Slavery in Barbados* and *The Unappropriated People*.



romance and sentimental conventions and approaches race relations with pragmatism and a more realistic viewpoint than *Hamel*, while simultaneously subscribing to stereotypes associated with mix-race women's sexuality.

The pragmatism of the treatment of Lucy's sub-plot extends to the narrator's acknowledgment that amorous relationships between white men and black women were quite normal and accepted. In the Barbados depicted by Orderson, Mr. Fairfield's relationship with a slave is considered a "peccadillo" not interfering with "his general attachment to religion and virtue" and "not to be dissembled" by the narrator, as this "frailty" was caused by "the influence of robust health and a warm constitution" (Orderson 26). When Mr. Fairfax decides to marry, being a decent man he naturally proceeds to "manumit his paramour, securing to her £6 per annum," and to take the child, who "possessed a tolerably fair complexion," under his care, to protect her from "the wretched prospect of inevitable prostitution" (Orderson 26). Although the narrator does not completely condone his character for having taken a black mistress, the tone of this passage demonstrate his tolerance and almost justification of these occurrences in Barbadian Creole society, as long as the white man is fair in his treatment of his black mistress, as Mr. Fairfield demonstrates to be. The author's tone is very different when, later on, he describes the behavior of the Irish MacFlashby, whose actions do not comply with the codes of honor of Creole society. MacFlashby, unlike Mr. Fairfield, is depicted as selfishly indifferent to the consequences of his depravity. Lucy, the mixed-race daughter of Mr. Fairfax—although she is not a slave—fulfills a similar role of maid and companion for Caroline, as Michal does for Joanna (Caroline is unaware that Lucy is her half-sister). Like Michal, Lucy falls in love with her mistress's fiancé, the Irish

MacFlashby. However, in *Creoleana* the Irish man takes advantage of the brown girl, who becomes pregnant, causing her untimely death. Lucy's story—a precursor of the tragic mulatto story of American literature—is narrated in a didactic tone that does not leave too much space for sympathy, but condemns, not only MacFlashby, but also Lucy for “her own levity” that turns her into a victim of “the treacherous wiles of a vile seducer” (Orderson 87).

Lucy is seen “in amorous dalliance seated on the knee of her paramour” by Pollard, her fiancé and an accomplished black man, who refuses MacFlashby's bribe to marry her in spite of her conduct (Orderson 86). After the discovery of her affair, Lucy's physical and mental state deteriorates rapidly, until “her malady, at length, assumed a fearful madness, when in one of her maniac ravings, resisting all restraint, she rushed from her bed-room into the back gallery, denouncing in wild frantic accents, curses and vengeance on the head of her vile seducer” (Orderson 86). When Pollard intervenes, preventing her from jumping from the gallery, Lucy “uttering a fearful yell, as if terrified at his presence... [falls] from his grasp, a lifeless corpse!” (Orderson 87). The description of Lucy's madness and untimely death recalls a later, more famous, mad Creole, Bertha Mason. Although it is impossible to ascertain for certain if Brontë had read Orderson's *Creoleana*, both novels link madness with Creole women who are sexually promiscuous (a widespread association in Britain), even though Brontë never explicitly says that Bertha was a mixed-race Creole.<sup>168</sup> However, notwithstanding Orderson's stereotyping of the figure of the mulatto Creole, who falls prey to the passions of the flesh, his depiction

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<sup>168</sup> As I have argued at length in chapter 2, some critics, like Susan Meyer, have argued that Bertha Mason's physical description suggests that she might have been a mixed-race woman, although Brontë intentionally makes her Creole character racially ambiguous.

of Lucy's errors is realistic, as it paints a picture of a society in which a mixed-race woman—even if free—had no alternatives but marrying within her race, becoming a prostitute or the object of white men's illicit sexual desires.<sup>169</sup> Orderson's handling of Lucy's sub-plot demonstrates the author's intolerance for miscegenation and sexual relations between white men and black women—and the contradictions inherent within the text, as the narrator is more tolerant of Fairfield's errors—in spite of his openness in discussing the topic of the sexual exploitation of a black woman by a white man.

Interestingly, Orderson seems to condone the white Creole, Mr. Fairfield, who acted as a gentleman towards his black concubine, while he openly denounces the actions of the vile and cowardly Irish man, MacFlashby.

On the other hand, the anecdote of Rachel Pringle shows a mixed-race woman who knows how to profit from relationships with white men, and demonstrates, once more, the realism with which Orderson approaches race relations in Barbadian society. This anecdote also engenders contradictions in Orderson's otherwise clear affirmation of white (and English) superiority. Miss Rachel, who was the daughter and slave of a Scotch schoolmaster, William Lauder, with an African woman, is almost raped by her father, as her charms “awakened the libidinous desires of her disgraceful and sinful parent” (Orderson 76). Captain Pringle rescues her from the whip of the “Jumper”—as she was being punished for not submitting to her father's libido—buys her from Lauder, manumits her, and sets her up in a boardinghouse; thus “his ‘protection’ of this young interesting creature (not yet eighteen)” turns her into his lover (77). Rachel tries to deceive Pringle, in order to “strengthen her influence over her benefactor...by assuming

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<sup>169</sup> The novel does not explicitly say if Lucy was a slave or a free colored woman, although I assume from the context that she was manumitted like her mother.

the appearance of that ‘state which ladies who love their lords like to be in’ and [goes] so far as to present him...with a smiling ‘little cherub’ as the offspring of their loves” (77). Having discovered Rachel’s treachery, Pringle leaves her but Rachel “[is] not long without a ‘protector’; a gentleman by the name of Polgreen succeeded to the possession of her charms” (78).

Miss Rachel, in this anecdote, is depicted as a strong mulatto woman who, unlike Lucy, knows how to use her sexuality to obtain favors and protection. However, she is also portrayed as a shrewd businesswoman who knows how to make money and turns her small boardinghouse into the Royal Navy Hotel, frequented by His Royal Highness, Prince William Henry. The position Miss Rachel Pringle occupies in Barbadian society is somewhat similar to the occupation of hotelier that Mary Seacole performs in Jamaica. As I pointed out in chapter 2, brown-skinned women often ran small boardinghouses, which they obtained through the intercession and financial assistance of white lovers and protectors. Rachel is described by Gilmore as “the perfect representative of Anansi, the West African trickster hero...whose often unscrupulous use of his wits to survive against stronger and more powerful enemies made him a popular figure in Caribbean folklore”; thus she is, in a sense, a female version of Hamel (Gilmore 16).<sup>170</sup> Rachel, in fact, knows how to manipulate the Royal Prince into repaying the damage to her hotel he caused in a night of drunken recklessness (Gilmore, Introduction 16). To Prince William Henry who indulged in “a royal frolic by breaking the furniture” Rachel responds with “cunning,” instead of over-reacting, and the next day she presents him with the bill for the damages

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<sup>170</sup> For a description of the figure of the trickster, in African diaspora writing, or Anansi, see note 158.

(78). The description of Rachel's handling of a prince, who acts like an "upper class twit," portrays her as superior to the English Royal heir (Gilmore, Introduction 16).

Rachel's actions demonstrate her control over both Prince Henry and MacFlashby. Miss Rachel boldly calls MacFlashby a "Wretched man!" after he is publicly whipped and humiliated by Brushwood and shows up at her hotel (83). Unafraid of a white man, she refuses to serve him, reversing the understanding of white superiority that otherwise pervades the novel, by "addressing him in a tone that quite astounded him, exclaiming—'Whau! Whau dis! What you come here for? You tink gentleman go have any ting for say to you? Go! You better go home! Go, go hide yourself!'" (82-3). Miss Rachel is an independent mulatto woman who is respected by the town—"the prefix [Miss] being then rarely given to black or coloured women," explains the narrator—and whose actions seem to assume symbolic meanings, if we take her to represent a Creole culture surviving outside influences, and positing itself as critic of the English price and the Irish impostor (Orderson 76).

Although *Creoleana* assumes the English to be generally superior to the Irish (MacFlashby) and the Scottish (Lauder), both English princes—Henry and Edward (later Duke of Kent)—who make an appearance in the novel, are depicted in less than edifying terms, and criticized through the words of the narrator. While Prince Henry is depicted as a spoiled child and reprimanded by "the sly and cunning Rachel," the narrator depicts Prince Edward as "not being courteously disposed," when he meets Lieutenant Colonel B\_\_ (Orderson 78, 141). When Lt. Colonel B\_\_ apologizes for the delay in welcoming his Royal Highness to Barbados (en route to Martinique), Edward's sarcastic response makes him appear petty and rude to the representative of the Barbados Militia: "As I

suppose, Colonel, the President was occupied in ‘shearing the hog,’ and yourself in ‘hunting the boar,’ I will not be so inconsiderate as to interrupt either of you in your sports” (141). This anecdote serves to highlight the differences between Creole society and English society, as it shows the inability of outsiders (including the Royal Prince Edward) to understand the ways and manners of the Barbadians. The anecdote is humorous as it plays with a linguistic misunderstanding. When Miller, a “half-witted, humble, uneducated man, but zealous in his duty”—who introduces himself to the prince as the “President’s messenger”—is asked where the President is, he replies “Hogsty,” which is the “vulgar designation given to the estate (Hethersal’s) where the President then was”; thus the prince’s sarcastic allusion to hogs and boars (140-41). The misunderstanding in the exchange between Prince Edward and Miller, and the anecdote of Miss Rachel and Prince Henry, although depicted with ironical intent, stand in respectively for the differences between the motherland and its colony, translated, in the case of Prince Edward and Miller, into a lack of common cultural referents, and for the exploitation of the colony by England, dramatized in the anecdote of Prince Henry and Rachel. These two anecdotes demonstrate the existence of a Creole culture and identity distinct from England, and racially and linguistically hybrid. The use of the local patois (Bajan), in *Creoleana*, in fact, is another example of the presence of a Barbadian-Creole society; the author’s choice of language—to include dialogues in Bajan—defines this text as a West Indian novel, and as a precursor of twentieth-century Caribbean fiction, as I will discuss in more depth in the next pages.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> For an in-depth discussion of language, see my section titled “Language in *Creoleana*, *Hamel*, *the Obeah Man*, and *Warner Arundell*” (pg. 312), which links the analysis of *Creoleana*, *Hamel*, and *Warner Arundell*.

MARRIAGE AS SYMBOL OF THE CONTINUATION OF WHITE CREOLE  
SOCIETY

At the end of the novel, Caroline conveniently inherits the estates of the Chrichton sisters, becoming a wealthy heiress overnight. Jack Goldacre, after a short trip to Bermuda where “he received the kindest attentions from the hospitable inhabitants,” thanks to “several letters of introduction”—an example of cross-island Creole connections and hospitality—returns to Barbados to pursue a classical education “under the assumed name of Brushwood,” wanting to acquire “the cultivation, to befit him for that station in society to which the fortune he must ultimately inherit gave him a just claim” (Orderson 49). While living under the disguised identity of Mr. Brushwood, Jack not only meets Caroline again, but publicly humiliates his rival MacFlashby (as mentioned earlier) to punish him for his arrogance and impudence, by “laying the whip over the shoulders of Mr. MacFlashby with a degree of energy and activity that made him writhe under the chastisement,” and that exposed MacFlashby’s “Irish cowardice” to the entire town (80-81). Having acquired the necessary cultivation to express his sensibilities, and having triumphed over his Irish rival—whose cowardice is juxtaposed to Jack’s integrity—Jack can drop his disguise as Mr. Brushwood and court Caroline, who now responds to his newfound confidence given to him by proper education. The stages of the love affair between Jack and Caroline—that culminates in the marriage of wealth and sensibility—are told in the language of sentimentality. However, the conclusion of *Creoleana* seems to shift linguistic register and to become extremely practical, as the discussion of the marriage arrangements between the fathers of the young Creole heirs demonstrates. The narrator explains that Deborah and Judith Chrichton conveyed “the whole of the Whiston estate, and all other their property, in trust, to Mr. Fairfield, for the sole use of his

daughter during her minority, and, in fee simple, to her and to her heirs, upon her coming of age. Caroline was now two-and-twenty, her right therefore was complete” (Orderson 144). Jack’s father not knowing of Caroline’s inheritance, which is kept a secret by her parents, visits Mr. Fairfield to discuss the financial settlement of the marriage: “You know, Mr. Fairfield...[that] I am out of debt—[I] have one of the best plantations in the island, and that I can give Jack £12,000 cash upon his marriage; beside which I will make over to him one half the crop, while I and my old woman live, and at our death it will be all his; I asks nothing about what you mean to do for your daughter—John says she’s a treasure enough for him without a farthing” (Orderson 145).

