COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN JEAN RHYS'S SHORT FICTION
CONQUERING THE CONQUEROR: COLONIAL DISCOURSE AS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN JEAN RHYS'S SHORT FICTION

By

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ABSTRACT

Jean Rhys, the English Caribbean’s first internationally known writer and its foremost white female author, created a relatively small body of work that includes five novels and over fifty short stories. Her short fiction is noted for its intense subjectivity, spare and elegant prose, and a preoccupation with alienation and forms of entrapment—physical, social and sexual. Most of her writing is memoir-based, and has, in varying degrees, the West Indies as its psychological landscape. Rhys’s literary voice articulates a unique form of autoethnographic expression—what I describe as a ‘colonizer discourse’ that alternately mimics and challenges the English canon and its reductionist inscriptions of the Caribbean, but never questions the superiority of white Creoles over their fellow West Indians. Some critics cite Rhys’s articulation of a white Creole subjectivity as her ‘achievement’ because she calls attention to the discursive process by which a white self is constructed over the black Other. While this is a valid argument it does not consider Rhys’s self-conscious championing of the white Creole, her true ‘underdog,’ through which she seeks to correct distortions and misrepresentations of the Antillean planter class. Writing from a perspective that is firmly entrenched in the nineteenth century world of colonial privilege, she reclaims her history as a subaltern with a view to fight textual control through textuality. Rhys has brought Caribbean literature to the world stage but her ‘colonizer discourse’ does little to reduce the marginality of non-white Creoles. Her alternative colonial historiography is reminiscent of what Ross Chambers describes as “oppositional behavior... a form of resistance that does not challenge the power in place...[but]...has the extremely tricky ability to erode...the power from which it derives” (1-2). This thesis will examine the ambivalences and paradoxes of
Rhys’s ‘colonizer discourse’ through a selection of her ‘Caribbean’ short stories. It will argue that Rhys’s configurations are meant to redeem only the white Creole from Otherness in the European context and that her racial and gender constructions serve this process using a recurring motif of destructive and doomed relationships built on a paradigm of patriarchal Empire and the colonial Island as a dependent and sexualized female.
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INTRODUCTION

Jean Rhys's reputation as a writer is built mainly on her five novels, particularly her masterpiece work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which brought her international acclaim and established her as the Caribbean's foremost white literary figure. *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written and re-written over a period of many years as a 'prequel' to Charlotte Brontë's nineteenth-century narrative *Jane Eyre*, in which Rhys reclaims Bertha, the West Indian-born "madwoman in the attic," and empowers her with a narrative voice that alters the prior text by "speaking back" to Brontë's text. This novel evolved over many years, with the first draft appearing in 1945 when Rhys indicated she had "a novel half-finished...the one book I've written that's much use" (*Letters* 39). *Wide Sargasso Sea* lingered in draft until 1957 when she was motivated to resume the project by re-reading *Jane Eyre* and being "taken aback when I discovered what a fat (and improbable) monster she was ...it 'clicked in my head' that I had the material for the story of Mr. Rochester's first wife. The real story—as it might have been" (*Letters* 149, 153). Rhys's stylistic experimentation with the novel form in *Wide Sargasso Sea* attracted an outstanding critical success, three major literary awards and a reverent following. Her four earlier novels and a portion of her first book of stories, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), were reissued afterwards, and two new collections of stories appeared, *Tigers Are Better-Looking* (1968) and *Sleep it Off, Lady* (1976). In her recent study of Rhys's fiction, Anne Simpson observes, "Rhys enthusiasts tend to privilege her last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which was published almost three decades after the others and is usually celebrated at the expense of her earlier works" (1). In her
comment Simpson implies that the corpus of Rhys’s “earlier works” are her previous novels, “the others,” and overlooks her short fiction, a body of work that has been collected in three books and includes over fifty finished pieces. Simpson’s oversight points to how the critical field undervalues and overlooks Rhys’s short stories, not by design, but simply because most of Rhys’s *oeuvre* stands in the shadow of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her most popular, and in the minds of many, her only significant work.

What often goes unnoticed in Rhys scholarship is that the vision and narrative thrust that made *Wide Sargasso Sea* one of the foremost literary achievements of the mid-twentieth century in the English-speaking world are consistent with Rhys’s short stories throughout all of her writing. Her career began with the short story “Vienne,” published in 1924 in Ford Madox Ford’s final edition of *the transatlantic review*, and, under his mentorship, Rhys published *The Left Bank and Other Stories* three years later. Ford wrote the introduction to this collection and identified Rhys as an oppositional critic of the world whose ideas are simultaneously out of step with the time and well ahead of it, saying, “What...is the lot of the opposition who must wait till their Thought is the accepted Thought of tomorrow?... To some extent that answer will be found in Rhys’s book” (*The Left Bank* 23), as well as this glowing assessment, “coming from the Antilles, with terrifying insight and a terrific—an almost lurid!—passion for stating the case of the underdog, she has let her pen loose on the Left Banks of the Old World” (*The Left Bank* 24).