Like the marriage between Fairfax and Joanna Guthrie—which joins two of the largest plantations on the island—the Goldacre-Fairfield marriage unites two young people who, like Fairfax and Joanna, represent the continuation of the white Creole planter class. This resolution, however, is reached only after the male Creole protagonists of the two novels fight against outsiders who threaten their fortunes, or their happiness and their love. Fairfax, as I discussed at length, fights to regain possession of his ancestral estates controlled by the English lawyer Fillbeer, by assuming the disguise of the mulatto Sebastian. Simultaneously, he saves his white Creole fiancée, Joanna, from the debauchery of the English missionary, Roland. Jack Goldacre prevails over the Irish MacFlashby by exposing his cowardice, in his assumed identity as Brushwood, which allows him to secretly live in Barbados while perusing his education. He wins Caroline’s love as the girl recognizes in Brushwood her neighbor Jack, transformed into a more confident and refined young man. The convenient and sudden inheritance that befalls Caroline allows fortune to be conjoined with love in this union between élite Creole



families. Both Orderson's and Williams' novels, set before emancipation, share the fear that white Creole plantocracy's influence will come to an end (and it did, for Orderson)—a fear translated in the melancholic and elegiac tone of the historical romance. This fear is exorcised through the marriage between white Creole gentlemen and proper ladies, who attest not only to the wealth of white Creole plantocracy, but also to the moral refinement of its members in spite of their colonial birth—their education and values, in fact, are always depicted as superior to those of characters who have recently come to the West Indies from Europe.

LANGUAGE IN *CREOLEANA*, *HAMEL*, *THE OBEAH MAN*, AND *WARNER ARUNDELL*

One of the characteristics of twentieth-century Caribbean novels is that they often use a combination of Standard English and Caribbean patois, often without a translation. Unlike *Hamel, the Obeah Man*, in which slaves express themselves in Standard English, *Creoleana* and *Warner Arundell* anticipate this feature of later Caribbean literature by intermixing local dialect to Standard English, often without translation.<sup>172</sup> In *Creoleana*, even white characters use words derived from Bajan dialect (indicative of a creolization process), while entire sections are rendered in creolized English when spoken by black characters. Harris argues that, in *Creoleana*, “it is the use of a creole dialogue within the socio-historical context that allows the reader to suspend his disbelief and journey back to the Barbados of the 1780s and 1790s” (498). The use of Bajan dialogue also suggests that Orderson wrote for his Creole compatriots, although, in his Preface, he affirms that he had a metropolitan audience in mind; “It is with very humble pretensions that the Author

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<sup>172</sup> Although *Hamel* is written in Standard English, his *Tour through the Island of Jamaica* contains extensive passages in Creole patois with some translations.

brings the flickering of his nearly exhausted lamp before the ordeal of the British public” (22). It is clear that Orderson considers himself a Barbadian, before he considers himself an Englishman, as he demonstrates in his dedication to Lord Stanley, in which he says that he intends to write about “political incident and domestic anecdotes of *my native country*” [emphasis mine] (20). In using local Bajan dialect to talk about “his native country,” alongside Standard English, Orderson demonstrates not only his accurate knowledge of the language spoken by black people in Barbados, but also a disregard for whether the “British Public” would understand it or not (22).

I would like to compare this strategy to that employed by Williams in *Hamel*. Although it has been argued that Williams’ black characters demonstrate a depth that is not normally found in black characters in novels written by white Creole authors, in his concern with the ability of his English audience to comprehend the speech of a character like Hamel, Williams denies his characters historical credibility. While Michal not only behaves like a white woman but also sounds like one, Williams underlines that his African-Creole characters do not speak Standard English, but does not challenge his audience with a sample of their idiom. The narrator, in fact, explains of Hamel’s final speech: “Of course Hamel used the dialect of his country, the creole tongue; sufficiently understood by all the assembled party,” but the entire speech is translated in English (Williams 421). Barbara Lalla in “Frustrated Romanticism” explains that “the voice of the Jamaica poor is the creole voice, and literary prose severely circumscribes the use of creole even in representing dialogue,” as in the case of Williams’ novel (19). Lalla further argues that, while Jamaican nineteenth-century verse—black folk songs or oral tradition—is often in Creole and represents the point of view of the working class, prose

normally reflects the perspective of white, educated Creoles planters, and if lines in Creole dialect appear, they are generally intended for comic relief (Frustrated Romanticism 19). That is the reason why, in Lalla's opinion, a character like Hamel must speak in Standard English; because "even the author who selects a black protagonist finds it impossible to achieve serious characterization using a medium traditionally linked with comic intent" (Lalla, "Frustrated Romanticism" 19).

Williams occasionally reminds his readers that his black characters speak patois, but feels the need to translate the occasional word rendered in dialect (as in "gubna" for "governor"), in order to ensure complete understanding by his English audience. For example, the narrator translates a song sung in Jamaican dialect into Standard English justifying his decision by saying: "I regret much I must not give the story in its native simplicity, insomuch as the lingo (I must not call it language) would be utterly unintelligible to all my uncreolized countrymen" (Williams 231). Unlike Orderson, who considers Barbados to be his "native country" and who clearly refers to Barbadians as his countrymen, Williams—in spite of his work's anti-missionary and anti-abolitionist agenda and his concern for Jamaican affairs—still claims ideological and linguistic membership to the British nation—his "uncreolized countrymen"—and reduces Jamaican Creole to the status of non-language; an unintelligible "lingo" (231).

On the other hand, Orderson seems to be unconcerned with whether his white English audience understands the utterances of his black characters, who speak entire sentences in Bajan dialect, like Rachel who says about the prince: "Go, go long man, da' no King's son! If he no do wha' he please, who d'en can do'um? Let he lone! ley he muse heself—da no King's son! Bless he heart!" alongside other utterances, which are

not translated for the benefit of the British public (79). Rachel is not the only character who speaks in dialect. The novel is interspersed by Bajan dialogue, often left untranslated, switching linguistic registers depending on the scene and characters. Although Orderson might have made this stylistic choice to give his novel some local color, the overall effect is that *Creoleana*—in spite of its overly sentimental main plot—also showcases anecdotes and scenes that feel very realistic and that anticipate twentieth-century Caribbean novels in their stylistic hybridity and multi-vocality, even though twentieth-century Caribbean texts, unlike nineteenth-century works by white Creoles, focus on the point of view of Black characters, and on a popular and rural consciousness—as well as on the experience of immigration, dislocation, and exile—to dramatize modern Caribbean realities. Servants, like Mr. Fairfield’s confidential man Musso, and the house servant Amarillus, who looks after Lucy while she is sick, are depicted as speaking to their masters in Bajan patois, indicating that white Creoles understood the language of slaves well, and engaged in code-switching.<sup>173</sup> Amarillus tells Mrs. Fairfield to call the “great doctor”—the white man’s doctor—and “lay um run for he! She too bad, fait um be!” and Mrs. Fairfield immediately comprehends the cause of Lucy’s malady from the seriousness of her servant’s request (85). Unlike Barbara Lalla’s assumption that the use of dialect by white Creole authors is connected to comic relief, not all conversations in Bajan patois in Orderson’s novel are meant to be comical. Harris argues that the use of patois functions to give black characters a “separate voice” through which “the characters become human participants in Orderson’s melodrama”; however, I

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<sup>173</sup> Although Williams’ novel does not show characters’ Creole speech, he too explains to his readers that white Creoles understood and spoke patois, and participated in code-switching when talking with their servants or with strangers.

argue that the majority of black slaves in the novel are not given an individual voice, but are still depicted as objects that remain in the background (501).

Slaves, in fact, are generally only seen from a distance, and used to create an overall picture of slavery as a benign organization of labor, and of Blacks as inferior to white people. In the scene of young Goldacre's return to his family home we get a glimpse of field workers:

‘Mas Jack’s come!’ was echoed along every field and through every gang: and whether from joy of heart on the occasion or mere pretext for a holiday, the laborers struck work, and hastening to the mansion, expressed their hearty welcome by loud and clamorous huzzas... To heighten this general domestic joy, the delighted proprietor, while celebrating his son’s return by sumptuous feasting within, took care that there should be no lack of rum and molasses, with an extra allowance of corn and fish, to cheer the hearts of those without. (Orderson 93-94)

From the beginning of the novel, it is clear that both Mr. Fairfield and Mr. Goldacre own field slaves; however, the narrator rarely talks about them, and they generally remain in the background. When he mentions them, as in the above passage, it is usually to depict a positive picture of slavery. While the novel occasionally denounces the ills of slavery—as in the case of Rachel’s father—this seems to contradict the image of happy slaves that coexists in the same text. Moreover, while the use of Bajan dialect gives depth to specific characters, such as Musso and Rachel, the slaves (as a class) are generally described as a faceless multitude, incapable of profound feelings, as in the scene of Jack’s homecoming feast, or in the description of the slaves’ reaction at the funeral of Miss Chrichton: “This last ceremony called forth from the negroes of the plantation, one of those vociferous lamentations by which that class of persons was formerly so accustomed to display their feelings, but all this loud wailing was merely lip-

deep, and came not from the fountain of genuine grief” (Orderson 136). In spite of the humanization of certain black Creole characters through the use of Bajan dialect, Orderson’s viewpoint is clearly that of a white planter who sees slaves as inferior to white Creoles, and incapable of deep and genuine emotions; in other words devoid of the same sensibilities as his white characters, Jack and Caroline. For this reason, the novel seems to present a shift in stylistic registers between the narration of the main love story between Jack and Caroline (coated in the language of sentimentality), and the more realistic anecdotes, and sub-plot of Lucy’s tragedy, which intersperse Bajan dialect with Standard English.

Even more than *Creoleana*, *Warner Arundell*, which I will discuss at length in the next sections, uses a variety of dialects and “a full range of techniques employed by later Caribbean writers, to accommodate his multiple language registers” and to depict the variety of the Caribbean experience (Winer xxxvii).<sup>174</sup> Like Orderson, when black characters speak, Joseph uses Creole in dialogue and Standard English in exposition. Joseph, however, when using Creole words or sentences, alternates between annotations, parenthetical explanations, and no explanation at all, making a judgment on whether his English public will be able to comprehend his various language registers. He clearly wants his novel to sound linguistically realistic without jeopardizing his readers’ ability to comprehend his text by making it too obscure. This is a concern he shares with twentieth-century Caribbean writers who write linguistically hybrid texts. Although the “editor” (E.L. Joseph), in his introduction, apologizes for subjecting his educated

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<sup>174</sup> Besides Standard English, Joseph uses a variety of language registers including Trinidadian English Creole, Grenadian English Creole, “Yankee English” (spoken by uneducated Americans), English Cockney, French Creole (referred to as “creole French” or “Negro French”), Spanish and Latin (Winer xxxix-xl).

audience to “creole barbarisms,” it is obvious that his use of multiple language registers is something he is proud of, and that he considers Creole dialect as defining Creole identity and literature. However, by using a frame (like eighteenth-century novelists, such as Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones*) Joseph can create distance between himself and the autobiographical writing of his main character, Warner Arundell, which he claims to be a narration of true facts he is just transcribing and editing. It is this very distance that gives him poetic freedom to use Creole patois:

Among the many errors in this Work, I throw myself on the mercy of the reader for one class in particular. Mr. Arundell’s papers are full of those peculiarities of language which may not improperly be called ‘creolisms.’ My wish has been to expunge these, and substitute English words; or, if the story required the creole words to be retained, I have endeavored to explain them, either in the text or by notes. But, having myself resided for nearly twenty years in the colonies, it is very probable that I have unwittingly copied many expressions which will be scarcely understood on the other side of the Atlantic, without having given the necessary information. For this I entreat the indulgence of the liberal. It is difficult to live many years in a country without contracting some of its dialect of idiom. (5-6)

Lisa Winer, in her introduction to the UWI Press edition of *Warner Arundell*, argues that Joseph, like twentieth-century Caribbean writers, is able to “define a space within which he can experiment with language registers that challenge the boundaries of what in his age would have been considered cultivated speech” and that he does this by creating a distance between the erudite editor (himself) and Warner Arundell’s writings, through the use of a literary frame and through editorial comments (xxxvii).

The use of a variety of dialects creates a picture of a cosmopolitan Caribbean archipelago and Spanish Main where peoples from different races and backgrounds coexist and often thrive. The world that Arundell describes is a real Babel of cultures and

languages, and the protagonist revels in the diversity of the lands he visits during his travels, as in the description of Port of Spain:

The bustle of the place astonished me; as did also the mixed hue and costume of the population, and Babylonian variety of tongues... The dialects of the people of Port of Spain were as mixed as their complexions and dresses. Chinese, corrupt Arabic, spoken by the Mandingo negroes; a hundred different vernaculars from Guinea; English with its proper accent, and then with its creole drawl; Spanish with its true Castilian pronunciation, as well as with the slight corruption with which the South American speak it; creole French, European French, Corsican, various kinds of *patois*, German and Italian, were all spoken in this town. (84-85)

The cosmopolitanism of *Warner Arundell* separates this novel from *Hamel, the Obeah Man* and *Creoleana*, which remain insular in their concerns, as I will discuss in the next sections, and make Joseph's novel a precursor of later Caribbean texts. Like Mary Seacole, discussed in chapter 2, Warner Arundell, in his cosmopolitanism, anticipates the wandering West Indian of later literature, however without the pessimism of authors such as George Lamming and Jean Rhys. Joseph's pleasure in confronting his English readers with the linguistic heteroglossia of the New World, and in particular of Trinidad, demonstrates that "Joseph is alerting them to the emergence of a national society that is forming during this period" in Trinidad, and to a unique Trinidadian consciousness and culture (Cudjoe 71). The island of Trinidad, as Cudjoe argues, is a "contact zone" made up of different ethnicities and languages, in which the hero, Warner, thrives, and which Joseph presents to his English audience as an exotic landscape of sounds and sights (71).





## Warner Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole

### WARNER ARUNDELL AND THE TRINIDADIAN LITERARY TRADITION

From the novel's sub-title, "The Adventures of a Creole," Joseph seems to posit *Warner Arundell's* allegiance to the New World rather than the Old, although Arundell shares an English sensibility with his mother country and considers the British to be superior to the French and the Spanish colonialists, as is evident, for example, in Arundell's disparaging description of the Spanish legal system.<sup>175</sup> Although E. L. Joseph was born in London (in 1772 or 1773), he moved to Trinidad in 1817 where he spent the rest of his life (he died of yellow fever in 1838, after the publication of *Warner Arundell*). Joseph was an Anglo-Jew of humble origins and with no formal education, who wrote plays, poetry, and satirical sketches. He worked as a teacher, plantation manager, newspaper editor, theatre organizer, novelist and historian (he wrote *The History of Trinidad* published in 1838) and was a rather contentious journalist, who often published disparaging skits on influential Trinidadian men, earning the reputation of being a controversial figure in the Trinidadian literary landscape.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Trinidad became a British colony in 1797, when Britain acquired it by force. Prior to British conquest, the island was a Spanish possession (the Spanish took it from the original Amerindians in the sixteenth century, and the Amerindian indigenes were exterminated by disease or forced to immigrate). From 1783, immigration of Roman Catholics from countries other than Spain increased the island's population, in particular after the massive immigration from French Caribbean colonies (Winer xvii). At the time of Britain's conquest of Trinidad, the majority of the island's inhabitants were French Creole speakers, and the island's judicial system was a combination of Spanish civil and criminal laws which were never completely replaced by a British legal system until the 1840s (See Donald Wood's *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* 182-83).

<sup>176</sup> For a complete biography of E.L. Joseph and contemporary reviews of *Warner Arundell* see Winer's "Introduction" (xix-xxv). The *History of Trinidad*, on which *Warner Arundell* is based, is a pro-slavery text, and the first historical account on the island, including a geographical description of Trinidad, a catalogue of its flora and fauna, and a political history up to 1837, the year prior to its publication. The period between 1783 and 1803 is described in detail, while the period of the Spanish settlement and the years after 1803 are only briefly outlined. Many of the manuscript sources used by Joseph have disappeared (Winer xxi).

*Warner Arundell* is part of a body of works rediscovered and published by the University of the West Indies Press, and written by Trinidadian authors between 1838 and 1907, comprising, besides Joseph's novel, the following texts: the Anonymous' *Adolphus, A Tale* (1853), *The Slave Son* (1854) by Mrs. William Noy [Marcella Fanny], and *Rupert Gray* (1907) by Stephen N. Cobham.<sup>177</sup> These novels are all written by authors who were born in Trinidad, or lived in the colony for a considerable length of time, knew the island intimately and wrote with social and political Trinidadian concerns in mind, often about slavery, racial relations, and miscegenation, sharing a typically West Indian “non-class-based social consciousness”—as it is developed and defined in later Caribbean literature—and often using Trinidadian Creole alongside standard English (Wiener xv).<sup>178</sup> Like *Warner Arundell*, Trinidadian novels included in the UWI series share a “strong political and social impetus,” which includes an analysis of the ills of all social classes, including mixed-race and black people, through the use of sentimentality (Winer xv). The reasons behind the more liberal treatment of issues such as slavery and mixed-race relationships in novels written by nineteenth-century Trinidadian authors could be linked to the comparatively short period of plantation slavery in the colony, and to the large number of free coloreds and free blacks—who were often wealthy, as the mixed-race branch of the Arundell family. While plantation slavery remained entrenched in colonies such as Jamaica and Barbados, it only lasted for a short period of fifty years in Trinidad. Another reason for the racial open-mindedness of Trinidadian novels such as

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<sup>177</sup> For a synopsis of these novels see Winer's “Introduction” (xi-xv)

<sup>178</sup> This series goes under the name of “Trinidadian Roots” (Winer xi). Other Trinidadian nineteenth-century novels not included in the series are: Michael Maxwell Philipp's *Emanuele Apadocca: Or, A Blighted Life, a Tale of the Boucaneers* (1854), Graham Branscombe's *Edith Vavasour* (1876), James H. Collens' *Who Did It?* (1891), and Grant Allen's *In All Shades* (1888), a Jamaican novel set in Trinidad. These texts, also briefly discussed by Winer in the Introduction to *Warner Arundell*, present some characteristics common to Trinidadian novels (xix).

*Warner Arundell* is to be found in the diversity of the island's population, which I discuss in my previous section on language.

One of the characteristics of Trinidad—conquered by the British from the Spanish in 1797 and, therefore, culturally and religiously composite—was, even prior to Emancipation, “the mixture of peoples of different cultures and races which outdid in its variety any other West Indian island,” and which is described in detail by Arundell, as in the passage on Port of Spain quoted above (Wood 102).<sup>179</sup> Moreover, because Trinidad became a plantation colony later than other British colonies, it maintained a smaller African slave population ratio compared to Whites, alongside its larger number of free coloreds and free blacks, who were often financially independent landowners, although they were frequently discriminated against because of their skin color.<sup>180</sup> The diversity of Trinidadian society at the time Joseph writes is important to understand the novel's “color-blindness”—as Winer describes it—as, in Joseph's world, “race and class membership alone were not considered sole determinants of character or ultimate fate”; a viewpoint that is, I think, influenced by Joseph's own social position as an outsider to the planters' elite, and by his Jewish heritage, which also rendered him a sort of cultural outsider (Winer xxxv, xix). Joseph's own marginality—stemming partly from his Jewish parentage—contributed to his detached position on the debate about abolition. As his character Warner Arundell, Joseph remains fairly neutral in the debate over slaves' emancipation. Although he clearly favors the side of Creole planters and, like Williams' in *Hamel*, believes in the negative influence of the Saints over colonial affairs—as

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<sup>179</sup>This diversity increased even more after Emancipation, with the immigration of apprenticed laborers from countries such as Venezuela, China and India.

<sup>180</sup> See Donald Wood's chapter “The People Before Emancipation” *Trinidad in Translation* (31-45).

demonstrated in the episode of Arundell's correspondence with the Anti-Slavery Society, which I analyze in the next section—Joseph maintains a detached and, Winer argues, “rational approach to the slavery issue” (xxi).<sup>181</sup> I think the word “rational,” might be somewhat too modern, at least to describe Joseph's protagonist's position on slavery. In fact, although Arundell clearly shows empathy for a slave's suffering and acknowledges their common humanity, he is certainly not prepared to make a political statement on their behalf, or to put his reputation on the line, as I will show in the next pages.

#### RACE, SLAVERY AND ABOLITIONISTS' PROPAGANDA IN *WARNER ARUNDELL*

Although Joseph was not a slave-master and landowner, there is no doubt as to where his loyalties stand when it comes to the interests of Creole planters versus English lawyers or abolitionists. *Warner Arundell* is unquestionably a novel that supports the planters' point of view and puts the New World at the center of its universe, while England remains an outside entity, even when Arundell lives there. However, if the novel privileges the perspective of white Creoles over that of their motherland, this is not done with such an open political motivation as it is done in *Hamel*, and Joseph is more objective than Williams in his representation of slavery, probably because while *Hamel* was written before 1833, in a Jamaica rife with political struggle and fear of slave revolts, the socio-political situation of Trinidad in the 1830s, as I briefly explained in the previous section, was not as explosive as that of the Jamaica of the 1820s. From the beginning of the long, autobiographical “true story” of Warner Arundell and the Arundell family, edited by Joseph, we are presented with a benign image of slavery that is similar to that

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<sup>181</sup> The Clapham Saints were social reformers who belonged to the Church of England and were active at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were based in Clapham, London. The Saints campaigned for the abolition of slavery and William Wilberforce was one of the leaders of the group (See Tomkins' *The Clapham Sect*).

portrayed in Williams' novel. However, Arundell is not afraid to denounce cruel slaveholders, like Jacopo, and the evils of slavery, as *Creoleana* also does, for example, when discussing Miss Rachael's dissolute father/owner.

Warner's father is depicted as a generous and kind slave-owner, who, however, "was of a procrastinating disposition, and, like most creole gentlemen, indolent, save when extraordinary occurrences excited him" (Joseph 29). Mr. Arundell's laziness—which seems to confirm the stereotype of the lazy Creole—is reflected in the poor management of his estate that results in the dissolution of his fortune. His slaves, Warner writes, who did not hire themselves out (as most of them did), "waited on him, or waited on each other, or, most properly speaking, waited for each other to work" (Joseph 30). However, in spite of the slaves' laziness and the time they spend "eating...sleeping; beating the African drum...dancing, quarrelling, and making love," they are depicted by Warner as loyal and affectionate (Joseph 30-1):

Yet with all the faults of these poor people, I should be unjust did I fail to acknowledge that, to my father and myself, they were most affectionately attached. My parent, like most creole gentlemen of the old school, had high notions with regard to the absolute authority of an owner over his slaves; yet, like most creoles, was an indulgent master and more under the influence of his bond-servants than he himself was aware of, or than the mere European would believe. (Joseph 31)

The master-slave ethic of reciprocal care (or social paternalism), that was expected in the colonial feudal model advocated by planters like Mr. Guthrie, is demonstrated by the relationship between old Arundell and his slaves, who "gratefully recollected [his generosity] when age weighted down his energies," and took care of him giving him "presents...with pride" (Joseph 31, 33). Warner recounts that when he visits his father's plantation in Antigua, which had been seized by lawyers and executors, and "the slaves

learned that I was the son of their own master, their reception of me was painfully affecting... [they] would have risked being flayed alive rather than have allowed me to be insulted” (Joseph 126-7). The manager, Mr. Lowery, who is running Arundell’s Antiguan estate, is an Englishman employed by the legal firm of Messrs. Keen and Leech. This Englishman, like Fillbeer in *Hamel*, subjects the slaves to “the most inhuman treatment which they experienced” demonstrating that—as Warner concludes—“Europeans, in general, make far more oppressive slave-owners than creoles” (Joseph 126).

The scene of Arundell’s visit to his father’s Antiguan estate under the management of the cruel Englishman Lowery, elicits the slaves’ enthusiastic welcome of their rightful owner, and is very similar to the scene in *Hamel*, in which Fairfax returns to Belmont cheered by his father’s slaves. Warner recounts that: “All the old people who remembered the kind treatment which they experienced from my father, kissed me, and wept like children. The whole gang blessed me, and prayed that I might inherit my rights, and become their master” (Joseph 26). Both Fairfax and Arundell are the victims of an unjust legal system that has seized their rightful property, and has placed their plantations under the management of English executors, who mistreat their slaves and steal their profits. Warner explains that “Messrs. Keen and Leech of St. Kitts, who had, to use a Cockney’s expression, ‘done for’ my father’s St. Christopher and Antigua estates; or who, as we say here, were good hands at ‘draining’ plantations,” are greedy and corrupted, as is the entire legal profession (Joseph 40). The names Leech and Lowery clearly reflect Joseph’s opinion of lawyers and managers, echoed in the words of Warner’s aunt: “nobody gets anything from wills in the West Indies but executors,” a

view as pessimistic as that of Dickens' description of Chancery in his famous novel *Bleak House* (Joseph 125).

Arundell is always sensitive to the horrors of slavery, which he condemns. He treats black people as fellow human beings and, for this reasons, Joseph's work seems, at times, to support the end of slavery. However, Warner's loyalties remain ultimately with white Creole society. Black and white people, especially at sea, are portrayed in egalitarian terms, as the sea and the inside of a ship are great levelers, where men are judged by their ability, not by their skin color, or by their class. A sailor's worth is measured according to his seamanship, courage and valor rather than being based on his skin color; therefore, in Joseph's novel, it is not surprising to find a black man in charge of a ship, as in the anecdote of the Muslim slave who sailed a schooner out of danger. Racial hybridity is celebrated, rather than disparaged in *Warner Arundell*, and Warner takes time and pleasure in describing the various ethnicities, religious differences, costumes, dress codes, and dialects of the people he encounters in his travels through the Caribbean Archipelago and Spanish Main, as when he describes at length the multicultural composition of Bolivar's army, through the disparate apparel of its soldiers: "Nothing could be more picturesque than the appearance of the Columbian troops; and in one sense, nothing less military. The men were dressed in all the various habiliments of the English, French, and Spanish armies; and many had the undress of the aboriginal Indians" (Joseph 251).

Warner's humanity towards slaves and his empathy for the leader of the Grenadian Revolution—the historical character Julien Fédon—supports Sally Everson's argument that Joseph's novel is not a pro-planter work, but a subversive text "lurking

within its ‘hidden design,’ or ‘forced poetics,’ not only an anti-abolitionist stance, but also a redemption of slave revolt as a legitimate means for achieving racial equality” (438). Although Warner is sympathetic to Fédon, to whom he owes his life, I disagree with this reading.<sup>182</sup> I argue instead that, although *Warner Arundell* presents many contradictions and, at times, seems to advocate egalitarian relationships between races, this novel ultimately supports a hierarchical Creole society based on slavery and ideologically distinct from England, while it simultaneously opens up a space for more open relationships between Whites and free coloreds, based on a shared Creole identity and on common economic interests. It is with this Creole society that Arundell ultimately identifies as, at the end of the novel, he takes on the status of a planter, through his marriage with a wealthy Spanish Creole lady and through the recovery of his family fortune. While Joseph demonstrates open-mindedness and tolerance towards other races not often seen in West Indian novels by white Creoles, he ultimately affirms his white superiority, even over his mixed-race siblings, while envisioning a hierarchical multi-racial society where brown Creoles like the Arundells can prosper.<sup>183</sup>

One of the moments in the text that better show Arundell’s allegiance with white Creoles is the episode in which he is accused of being a Saint, I mentioned earlier. Warner’s commentary on the condition of slaves in Trinidad, and on slavery in general, prefaces the incident he narrates. He explains that:

Negroes in Trinidad were, generally, well treated...[however] the bondsman’s situation must depend on the disposition of his master or

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<sup>182</sup> Fédon took Warner’s pregnant mother prisoner during the Grenadian Revolution, but after she died of childbirth he returned the infant, Warner, to Bearwell Arundell, his father.

<sup>183</sup> Maria Josefa, with whom Warner falls in love and eventually marries, after a series of adventures, is often described as having poor Castilian blood, to foreground her whiteness, however she is a Spanish Creole with connections to Cuba and Venezuela.



manager. Many have asserted, that all who govern negro slaves in the colonies are monsters. This absurdity is believed by the mass of the people in England; while those who attempted to defend the abominable system of West India slavery, pretend that instances of cruelty never occur. Those who manage slaves have immense power over their happiness; and human power never did, never can, exist without being abused. Great violence has been shewn by the condemners and approvers of colonial slavery: I think, however, it will be found that the crimes of slave-owners, in general, have been exaggerated; but that the system itself was not, in fact could not, be too loudly condemned. Such are my opinions of slavery. (Joseph 318-19)

In this preface to the anecdote of the plantation manager Jacopo, who interestingly is a “foreigner,” Warner establishes two important points. He separates the idea of cruelty and slavery from the class of West Indian Creoles by saying that “great violence has been shewn by the condemners and approvers of colonial slavery,” thus including Englishmen in the indictment of cruelty, and absolving Creoles from the accusation of monstrosity (Joseph 319). Secondly, he vouches for the overall magnanimity of Trinidadian Creoles; thus reducing the incident he narrates to an isolated case of cruelty by a manager who was a foreigner and is described as “a remarkably dark man for an European, and who wore ear-rings” and swore at Arundell in Italian (Joseph 320). By indicting all humanity in the cruelty that often accompanies master-slave relations—as “human power never did, never can, exist without being abused”—Arundell distances the crime from the notion that it is specifically a Creole crime (Joseph 319).

The planter Jacopo, in fact, has flogged his slave so hard he dies, in spite of Arundell’s attempt to save his life. When Arundell denounces Jacopo for the death of the slave, the master flees the island. England’s Anti-slavery Society’s secretary, having found out about Warner’s actions in defense of the slave, writes to him requesting “information on a number of subjects respecting slavery in Trinidad,” to which Arundell replies in the negative, as he sees the letter as “a bribe to become a spy on the community

amongst which I lived” (Joseph 322). Warner rejects, thus, allegiance to the Society writing back that he “did not like to become a member of either the anti-slavery or pro-slavery party” (Joseph 322). In spite of Arundell’s declaration of impartiality, it is clear that his loyalty remains with his neighbors—the “community amongst which I lived”—or the Creole planters, rather than with the distant Englishman, although he clearly disapproves of the actions of cruel masters like Jacopo (Joseph 322). Although Warner refuses to comply with the request of the Anti-Slavery Society, his letter addressed to the Society’s secretary accidentally ends up in the news-room, and Warner is suspected by the pro-slavery party to be a sympathizer of the abolitionist cause, which hurts his medical practice. When an “anti-slavery partisan,” described as a zealot, speaks in Warner’s defense, he does more damage than good (Joseph 323). This man is described by Warner as a man of an “uncontrollable... temper,” “impudent,” and as having a “total disregard for the truth,” who “inflicted an injury on [him] by attempting [his] defense” (Joseph 323). In this incident Warner, rather than blaming his false accusers—the local planters—seems to allocate all faults for the ostracism of which he becomes a victim, on the abolitionist zealot who tries to defend him, believing him to also be an abolitionist. Even as he is made into an outcast by the white Creole community of Trinidad, Arundell seems to understand their reasons for distrusting him.

#### ARUNDELL’S TRIP TO ENGLAND: DISPLACEMENT AND RETURN

Warner Arundell travels to England to study medicine; but never completes his studies and returns to the West Indies on pretext of not having received his monetary allowance from the law firm of Messrs. Keen and Leech, who had sent him to England to get rid of his unwanted presence. During his stay in England, Arundell describes the

customs of the inhabitants of the British Island and compares them to those of the West Indies, as Mary Seacole does when she travels to England. The overall picture of Arundell's stay in his mother country is one of displacement, rendered harsher by the inclemency of the weather. Winer compares Arundell's experience as it is depicted by Joseph to that of West Indian immigrants in twentieth-century Caribbean novels such as Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) and Rhys' female protagonists in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and argues that "Warner experiences the mother country as a place of displacement, loss of privilege, and an absence of nurturing" (xxx). After the initial positive first impression of the "land of freedom," where servants "worked five times as hard as the slaves of the West Indies; for the energies of the latter are weighted down by bondage," Arundell begins to feel the foreignness of the English lifestyle and landscape, and complains that "the smoky atmosphere, unlike aught I ever before beheld, weighted down my spirits" (Joseph 150-51). The three chapters dedicated to Arundell's stay in England are full of a comic sensibility typical of picaresque West Indian novels. Arundell does not hesitate to laugh at both Creoles and Englishmen, comparing their different habits, looks, ways of speaking and pronunciation, rules of hospitality, greetings in the street, manners in giving directions, food, homes, variety of clothing, cleanliness, women's looks etc., as if he was writing a travelogue on the customs and manners of English society for his West Indian countrymen—an intention that is openly stated:

As few or no West Indians have ever given an account of England, I will, for the information of my fellow-colonists as have never crossed the Atlantic, subjoin my recollection of the impressions which England in general, and London in particular, made on me. I wish not to alarm my creole readers by heading the following desultory paragraphs, 'The

*Domestic Manners of the English;*’ I would rather they should consider it as A CREOLE NOTION OF ‘HOME’. (Joseph 153)

The irony of this passage is evident as Joseph alludes to Mrs. A.C. Carmichael’s travelogue about St. Vincent and Trinidad published in 1833 and titled *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies*.<sup>184</sup> By reversing the ethnographic gaze normally pointed towards West Indian Creoles and their slaves, Joseph engenders a critique of England’s sense of superiority over their colonies, as well as satirizing Mrs. Carmichael’s work, which was not well received in the West Indies. Moreover, the above passage, openly acknowledges—in contrast to Joseph’s preface—that, in writing *Warner Arundell*, Joseph had a Creole audience, as well as an English audience, in mind. The word “HOME” written in capitals and quotation marks seems to question the idea of England as “home” of Creoles (and to imply that Creoles’ ideas about England are often misconceptions), affirming, therefore, a Creole identity and consciousness distinct from the motherland<sup>185</sup>.

Although Arundell is a white man, like Seacole he often becomes the object of stereotyping as when a man asks him if he is a foreigner, “Not exactly; I am a West Indian,” he replies; and the man says: “Bless me, sir! You are a West Indian and you are as fair as any Englishman! I thought you natives of the West Indies were *molatoes*

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<sup>184</sup>A.C. Carmichael’s book *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833) is a pro-slavery narrative written in response to abolitionists’ claims that slaves were mistreated in the West Indies. The book focuses mainly on St. Vincent’s and Trinidad’s black populations (See Williamson’s article “Mrs. Carmichael: A Scotswoman in the West Indies: 1820-1826”).

<sup>185</sup> For a different reading of the English chapters, see Cudjoe’s “The Textuality of Colonialism” in *Beyond Boundaries: The Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century*. Cudjoe argues that “A Creole’s Notion of ‘Home’” suggests “A Creole’s sojourn abroad, but not really in a foreign land, but in a country in which he feels at home and that has provided him all his virtues and the means by which to value his achievements” (77). I disagree with this reading, and with Cudjoe’s analysis of London as “a place to be adored and admired” (77). Although Warner might have felt this admiration at his arrival, his experiences in London change his opinion of the motherland, and he is happy to return to his real homeland, the West Indies.

(mulattoes)” (Joseph 165). Arundell laughs at the common English belief that “mulattoes [are] the pure descendants of whites, rendered dark by being born in a torrid climate”; however, it is clear that he feels out of place in England, and that he is perceived as a foreigner, and as inferior to Englishmen because of his colonial birth (Joseph 166). Lucy, the slave of Mr. Rivers, whose family has fallen sick and indigent in a foreign land (England) where they have no connections, sums up Arundell’s opinion of England: “This country cold for true; and everybody heart cold like the country” (Joseph 169).<sup>186</sup> Although Arundell’s tone remains light and the chapters on England are ironic rather than openly confrontational, from Arundell’s narration what transpires is the difference between the network of connections that a white Creole from an old family, and with a name, can count on in the West Indies—even though he has fallen out of fortune—and the lack of solid connections and anonymity he experiences in England, where people fend for themselves and are not governed, in their actions, by the same rules of hospitality and duty towards neighbors and fellow white men that govern Creole society.

Mary Seacole identifies with England and refuses to openly acknowledge the limitations imposed on her by her sex and race; however, ultimately she can only live in English spaces outside England and in contact zones where exceptional circumstances, such as war or disease, level class differences and eliminate racial and gender barriers, allowing egalitarian relationships to form between Seacole and Englishmen. Arundell, on the other hand, returns home where he knows he belongs, differently from Mary Seacole, who experiences feelings of rootlessness and, at the end of her narrative, says that she “had no home to go to” (Seacole 164). However, this idea of “home” in *Warner Arundell*,

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<sup>186</sup> Warner had met Mr. Rivers and his family during the passage to England.

can be ambiguous because it can be questionable where Warner's "real" West Indian home is, as his ancestors "came to the New World when it was possessed by the Spaniards exclusively...and established a settlement in the island of St. Christopher," and his progenitor, Christopher Arundell, was a "Bucanier" before becoming rich and settling in Antigua, showing that Warner shares a taste for adventure with his forefathers (Joseph 7). Warner's father, Bearwell, was born in Antigua, but owned plantations in St. Kitts, Grenada, Antigua, and Trinidad, which makes it difficult to pinpoint a single island as Warner's home. Warner was born in Grenada and raised in Antigua after his father's death. As a young man, he traveled all over the Caribbean unable to stand still, or to settle down in any specific place, which makes him, like Seacole, a wanderer (if not rootless), although he does not experience the same longing for England, nor does he wish to recreate his identity.

In fact, Arundell's trip to England serves to de-mystify the motherland, a place that remains foreign and unwelcoming to him, and Arundell learns that his priorities should lie with the West Indies and not with England. For this reason, even if he has the resources to remain in London, Arundell decides to return to the New World and to go to South America with the Spanish army, as a means of earning a living and a passage home. However, he ends up fighting with the rebel army of General Bolivar to free South America from Spanish control. Winer argues that Arundel's return to the West Indies with a new understanding of his place in the world anticipates "novels of return such as Lamming's *Of Age and Innocence* (1958), V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Man* (1967), and Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980)" (xxx). Warner's cosmopolitanism is different from Seacole's rootlessness as, in spite of his extended

travels, Warner's loyalties remains steadily fixed on the New World. His consciousness is West Indian and his return home is not associated with feelings of non-belonging and homelessness. While Mary Seacole wants to build a space for herself in English society through her actions as a Crimean heroine and through her autobiography, Arundell's focus remains always the New World, notwithstanding his experiences in England. This could be due to their different subject positions and to the historical periods when they write; Seacole is a Jamaican woman of color writing after emancipation (when many free blacks left the colony), Arundell is a white Creole man who writes before emancipation, when Trinidad was still a slave-based economy where white Creoles like Warner were privileged and well connected, even without a fortune.

#### WARNER'S MIXED-RACED SIBILLINGS: A NEW MODEL OF SOCIETY

Arundell is not ashamed of his mixed-race siblings; a fact that comes as a shock, as most novels written by white Creoles in the nineteenth century might be sympathetic to black characters, but their white protagonists remain very race conscious when it comes to their personal relationships, or their family connections with mixed-race family members. In *Creoleana*, for example, although Mr. Fairfield provides for his mixed-race daughter Lucy, she remains in a subordinate position to the legitimate white daughter Caroline, and Caroline is never told that Lucy is her half-sister as the fact would be considered a blemish to her good name. In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the white Creole Antoinette refuses the help of the mixed-race Sandi Cosway because she is "shy about [her] coloured relatives" (Rhys 46).

Winer argues that *Warner Arundell* displays “race optimism,” and “color blindness” not present in other novels of its times, and that the novel rejects the figures of the tragic mulatto and the untrustworthy mulatto of later Caribbean literature, as the Arundell clan are a bunch of happy and successful mulattoes who are well-integrated in their community (xxxiii). I, however, disagree with Winer’s explanation of the reasons for the novel’s “race optimism,” or liberal views on race relations (xxxiii). Winer argues that “the category of race, defined as the privileged dyad black versus white, only became codified in the way we understand it at the end of the nineteenth century,” and therefore *Warner Arundell* is not a race conscious novel, because it was written at the beginning of the century, when the category of “race” did not exist as we know it today (xxxv). The particular historical context in Trinidad, where black or mixed-race masters owned slaves, and where there wasn’t such a marked division between a minority of white slaveholding planters and a majority of black slaves, might have influenced Joseph’s depiction of a more liberal multiracial society, in which “West Indians of mixed race constituted a group (or groups) in their own right, with distinct political aspirations”; however, I think that it is misleading to assume that Joseph was not aware of the widespread rhetoric on the inferiority of Blacks and on the ills of miscegenation, which we can find in writings about the West Indies as early as Long’s *History of Jamaica* (xxxv). Although the construct of “race” was not as developed as it became at the end of the century with the diffusion of social Darwinism and scientific racism, *Warner Arundell*’s Trinidad, like Granada, Antigua, St. Kitts, Jamaica and the other West Indian colonies, was already stratified according to skin color. Arundell recognizes this fact when he says: “my poor sister Jane...feared to accost me, lest, influenced by the abominable prejudice of the West



Indies, I should repulse her sisterly love, and treat her with scorn. Such was the accursed distinction which existed between members of the same family, whose complexion differed” (Joseph 130). Therefore, I don’t think that Winer is correct when she argues that it is anachronistic to talk about race in a discussion of *Warner Arundell*.

Selwyn R. Cudjoe’s reading of race relations in *Warner Arundell* differs from Winer’s and Everson’s more optimistic readings. If Winer considers Joseph to be a liberal in his views on race relations, Everson’s reading of *Warner Arundell* is even more radical. She argues that Joseph was an abolitionist in disguise, and that “through the mulatto figures of Julien Fédon and Rodney Arundell, Joseph suggests the possibility of authentic racial solidarity and a truly modern Creole future that owes its debt to . . . slave revolts,” which the novel supports, through its white Creole protagonist’s solidarity with Fédon and a re-interpretation of the Grenadian Revolution as a “success,” calling for a racially mixed modern Creole society <sup>187</sup> (Everson 440). Very differently from these interpretations, Cudjoe argues that although Arundell appears to welcome the attentions of his mix-race siblings, the novel ultimately upholds white superiority and slavery, and depicts black and mixed-race characters as inferior to Whites.

Cudjoe sees the fact that Joseph chooses not to mention Bearwell Arundell’s brown family, until Warner receives a letter from them, but speaks at length of Warner’s mother as “an angelic being,” as a proof that Joseph condoned this kind of behavior, perceived as normal in Creole society (80). Cudjoe also sees the fact that Joseph passes

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<sup>187</sup> The Grenadian Revolution, or Fédon Rebellion (Mar 1795-June 1796) was fought by Julien Fédon—a mixed-race French Creole—against British troops. Fédon, a free mulatto planter led an army of free coloreds and some slaves, and initiated the revolt by killing a number of English inhabitants of the island. The rebellion was crushed by Gen. Ralph Abercromby. For a discussion of Fédon’s Rebellion see Cox’s “Fédon’s Rebellion 1795-96: Causes and Consequences” 7-19.

no judgment on Bearwell's lack of responsibility for his "nameless," black concubine—nameless as "we learn nothing of the black mother of these 'brown' children...[who] is absolutely erased from history"—as a proof that Joseph considered her and her children inferior to the white side of the Arundell family (80). Unlike the narrator in *Creoleana*, who at least explains that Mr. Fairfield provided for his black mistress when he decided to marry, Joseph completely glosses over Bearwell's indiscretions and lack of responsibility for his brown children, who are described as "neglected and looked down upon in consequence of having committed the sin of bearing a brown complexion," even though they are "respectable" (Joseph 129). Cudjoe argues that Joseph's portrayal of Warner's acceptance of his brown siblings does not signify that Joseph embraces racial equality. On the contrary, Warner's magnanimity "asks us to sympathize with Arundell, to compliment him on his generosity, to recognize his large-heartedness" rather than affirming his siblings' equality (80). This is supported by the meekness with which Warner's brother Rodney introduces himself in his letter: "I hope you will not be offended by your coloured brothers taking the liberty of writing to you...although you are our youngest brother, *you are the head of the family because you are a white man,*" followed by an offer to help his indigent, but white, sibling [emphasis mine] (Joseph 129-30).

Although I think that Joseph comes through as unusually open-minded in his description of the brown branch of the Arundell family, and that the novel contains instances in which it envisages, if not racial equality, certainly the possibility of a modern Trinidadian society, in which multiple races live peacefully and productively side by side in a contact zone, ultimately I agree with Cudjoe's reading of *Warner Arundell*. Joseph's

novel promotes an idealized view of plantocracy as a system of production that simultaneously provides slaves with security, happiness, and guidance, and supports an unspoken understanding of Whites' superiority over other races. Joseph's belief in white superiority is demonstrated by Arundell's refusal to take on his brown brother Rodney's offer: "come and live with us: we will maintain you as a gentleman; and when you are of age, between us we will find money enough to make Keen and Leech give you back your rightful property" (Joseph 130). Although Rodney's wealth allows him to cross racial barriers and contact his white brother Warner to offer him financial help, Warner's choice to take Messrs. Keen and Leech's allowance instead, and go to England, over accepting charity from a brown Arundell, demonstrates that even a novel that seems egalitarian in its treatment of race relations and mixed-race families, ultimately cannot endorse a reversal as that of brown men supporting a white man.

The two branches of the Arundell family are not reunited until the end of the novel when Rodney finds Warner, accused of murder, and defends him unconditionally: "You lie in your throat, to say my poor brother has committed murder. The blood of a murderer has never flowed in the veins of one of my father's children" (Joseph 400). Rodney not only defends his brother's honor, but he is the deliverer of the news that will bring to the reinstatement of Warner's fortunes. Rodney has arrived with "a fine schooner he now owned," bringing good news regarding Warner's rights to his property in the form of a lawyer's letter saying that "if [Warner] would return to St. Christopher's, he (the lawyer) would make Keen and Leech disgorge all the property of which, he said, he could easily prove that they had plundered [Warner]" (Joseph 401). Rodney Arundell clearly identifies with his white father in his defense of his brother and concern for his

brother's affairs; the name Arundell on the lips of the brown Rodney confers honor to all the Arundells, both white and brown.

The identification of the brown Arundells with their paternal, rather than their maternal inheritance, is shown once more when the entire Arundell family is reunited, and one of the many cousins asks Warner about home: "I'm told buddy, you've been 'home;' what sort of a place is England?...I'm told it's rather hot in summer, but r  ly cold in winter" (Joseph 410). Beside the irony of the scene, mimicking the Creole accent, the fact that a mulatto Creole refers to England as "home" shows that the brown branch of the family looks up the color chart, and feels entitled to think of England as "home" because of the white blood in their veins. However, besides the obvious blood ties, the Arundells can enjoy an equal standing with their white brother only because of their wealth, which has increased during Warner's absence as now they own a schooner. In spite of the mutual sympathies that the brown Arundell siblings seem to enjoy in the relationship with their white brother, and in spite of their identification with the English paternal line of the family, rather than with their African maternal heritage, it is clear that Bearwell, notwithstanding his magnanimity to his slaves, did not provide for his mixed-race children. However, his children don't seem to mind; they clearly exonerate their white planter father from guilt. Bearwell's properties—as Winer notes—"are entitled in such a way that there is no legal or ethical imperative for [Warner] to share his father's wealth with his half-siblings" (xxxiii). However, the brown Arundells are conveniently wealthy on their own accord and more interested in sentimental reunions than in their rightful inheritance of the family fortune (xxxiii). This supports, once more, my reading of Joseph's race consciousness and belief in white superiority and entitlement, over even

the “respectable” mixed-race members of the community (Joseph 129). The brown Arundells happily accept their inferiority to their white brother, supporting the righteousness of Joseph’s white consciousness, which comes through in the conclusion of the novel with the marriage between Warner and Maria Josefa.

#### MARRIAGE AS WHITE CREOLE PARTNERSHIP, CREOLE COSMOPOLITANISM AND CITIZENSHIP

Thematic similarities can be drawn between *Warner Arundell* and *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, as well as between *Warner Arundell* and *Hamel, the Obeah Man*. Like Mary Seacole in *Wonderful Adventures*, Warner travels extensively in the Caribbean archipelago and Spanish Main where he practices medicine, often in contact zones, such as the army of General Bolivar, during Latin America’s struggle for independence from the Spanish Empire. Like Mr. Fairfax in *Hamel*, Warner is a white Creole who has been divested of his family fortune through the corruption of lawyers and executors and who, in the end, wins back his ancestral estates and faithful slaves. However, unlike Fairfax who marries an English Creole planter’s daughter, Arundell in the end marries a Spanish Creole lady from an old, influential Castilian family, joining their wealth in a union symbolic of the endurance and continuity of white Creole society, but also of a new cosmopolitan vision of a Pan-American Creole world, in which the interests of Spanish and English Creole families can come together, as symbolized by the union of Warner and Maria Josefa. However, in spite of thematic and generic similarities—*Warner Arundell*, like *Hamel*, is an historical romance and, like *Wonderful Adventures*, it is a picaresque, and a travel narrative—Joseph’s hero’s experiences are very different from the insularity of Mr. Fairfax’s concerns and from the rootlessness of the mixed-race Seacole, who writes after emancipation and from the point

of view of a woman of color. Warner Arundell is a character who is both cosmopolitan and firmly rooted in a white Creole consciousness. Although Joseph presents his readers with a liberal view on race relations and a rejection of the evils of slavery, *Warner Arundell* is simultaneously a pro-slavery and pro-planter novel.

The fact that Arundell is initially destitute of fortune contributes to his liberality and mobility. His travels are extensive and the time Arundell spends at sea (as mentioned earlier) is a time in which he lives in the egalitarian microcosm of a ship, where men are judged by their ability, courage, and camaraderie, rather than by the color of their skin.<sup>188</sup> For example, Warner recounts that the captain of the *Sea Fairy* is a black man, without adding any value-judgment based on race: “The captain of this passage-boat was a negro, called Joe Rogers, a Bermudian, and, like most of his countrymen, or rather fellow-islanders, a marine Jack-of-all-trades; viz. a ship-builder, rigger, sail maker, caulker, sea-cook, wrecker, smuggler, fisher, whale-fisher, pilot, and privateer’s-man” (Joseph 120). Joe Rogers’ most defining quality is that he is a Bermudian, which makes him a versatile sailor, as the list of his skills demonstrates. In another anecdote (as mentioned earlier), a Muslim slave takes charge of a ship and skillfully navigates it through a dangerous passage, demonstrating his seamanship and valor, as well as his loyalty to his white master who is sick with leprosy. Winer draws connections between Joseph’s novel and twentieth-century Caribbean writing about the sea, such as the poetry of Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite, characterized by a “pervasive presence of the sea”; she argues that *Warner Arundell* is “always restless” like the sea, a characteristic often found in later

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<sup>188</sup> Warner travels from Grenada to Antigua, to Trinidad, to Caracas in Venezuela where he studies medicine, back to Trinidad, Antigua and London. When he returns from Europe he goes to St. Thomas, Trinidad, Margarita, Demerara, the French colony of Cayenne, back to Trinidad, Antigua, and ends his travels in Trinidad.

Caribbean texts set in small island communities, which depended on the sea for trade and sustenance more than larger islands, such as Jamaica or Trinidad (xxx). What is important, however, is that, through his travels, Arundell does not become “homeless” like many of the Caribbean writers of the 1950s, such as Lamming or Rhys, or like Mary Seacole. On the contrary, the more Arundell travels the more his sense of self and his loyalties to the New World are strengthened. Although Warner’s wanderings and travels can be read as a sign of rootlessness, I argue that they do not infringe on his sense of identity, given to him by his family name—one of the oldest and most respected in the Caribbean—and by his sense of belonging to white Creole society.

In particular, as I discussed earlier, the trip to London teaches Arundell where his allegiances are. When Warner decides to return to the West Indies and practice medicine there, without obtaining qualifications from the College of Surgeons in London—even though his friend Holywell has offered to help him financially to remain in England—Warner has no regrets, and never looks back to the motherland as “home,” even though his sensibilities remain English, as does his hostility towards French people. He rejects the divisions within the English medical field as unnecessary to practice in the West Indies: “I cared little about [a diploma], because I intended to practice in the West Indies, where the obsolete distinction between physicians and surgeons is little attended to: both branches there, as they ought to be everywhere else, are practiced by the same person” (Joseph 165).<sup>189</sup> Warner’s rejection of the English organization of the medical profession into separate orders functions to affirm his Creole identity and, as in the case of Seacole,

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<sup>189</sup> O’Shaughnessy explains that “Medical graduates were generally British trained because there were no medical schools in the British West Indies...[however] many West Indian practitioners held qualifications from the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons, and Surgeons’ Hall” (26).

“stamps him as a marginal figure in Britain and provides an alternative space for remaking medicine” (Haynes xlix).<sup>190</sup> Like Seacole’s healing skills, Arundell’s knowledge of West Indian diseases—like yellow fever, malaria, tertian fever, or diarrhea—and remedies, alongside his ability to dress wounds, makes him a better doctor than English physicians or surgeons, even if he doesn’t have a formal license. His medical skills help him to get a passage as a ship surgeon back to the West Indies, a job as a general practitioner in Trinidad, a post as a surgeon in General Bolivar’s Army fighting for South America’s independence from Spain, allowing him mobility even when he has no money.

Warner’s travels in the Caribbean Sea and South America demonstrate that, although he has no fortune, his ancestral name helps to open doors in the West Indies, and to grant him the protection of relatives or family friends, a place to live, or an appointment as a doctor. Even if Sir Ralph Woodford, the Governor of Trinidad, not knowing who Warner is, is suspicious at first of the fact that Warner has no proper license, and doubts his medical skills, he is immediately sorry for his mistake upon hearing that Warner comes from an old family: “Sir Ralph, as I was subsequently informed, regretted his harsh treatment of me; more especially when Dr. Chicano, who, it appeared, knew me, informed him that I was nephew to an old and respectable colonist of this island. He made enquiries about my character: these satisfied him, and added to his regret of having offended me” (Joseph 232).<sup>191</sup> Although Warner is a poor white man

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<sup>190</sup> In the nineteenth century the medical profession was divided into three branches: physicians who cured illnesses, surgeons who cut out diseases, and apothecaries who prepared physicians’ prescriptions. The role of the general practitioner emerged in the eighteenth century due to the increased demand for doctors in England (See Haynes xlvii-*lii*).

<sup>191</sup> Sir Ralph Woodford (1784-1828) was the first non-military governor of Trinidad from 1813 to 1828, when he died at sea. Trinidad was an English colony since the Treaty of Amiens with Spain gave the



with a respectable name as his only capital, he gets around thanks to a network of connections that allows him to survive, and even thrive, everywhere he goes.

Arundell's linguistic ability also helps him assimilate in the many islands he visits, turning his experience into an example of West Indian cosmopolitanism.<sup>192</sup> Like Seacole, Warner is also restless at times, as when he explains: "I soon became wearied with the sameness of Antigua's scenery, and its Lundy-foot coloured soil. This caused me to visit St. Christopher's" (Joseph 127). However, unlike Seacole, who has to grapple with her identity as a woman of color after Emancipation, Warner's sense of self remains stable throughout the narrative. His desire to travel is mostly a desire to visit new lands, and to observe and describe their flora and fauna, as well as their culture and customs, to English readers, not an effort to forge a new identity or to prove his Englishness.<sup>193</sup> Warner is always comfortable and proud to be a Creole and a member of the Arundell family.

Warner's Creole consciousness transpires in the choices he makes at the end of the novel. Like *Hamel, the Obeah Man* and *Creoleana*, this novel ends in a marriage that affirms the influence and wealth of white Creole plantocracy. *Warner Arundell* follows a

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British formal possession of the colony in 1802, after Abercromby's invasion of 1787. Due to the terms of the treaty, the British maintained the Spanish legal system until 1840s, ruling over a population, which was, for the majority, Catholic French Creole. Woodford was a sympathizer of Catholicism having lived in Madera; his father was also a sympathizer of Catholicism. Woodford responded directly to the British Parliament, under the Crown Colony System (See L.M. Fraser, *History of Trinidad: 1814-1839*, vol. 2). Joseph's depiction of Woodford, alongside other influential contemporary figures and elite members of the Trinidadian Creole community, engendered a critique of Joseph's novel after its publication.

<sup>192</sup> Arundell is fluent in English, English Creole, Latin, French Creole, and Spanish; his multilingual proficiency allows him to cross cultural borders and communicate in a hybrid New World.

<sup>193</sup> Cudjoe argues that Joseph's rendition of the flora and fauna of the West Indies, and in particular of the island of Trinidad, contributes to the "Caribbean feel" of the novel (72). The description of natural scenes—like the multitude of hummingbirds that welcomes Warner at his arrival in Port of Spain, and gives the name to the island of Trinidad (originally named "Iere" or island of the humming-bird by the aborigines)—contributes to create a distinctive Trinidadian sensibility, as "the author names the sounds and the sights that are associated specifically with the island of Trinidad and Tobago" (Cudjoe 73).

similar pattern in its conclusion. Like Fairfax, Warner has been divested of his property by lawyers and executors and shares the same distrust for the legal profession (and the Trinidadian Spanish legal system) that we find in *Hamel*.<sup>194</sup> However, by the end of the novel, Warner's right to his paternal inheritance is reaffirmed and he can happily relinquish his existence as a wanderer, and comfortably settle down in his role as a planter and slave owner. Joseph's support of slavery and white plantocracy becomes evident in Warner's final remarks:

I proposed the following arrangement. I was to receive the two plantations free of debt. Leech was to give up the last year's crops of both estates, pay all the law charges, including a gratuity of one thousand pound sterling to my lawyer, and give me, over and above, twenty thousand pounds. These terms older Leech readily acceded to; but he never more held up his head. His daughter, after his death, married one of my cousins. It was a glorious day on both my plantations when I took charge of them. Oxen were roasted, and the poor slaves wept with joy. Under the direction of Keen and Leech they were overworked and ill-treated; under my father they were well off. I promised to follow up my parents' system, and I hope I have kept my word. *I believe that my people are as happy and contented as any laborer on earth. To have emancipated them before the glorious measure of general freedom was taken by the English nation, would not have served them so well as treating them humanely as bondsmen. I believe, had I offered freedom to any of my people, prior to the general emancipation, the boon would not have been considered a favor.* [emphasis mine] (420)

The last part of this passage, italicized, constitutes a direct response to English abolitionists who argued that slavery in the West Indies was always inhumane, slaves

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<sup>194</sup> The Trinidadian legal system, at the time *Warner Arundell* is set, was a combination of Spanish criminal and civil laws with some alterations; English laws mostly regulating the fields of trade, navigation, and mutiny. Although Trinidad became a British Colony in 1797, Spanish law was continued until the 1840s, notwithstanding the inefficiency of the system. A Commission from England examined it in 1827, but it only made small changes in laws on slavery. The commission concluded that the colony was not ready for a drastic reformation of its legal system, and, in particular, for the introduction of trial by jury. The committee advised that the change should be gradual. Few changes were made before the 1840s, such as the introduction of Habeas Corpus in 1832 and the reduction of the age of majority to twenty-one. Laws were often confusing and difficult to apply. This was due to the difficulty to translate Spanish technical terms, as their meaning was not always clear (See Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Translation* 182-83). Joseph distrusts Trinidadian laws and lawyers, whom he describes as corrupted and incompetent.

were flogged all the time, and lived in horrible conditions. Joseph partakes in the nineteenth-century debate comparing the condition of slaves to that of English factory workers, in which the pro-slavery faction argued that West Indian slaves were happier and better-treated than English laborers.<sup>195</sup> Joseph's views, expressed through his protagonist Warner, also reflect the position—shared by planters—that slaves were not ready for immediate emancipation and that amelioration was the best way to secure slaves' happiness and well-being. Like Williams, Joseph believes that often English masters were more cruel than Creoles, and argues for a paternalistic model of slavery in which responsible and caring owners acted as father figures to their slaves, who were generally viewed as children, incapable to make their own decisions, and thus in need of guidance and authority. Although Arundell is, in many ways, liberal in his views on slavery and in his treatment of black people, ultimately he settles in his role of planter, like Jack Goldacre and Oliver Fairfax, and thence “Warner Arundell has no more adventures to recount” (Joseph 436).

Arundell's choice of bride also reflects his Creole consciousness and Creole cosmopolitanism. Cudjoe argues that, “just when the colonial order is threatened, it is saved with the union of the descendants of two distinguished Creole families as if to suggest that they are the legitimate heirs of the New World heritage” (82). However, in the above passage, quoted from the conclusion of the novel, another marriage is mentioned; that of the white daughter of Mr. Leech who “after his death, married one of [Arundell's] cousins” (Joseph 420). This other marriage, mentioned without further comment, seems to counterbalance the marriage of Wa

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<sup>195</sup> For a discussion of this debate see Catherine Gallagher's *Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* 3-35.

rner and Maria Josefa (whom Cudjoe considers to be white, although she is of Spanish lineage, rather than British descent), and to cast doubts on Joseph's white Creole consciousness and belief in white superiority, argued by Cudjoe. However, I claim that the two marriages are only apparently in contradiction to each other. Warner and Maria Josefa represent nobility, both in their deeds and their ancestry (although her Spanish lineage might cast doubts on her whiteness), as he is the quintessential Creole gentleman, who returns the treasure he has found to its proper owner, and she is "an altruistic member of the Castilian race who served the wounded during the South American war of independence," and a model of Creole femininity (Cudjoe 82). While Cudjoe argues that "the lineage of the idealized Maria Josefa contrasts with the bastard origins of the non-English women of African descent, and Maria's union with Warner is meant to discourage transracial relationships," I disagree with such a one-sided reading of the text, which is not supported by the other marriage; the mixed-race marriage between the white daughter of Leech and Arundell's brown cousin (82).<sup>196</sup> On the contrary, I think that, although the fact that Arundell marries a rich Spanish Creole and becomes a planter and slaveholder is significant in a reading of the underlying pro-slavery ideology of this novel, *Warner Arundell* simultaneously envisages the development of a new, modern, post-emancipation Creole society, in which an English Creole from the English-ruled Trinidad (or Antigua, or Barbados), can unite with a Catholic, Spanish Creole he has met during the Latin American War of Independence. The marriage of Warner and Maria Josefa seems to encourage a cross-island and cross-national pan-Atlantic membership of white Creoles, as we find it in Sansay's *Secret History*, and Warner's involvement in the

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<sup>196</sup> Moreover, the fact that Maria Josefa is a Catholic of Spanish descent attests to Warner's open-mindedness, at a time when Englishmen would have frowned on such a choice.

liberation of South America from Spain might suggest that English colonies should also seek independence. Simultaneously, through the marriage of Leech's daughter and a brown Arundell, Joseph seems to allow for the presence, within Trinidadian society, of a new mixed-race class that, although not equal to the white Arundells, has carved a space in the community based on their wealth and entrepreneurialship. The marriage between a white woman and a brown man is not openly condemned by Warner Arundell, making Joseph's text even more modern than later novels by white Caribbean authors, who remain influenced by racial hierarchies and social stratification.

### CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the three texts on which I focused my attention in this chapter—*Hamel*, *Creoleana*, and *Warner Arundell*—share a common white Creole perspective on the events they narrate, as they are written to validate—albeit in different ways and within diverse historical contexts—a white Creole identity and consciousness that, in these novels, is often juxtaposed to Europe and to Britain's political and economic agenda and control over its colonies. The juxtaposition between Europe and the New World, and between Britain and its Caribbean colonies, transpires in the representation of outsiders within West Indian Creole communities. These outsiders are depicted in humorous or disparaging terms—as in the descriptions of the lawyer Fillbeer, in *Hamel*, of Goldacre's Irish antagonist, Mac Flashby, in *Creoleana*, and of the planter Jacopo and the manager Lowery, in *Warner Arundell*—or as dangerous presences meddling with Creole affairs—as in the account of the missionary Roland's nefarious influence in Combah's uprising, in *Hamel*.

Although the novels' white characters and authors identify with England in terms of common values, ancestry, history, and cultural referents, and often make comparisons between England's colonial rule and civilizing mission and the corruption of the Spanish and French colonial governments, as in *Warner Arundell*, the novels simultaneously declare their ideological separation from Britain's politico-economic policies interfering with colonial interests, even though they do not go as far as advocating independence. These novels engender contradictions, while they support a white Creole ideology. They depict Europe—and England—as outsiders to white Creole interest, but claim cultural membership to the English nation. They portray the West Indies as the emotional center of their narratives, and Europe as “other,” as in the description of Warner's sense of displacement and estrangement during his permanence in England. However, while they relegate the motherland, or the “Old World,” to the margins of their narratives, these novels adapt English literary genres, and make allusions to English writers, to demonstrate their authors' knowledge of metropolitan literary models, as they write primarily for an English audience, from which they seek cultural recognition.

Finally, the novels I analyzed share a pro-slavery point of view, in spite of their more or less sporadic acknowledgment of the horrors of slavery when practiced by cruel slave-owners, and in spite of their shared understanding that slavery is doomed to end. Williams', Orderson's, and Joseph's novels, as well as other nineteenth-century Caribbean texts such as *Marly* and *Montgomery* (whether they were published before or after 1834), are all set in a pre-emancipation British Empire. They share a vision of a pro-slavery Caribbean society based on paternalistic relations of care, and a belief that emancipation should happen as slowly as possible and through a gradual process of

amelioration, as slaves are not ready to be emancipated (an argument common to most West Indian planters, and used to oppose the views of abolitionists and to delay emancipation). Only *Warner Arundell* seems to envisage the possibility of racial border-crossings and mixed-race marriages, in a society where a new class of free coloreds can prosper alongside white Creoles, in a process of creolization that anticipates the twentieth-century.

## Conclusion

### **CREOLE CONSCIOUSNESS: FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY WEST INDIAN NOVELS TO TWENTIETH-CENTURY CARIBBEAN LITERATURE**

It is difficult to chart the development of the figure of the Creole, in nineteenth-century Anglophone transatlantic literature, in a straight line, because this figure is riddled with many contradictions, which are dictated primarily by differences in skin-color, but also by other distinctions. Among these are gender distinctions and varied historical-political conditions specific to different geographical locations, such as the post-American-Revolution's split between West Indian Creoles and American citizens, as the New Republic goes through a process of "un-becoming Creole," delineated in Sean X. Goudie's *Creole America* (11). Other distinctions that affect definitions of the literary West Indian Creole are connected to multiple historical transformations that occurred in the course of the nineteenth-century, after the acquisition of independence by the North American British Colonies. Particularly, the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807, and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, influence the ways in which black Creoles see themselves, and the reaction of white Creoles to sweeping changes, not only political but also economic, as these major historical events had enormous consequences on economic production in the West Indies, as well as on the ways in which black and white Creoles began to move in oppositional ideological directions, in the years that followed the Haitian Revolution.

While white Creole planters distanced themselves ideologically from their motherland in the thirty years that passed from the end of the Haitian Revolution to the



abolition of slavery in all British colonies, a growing number of mixed-race and black Creoles began to consider themselves British subjects, as they believed that they were kept in bondage by their Creole masters against the will of the English Parliament, which, they thought, had set them free in 1772 and 1807. This increased animosity between slaves and masters, fuelled by abolitionist and missionary propaganda, produced, on the part of white Creoles, a rising sense of insecurity, as they felt that slavery was about to come to an end, threatening both their livelihood as planters, and their personal safety as a white minority living within an overwhelming black majority; and they blamed the motherland for their troubles.

Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, in *An Empire Divided*, highlights the economic, and ideological reasons why the British West Indian colonies never joined their North American neighbors in their fight for economic and, later, political independence from Britain, although many West Indian colonialists were unhappy with their motherland, adducing multiple reasons for the decision of the West Indian colonies to support the English Parliament. Among these reasons are: stronger cultural ties to the motherland than North America; less developed infrastructures, such as schools, that prompted West Indian Creoles to send their children back to England for an education (which contributed to consolidating already solid cultural ties), and to consider their residence in the colonies as temporary; intermarriages between West Indian Creoles and English aristocrats; a higher white mortality rate due to tropical diseases, which resulted in a slower white population growth coupled with an increase in the importation of African slaves to work in expanding sugar plantations; the creation of an economic monopoly where few large planters owned all the land resulting in a near absence of small farmers and diversified

agricultural production that could have guaranteed economic independence from British imports; an abundance of West Indian absentee planters versus a larger North American small farming community who considered the colony as their new homeland (often having left England to attain religious or political freedom); geographical factors, such as the insularity of the Caribbean islands, separated by the sea and often mountains, which rendered military unity difficult and made West Indian colonies an easier target for both invasion by other European powers and Blacks' uprisings (such as Maroon wars and slave revolts), prompting West Indian colonialists to seek the military protection of the motherland unlike their North American neighbors, whose territory was easier to defend from invasion and who experienced fewer slave insurrections.<sup>197</sup>

British West Indian colonies, as O'Shaughnessy persuasively argues, did not wish to become independent from Britain in the years that preceded the American War of Independence and at the outbreak of the conflict between the motherland and its North American colonies, and thus maintained a distanced approach from their neighbors' plight, stemming mostly from the perception of their military weakness and fear of slave revolts, and from their self-interest, which they put before larger ideological claims to liberty. However, as I have shown, in the years that followed the American Revolutionary War and, in particular, in the course of the first three decades of the nineteenth-century, British West Indian colonists became more and more dissatisfied with the policies of the motherland with regard to colonial administration, and in particular with England's propaganda against plantation slavery. The ongoing discourse on the viability of West Indian slavery crossed the Atlantic Ocean multiple times, as is reflected in the fiction that

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<sup>197</sup> See O'Shaughnessy's *An Empire Divided* 3-33.

is produced by American, British and Caribbean Creole authors, in the first half of the nineteenth-century. The works of fiction I analyzed in this project highlight the diversity of interpretations and meanings the figure of the West Indian Creole assumes in American, British, and West Indian nineteenth-century novels, and the contradictions inherent in texts written on both sides of the Atlantic.

Although it is impossible to extrapolate a fixed definition of the characteristics of West Indian Creoles that will fit all the novels I included in this project (and the many texts I had to leave out), by glancing at these diverse texts what transpires is the centrality of literary Creoles in some works of fiction produced in the first half of the nineteenth-century, even if often Creole characters are relegated to a position of marginality. Creole characters, at the margins of the British and American novels, attest to the complex and troubled relationship between England and its colonies, on the one hand, and to the ways in which the new American Republic tries to redefine its non-Creole identity, in opposition to the West Indian Creole, on the other hand. Nineteenth-century British and American novels, such as *Jane Eyre* or *Arthur Mervyn*, which depict Creole figures as marginal to the national standard of citizenship, often embody the contradictions inherent in the tension between the desire to maintain an ideological division between Creoles and the homeland in developing notions of identity, citizenship and self-representation, and the inevitable imbrications with the West Indies brought about by war, politics, commerce, disease, and the flow of peoples and capital. In both nineteenth-century British novels and post-Independence American novels, Creole figures are depicted as always deviant and falling short of the standard set by, on the one hand, “true” British citizens living in the homeland and, on the other hand, “new” American citizens.

However, it is the very insistence on Creoles' marginality in works by British or American writers that makes literary Creoles so important to understanding the crisis of identity that characterizes this particular historical period, in which both England and the New Republic try to re-define their role in a changing world and, in the process, must wrestle with larger ideological issues and answer uncomfortable questions, such as the viability and justice of an economic system based on the exploitation of other human beings: plantation slavery. Depending on the specific agenda and ideological positioning of a particular author, the answers to these life-altering questions vary, and, as I have explained in chapter 1, the New Republic approaches the problem of slavery differently from Britain.

In fact, as Ashli White argues in *Encountering Revolution*, the New Republic uses the Haitian Revolution to reach paradoxical conclusions—different from those reached by England in 1833—as the ensuing immigration to U.S. cities of French ex-colonists from Saint Domingue, instead of discouraging the continuation of the practice of slavery in the United States, serves to bolster the New Republic's system of slavery and, simultaneously, shapes the development of notions of American exceptionalism. In fact the New Republic, by comparing itself to French colonialists, makes a distinction between the brand of slavery practiced in Saint Domingue and the more humane treatment of slaves in the United States, which results, paradoxically, in the expansion of the practice of slavery (which endured until 1865), in spite of the obvious contradictions between the slave-holding Republic that the United States was, and the democratic principles on which the American constitution was founded. In spite of the growing fears of slave revolts, translated in metaphors of contagions, exemplified in my reading of

Brown's novel *Arthur Mervyn*, the United States resolves its crisis of identity by distancing itself ideologically from European colonial powers, through a critique of West Indian Creoles, and through an attempt to separate the new identity of the American citizen from its Creole past, and from the figure of the West Indian Creole. However, as I have demonstrated in my reading of *Arthur Mervyn*, which expands on the scholarship of Sean X. Goudie, these attempts to insulate the United States from its Caribbean (and South American) neighbors prove hard to maintain.

Conversely, Britain experiences a similar identity crisis expressed through a set of fears of contamination by West Indians of the English domestic space. These fears are exemplified by novels in which the threatening presence of the Creole—or more broadly of the dark “other”—reaches home: novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (discussed in chapter 2), or Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (not part of this project). The presence of Creoles in domestic novels by English authors dramatizes the fear that a protracted residence in the colonies would result in a loss of Englishness; or, in other words, that the English would cease to be English, and that changes in the manners, habits, speech patterns, and morals of Creoles would be passed down to their offspring who would no longer resemble English men and women. These fears are exemplified in the depiction, in novels such as *Jane Eyre*, of Creole figures who showed their degeneracy in their physical traits, which were relentlessly studied through nineteenth-century “sciences” such as phrenology and physiognomy (which associated specific physical traits with personality traits), as shown in my analysis of the description of Richard Mason in Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*. But more importantly, the fear of the Creole invading the English space is conflated to fears of miscegenation and of the

presence in England of dark “foreigners,” coming from the colonies and contaminating the motherland.<sup>198</sup> This fear is illustrated in novels such as *Wuthering Heights* with the arrival of the dark (not necessarily Creole) and “nameless” (as he has no ancestry) character Heathcliff, who will destroy two generations of Earnshaws and Lintons. British fears of miscegenation are also reflected in George Osborne’s rejection—notwithstanding her wealth—of Miss Swartz, the mulatto Creole heiress from St. Kitts, as I argued in my reading of *Vanity Fair*.

West Indian Creole characters in British and American fiction, therefore, are seldom depicted realistically, as they represent not real Creoles but the sum of contemporary cultural and racial stereotypes. Literary Creoles reflect the ways in which American and English citizens come to terms with the uncertainties brought about by slavery, transatlantic commerce, travel and immigration, as well as with the reconfiguring of geopolitical space due to wars and revolutions. By positing the Creole vis-à-vis the new American or the English citizen, nineteenth-century writers try to exorcize fears associated with the backlash of modernity; with a world in which “brown” people can no longer be contained within specific geographical sites, or where the colonies have the power to transform the motherland. In this sense the literary Creole serves (and often fails) to construct Englishness or to separate the exceptional identity of American citizen from the rest of the Atlantic World.

However, these canonical texts depicting Creoles in stereotypical ways present contradictions that seem at odds with their authors’ stated (and inferred) intentions, as I

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<sup>198</sup> Fear of foreign invasion and of brown Others entering the English domestic space was not limited to Creoles and their black servants, but was connected to increased immigration from Eastern European countries, and other parts of the British Empire, such as its Eastern colonies. The fear of foreign invasion of the home space is often dramatized through the genre of the gothic, as I have shown.

tried to demonstrate by reading novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *Vanity Fair*, *Arthur Mervyn*, and *Secret History* against the grain. Although none of these works (except perhaps Sansay's *Secret History*) offer a realistic portrayal of Creoles, I tried to identify specific instances in the texts in which I show that these British and American authors, who relegate their Creole characters to the margins of their novels or describe them as degenerate, unchaste, lazy, and even crazy, tell us much more than they intended—often by means of gaps in the narrative, speech acts by Creole characters, silences, and analogies. So, for example, I attempted to analyze the figure of Bertha Mason by giving meaning to the silences in the text and by reading Bertha's suicide as an act of re-empowerment, arguing that it is her actions in the novel that are the biggest catalysts of change. In my analysis of Miss Swartz, the mulatto Creole in *Vanity Fair*, I tried to establish Rhoda's historical significance through an analysis of Thackeray's own background as a "colonial" writer—arguing that his connections with India influenced his depiction of Miss Swartz—and by comparing Rhoda's apotheosis to other female characters, such as Amelia and Becky, who in spite of their Englishness undergo a spiral downward trajectory that undermines their superiority.

Canonical novels, in spite of their authors' stereotyping of Creoles, depict a modern world in which Creole figures are central to the economy of both England and the United States, as they are closely linked to wealth and transatlantic commerce. These novels also show that places like London, Liverpool, and Philadelphia become cosmopolitan centers in which peoples from different ethnic backgrounds intermingle and infiltrate mainstream cultural practices, affecting cultural reproduction. As Berman argues in *Creole Crossings*, the figure of the Creole in domestic British literature "linked

peripheries to central organs, and central organs to peripheries,” and the Creole woman, in particular, is the figure that can best cross geopolitical borders, as she represents the link between the public sphere of antislavery reform, and the private sphere of domestic reform (189). Berman, therefore, argues that Creole female characters, in domestic British fiction, serve to expand the parameters of belonging and citizenship, as “a transracial and transnational type such as the Creole serves as a key experimental field for the development of racial and national distinctions” (188-89). The female Creole, thus, is the figure that can best represent the “promise—as well as the limitations—of ‘domestic’ political enfranchisement within expanding nations,” as she serves as a “test case for national belonging generally, as well as for the sex and/or gender norms that were thought to ensure the future of nations” (Berman 188). Figures such as Miss Swartz demonstrate exactly the ways in which Creole women serve to expand notions of what it means to be British, by infiltrating domestic space, through marriage and the birth of offspring that will have a claim to Englishness, changing the meaning of what constitutes national belonging. England, and in particular London, as they are depicted in *Vanity Fair*, represent the “cosmopolitanization” of the homeland, and of what it means to be English.

Male Anglophone Caribbean émigré writers who lived and published in England in the 1950s, such as George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul, were considered, for a long time, to be the forefathers of Caribbean literature, which did not exist—as Lamming claims—before they began to write. These intellectuals shaped the canon of Caribbean literature for the generations to come, as they were the first West Indians to write about the experience of being born and educated in the colonies, and about what it meant to be



a colonial writer aspiring to metropolitan recognition, when British history, the history of colonization, and English cultural models functioned as “a calculated cutting down to size of all non-English” (*Pleasures of Exile* 27).<sup>199</sup> Although other Caribbean writers published between the 1840s and the 1940s, as Leah Reade Rosenberg explains in *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007), the male émigré writers of the 1950s-60s shaped the canon, as Caribbean literature became associated with the Caribbean peasantry, and these authors, living in exile, “dedicated themselves to establishing authentic national literature based on working-class and peasant culture [referring] to this national, folk literature as the soul of the nation or the pride of the people” (Rosenberg 1).<sup>200</sup> Twentieth-century Caribbean literature, like earlier literature, is political in its intent; however, while colonial authors used literature as “part of an argument for Caribbean political rights, because both British and West Indian intellectuals regarded literature as evidence of a people’s cultural legitimacy and political competence,” post-independence literature served to “claim the right to determine national culture,” which came to correspond with the voice of the West Indian folk (3).<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Although I have occasionally made reference to works by twentieth-century Caribbean writers a more in depth discussion of works written by Caribbean authors in the twentieth century falls out of the parameters of this project, although it might be the focus of future research.

<sup>200</sup> Caribbean intellectuals of the 1950s, such as Lamming and Naipaul, lived in exile because they felt that their West Indian islands did not have a readership that cared enough about art and literature produced by fellow West Indians; they felt that they had to prove themselves in England and Europe and impress a metropolitan audience before they could get the attention of a Caribbean readership, which was in any case very small. However, they considered their contribution to Caribbean history and literature as indispensable in the process of decolonization.

<sup>201</sup> The emergence of national literature corresponds with the expansion of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean, and with the ongoing discourse, within intellectual circles, on the prospects of annexation to the United States (Rosenberg 3). An in-depth discussion of twenty-century Caribbean literature and nationalism is not within the scope of this project, which focuses on West Indian Creoles during the first half of the nineteenth century. For an analysis of the impact of nationalistic movements in the formation of Caribbean literature see Rosenberg’s study.

However, the recent re-discovery of many texts written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century by West Indian authors (which are not included in Rosenberg's analysis, and which have been the focus of my project), demonstrates the existence of a rich West Indian literary tradition prior to the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In the course of this project, I examined some of these novels, recently rediscovered—and written by West Indian Creoles prior to, and right after, emancipation—to try to establish the existence of a West Indian consciousness in these early works of fiction, and to determine the manner in which West Indian Creole writers responded to the ways in which British and American authors (but also public opinion, political pamphlets, newspapers, and magazine articles) depicted them. The political context in which many of these authors (often white Creoles, connected to West Indian plantocracy) write is that of the ongoing debate on the abolition of slavery.

In my reading of texts by white West Indian Creoles—*Hamel, the Obeah Man*, *Creoleana*, and *Warner Arundell*—I have, surprisingly, come across many contradictions, as I also found in novels by British and American authors. In an effort to consolidate what may appear to be a very diverse set of texts, I tried to map the multiple contradictions that characterize works by West Indian Creoles in the nineteenth century, to reach an inclusive picture of the cultural forces in action at the time these authors write. Contradictions are found, primarily, in the ways in which black Creole characters are described in texts by white Creole authors, who often use Blacks as mouthpieces for plantocracy's political agendas (as in Williams' novel). These contradictions demonstrate the tension between white Creoles' desire to depict plantation slavery as a paternalistic institution—which guaranteed the welfare of both masters and slaves, and which slaves

welcomed as a lifestyle preferable to wage labor—and the contrasting reality of black rebellion and violence that conflicted with an overarching discourse promoted by anti-abolitionists about the magnanimity of white Creole planters. Contradictions also exist between the fluidity of race relations depicted by West Indian authors, and the rigidity of a class system based on the color scale, as demonstrated by my reading of the two quadroon female characters, Michal and Lucy, in *Hamel* and *Creoleana*. In my analysis of these novels I argued that Williams, Orderson, and Joseph present a fluid society in which white and black Creoles can form close relationships of mutual dependence and shared cultural understandings that demonstrate the effects of creolization (as defined by Brathwaite in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* and *Contradictory Omens*) on the growth of a West Indian consciousness, as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The novels I analyze in chapter 3 further attest to the existence of a well-defined white Creole consciousness, operating in opposition to English outsiders and to the nefarious interference of the motherland with colonial administration. These novels (as well as other West Indian texts I did not discuss in depth, but which I mentioned in my introduction and in chapter 3, such as the anonymous *Marly*) juxtapose West Indian Creoles (white and black) to European and English strangers, reversing the geopolitical parameters of center and periphery by depicting England as the margin and the Caribbean island as the center of the narrative. The English geographical and cultural landscape thus becomes alien, as I showed in my reading of Warner Arundell's sojourn in London. Novels written by West Indian Creoles respond to the stereotypical depictions of Creoles present in canonical English and American literature, by substituting representations of

Creoles as marginal, deviant figures—as portrayed in novels such as *Jane Eyre* or *Arthur Mervyn*—with representations in which the colony, and its Creole inhabitants, become the center of the fictional world, and Creoles (even black ones) are given a voice.

White Creoles use fiction, autobiographies, histories, and treaties to defend themselves from the accusation of being cruel, unrefined, and depraved, and of supporting a system of production, which debases both the slaves and their owners. They respond to these accusations by defending slavery as preferable to England’s exploitation of factory and textile workers, and by practicing identity repair—embodying feudal qualities such as honor, chivalry, and hospitality, which define the Creole character in opposition to “the white varlets in England” and the “old stupid world”—thus effectively re-writing the figure of the literary Creole (Williams 98, 100). However, while West Indian authors reject the ways in which Creoles are portrayed in English public opinion and endeavor to re-write their literary identity, they do this by borrowing from English models and by citing canonical seventeenth and eighteenth century masters of the English language to prove that they are as refined as the metropolitan audience for whom they write. As Simon Gikandi argues in *Maps of Englishness*, Creoles wrote within the British literary tradition, and simultaneously challenged that tradition. This is evident in texts such as *Creoleana*, which depicts the romance between the heirs of two Creole families using the lofty language of sentimentality to prove the affinity of these virtuous Creole characters with the novel’s intended English audience. While English genres—such as the imperial romance, the picaresque, and the gothic—are often adapted to the historical and political reality of the West Indies, and to the Caribbean landscape, the preoccupation of Creole authors to demonstrate their erudition and familiarity with the English literary

canon anticipates the dilemma of twentieth-century Caribbean writers, such as George Lamming and the other émigrés, who felt that the only way their writing could be validated was if they received metropolitan attention. Like later Caribbean writers, these early Creole authors “faced the dilemma of creating authentic modern culture for a region that European discourses had defined as the antithesis of the modern...and depended in their efforts on European intellectual traditions that defined the Caribbean as uncivilized and primitive” (Rosenberg 5). Thus, novels written by West Indian Creoles engender contradictions between their rejection of England’s economic and political interference with colonial affairs (which, however, falls short of a coherent discourse of independence), and their affirmation of the cultural ties shared with England, through the authors’ choices of audience and literary styles.

Notwithstanding their imitation of English literary models, these novels anticipate some of the characteristics of later Caribbean literature, such as the use of Creole dialects and code switching, often without translation or explanation, which imitates the linguistic hybridity of the Caribbean in the nineteenth century and demonstrates again, the process of creolization underway as white Creoles spoke and understood the dialects of their black slaves, and often engaged in code switching as shown in dialogues in *Creoleana* and *Warner Arundell*. Other characteristics that anticipate twentieth-century Caribbean literature can be found in nineteenth-century texts by Creole authors, such as a focus on West Indian community concerns—often translated into social activism—and an emphasis on race relations among members of these communities. As I mentioned earlier, novels by white Creoles depict fluid relations between races but, at the same time, seem to support divisions based on racial hierarchies, especially between slaves, free colored

people, and Whites, and between black and mixed-race Creoles. These divisions, which intensified with the growth of the sugar industry and are generally more marked in colonies such as Jamaica, the biggest British sugar producer, with higher percentages of Blacks than Barbados and Trinidad (which had a large free-colored population), are the cause of what Brathwaite considers the failure of creolization in Jamaica.

Brathwaite, in fact, argues that Whites failed to recognize what they had in common with free colored people, although he also considers free coloreds as the bridge that unites Whites and Blacks in the process of creolization. Brathwaite claims that instead of forming real cross-racial alliances that would have allowed West Indian colonies, such as Jamaica, to become politically independent from their motherland, white Creoles preferred to maintain, and even cherished, their connections with English metropolitan cultural models, which they imitated, both in literature and in daily life. Free coloreds and elite Blacks also imitated the behaviors and tastes of white Creoles, disavowing their own Afro-Creole cultural inheritance. If this is true, as Brathwaite argues, for colonies such as Jamaica, Joseph provides the readers with a different outlook on race relations in other West Indian communities, such as Trinidad—which had a high percentage of wealthy free coloreds, as it had only been a sugar colony for fifty years—describing cross-racial semi-egalitarian alliances, while maintaining a pro-slavery stance. Winer describes Joseph's racial open-mindedness as “color blindness” and argues that his positive approach towards other races remained unheard of in many twenty-century Caribbean novels, which do not demonstrate the same race optimism as *Warner Arundell* (xxxiii).

Caribbean fiction written in the twentieth-century is politically engaged, and generally written by Afro-Caribbean authors. It focuses on the peasant experience, and on the condition of black people following emancipation and later independence; a condition that often is one of dislocation, exile, and rootlessness. Lamming, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, writes: “For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labor. He became, through the novelist’s eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality” (39). However, Lamming and the other émigré intellectuals wrote about West Indian peasants from outside the West Indies, “divorced from the peoples they represented and the societies their work was to transform,” a position that is problematic and highlights the presence of contradictions also in twentieth-century Caribbean literature (Rosenberg 4). Works such as Joseph’s *Warner Arundell* and Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures* share some of their themes with late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Caribbean novels, which often tell stories of migration, diaspora, and dislocation, and depict characters who appear to be rootless, as the economic crisis and high unemployment of the 1880s-1920s, combined with U.S. growing imperialism, caused the migration of many Afro-Caribbean people, who left their islands and flocked overseas, especially to Latin America. This process of migration and dislocation had already started in the 1850s, as *Wonderful Adventures* acknowledges in Seacole’s rendition of the railroad project in Panama, where a majority of black Jamaicans found work. Mary Seacole’s autobiography, in fact, shares many characteristics with later Caribbean texts, and especially her feelings of homelessness and rootlessness. Like later Caribbean

intellectuals, she writes for an English public and seeks to carve a place for herself as a colonial British subject. Her subject position is further complicated by her gender, as well as by her race, both of which she strategically deploys to obtain the sympathy of her audience, demonstrating she knows how to manipulate English literary genres and social expectations to her advantage, but at the same time also showing that she has internalized some of the values of the colonizer.

A study of early nineteenth-century West Indian novels narrows the gaps between earlier West Indian texts and Caribbean literature as it comes to be defined in the 1950s-60s, highlighting continuities and differences. Although novels written by West Indian Creoles in the nineteenth century inevitably privilege the experience and point of view of white Creole planters, as the educated white Creole elite held an advantageous position from which they could write and publish in England, while few Blacks could write, and generally didn't with few exceptions, such as slave narratives, the nineteenth-century body of works by white Creoles helps give a more accurate picture of life in British West Indian colonies, and of the political involvement of these texts. Many travel narratives and novels, describing the customs of the West Indies, were also written by English authors, who often wrote in favor of emancipation, but only had a second-hand knowledge of the Caribbean setting and of the lives of black people, whom they often described in a patronizing manner. On the other hand, an analysis of life and customs in the West Indies by Creole writers—even when they held pro-slavery beliefs like Williams, and forwarded their own political agendas—provides modern readers with a more accurate and realistic picture of race relations and class stratification in pre-emancipation colonial societies. Novels by nineteenth-century Creole authors



demonstrate the process of creolization that was underway, and the presence of a Creole consciousness as early as the nineteenth century, although this emerging 'consciousness' was, in many ways, different from what is later considered a Caribbean national identity, as it was largely based on racial distinctions and class hierarchies, and novels by West Indian Creoles, generally, did not reflect the point of view of the majority of the population of the West Indies.

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