Rhys’s short fiction did not develop significantly over the course of her writing career but is consistent in its alternate vision, aesthetic sense and its discursive aspects. The short stories are a varied group of pieces: some are only a few paragraphs in length while others are almost novella length, but they consistently set out the centrality of the
outsider, usually a woman character. Some of the works, “La Grosse Fifi,” “Let Them Call It Jazz” and “Vienne,” are acclaimed as masterpieces. An unfinished work, “The Imperial Road,” was considered too racist by Rhys's publishers and never completed or published.

David Plante, who helped Rhys write her autobiography, *Smile Please*, published posthumously in 1980, indicates that Rhys was dismissive of her short fiction, and describes the stories in her last collection, *Sleep It Off, Lady* as “no good, magazine stories” (Plante 38). Cheryl and David Malcolm take a different view in their critical study of the short fiction, (currently the only book devoted entirely to this subject), saying, “Rhys wrote some very good short stories that in their rigorous exposure of social cruelty, in their economy and subtlety of technique stand up next to her best novels” (Malcolm xiv). Taken as a whole, the stories deserve more attention than they have received, as they provide important access to Rhys’s thoughts and stylistic inventions. My specific interest lies in her portrayal of the female predicament, her rendering of the metanarrative of male imperialism and her complicated attitude towards race.

It is the short stories that will be the focus of this thesis, specifically selections from what I call the ‘Caribbean’ stories: those which are situated specifically or implicitly in Dominica, with the exception of “Let Them Call It Jazz,” in which England is the ‘island’ for a transplanted Dominican. My purpose in writing is to identify and discuss a particular form of colonial discourse in Rhys’s ‘Caribbean’ stories that occasionally reverses into anti-colonial discourse. It is connected to Modernism as an ambivalent discourse which both attacks and reinforces imperialism textually by “simultaneously consolidat[ing] and disown[ing] its ideological tenets and social aspirations and interrogating its values, but cannot disengage from imperialism’s ‘cultural hegemony’” (Parry 55). This pro/anti
colonial element is a significant issue in Rhys’s writing, which her critics touch on but rarely develop at length. Veronica Gregg gives Rhys’s colonial identity and discourse considerable attention in Jean Rhys’s Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole (1995) saying, “The Creole’s relationship to this discourse...[the re-writing of History]....is variously one of questioning, denial, undermining, or complicity—never total rejection” (73), but her study includes the novels and employs a broad perspective that exhaustively examines the historical and cultural framework of the writing as opposed to its discursive qualities. This thesis will move beyond the scope of previous criticism to investigate the connections between Rhys’s discourse and master narratives of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. My line of argument will be to assert that Rhys’s textual appropriation and suppression of racialized Others reflect an assumed ‘knowledge’ and a moral authority that are, at the same time, undermined by a pervasive ‘paradox of belonging’ through which she is “othered” and marginalized by masculinist imperatives of the European social order as a racially inferior colonial and as a feminine subject. The selected texts, “Again the Antilles” (1927), “Let Them Call It Jazz” (1962) and “The Imperial Road” (written in the late 1960s about her 1936 visit to Dominica, but never published), have been chosen for their discursive similarities and for the ways in which they reflect how Rhys’s engagement with a metropolitan audience evolves over five decades of writing.

Rhys launched her career with short fiction, and the short story is a consistent part of her writing over decades of production in contrast to her novels, which were written between 1928 and 1939, with the exception of Wide Sargasso Sea. Rhys’s literary sensibility fit with the Modernist penchant for what was experimental, informal, personal, authentic and rebellious against Victorian standards of literature. Her fine attunement to marginality
as a Creole proclaims her position as Other against the norm, which in turn, informs her combative and critical view of European social structures. Rhys’s writing reveals distrust for socially conditioned behavior and shows a keen awareness of how conventions of every kind exert pressure on the individual to mask genuine feelings with contrived forms of outer display. Always the loner, Rhys eschewed the group life of Ford and the expatriate literati in postwar Paris (which included Henry Miller and Ernest Hemingway), where she and her first husband, Jean Lenglet, had taken up residence after their marriage in 1919 (Simpson 5). Nonetheless, she appears to have accepted Ford’s influences and definitions readily. He devised her pseudonym, “Jean Rhys,” (using Lenglet’s chosen first name and the Welsh spelling of her father’s middle name, Rees), while she “shrewdly exploited [his] modernist originalities” (Bloom xviii). Ford correctly described Rhys as an Antillean outsider whose position as a colonial privileged her with the acuity to criticize the European social and historical order, saying she had “a sympathy of which we [Europeans] do not have too much in Occidental literature with its perennial bias towards satisfaction with things as they are” (The Left Bank 24). Rhys’s “sympathy” manifests itself in the “speaking back” that evidenced itself originally in her short stories and later in her novels. The impetus of her writing is the cultural tension between Europe and the West Indies, and she speaks from what she describes as “the other side,” the constitutive otherness of being an expatriate white Creole and an exotic foreigner in the European metropolis.

This “other side” is metonymically connected to what “clicked in [Rhys’s] head...the real story – as it might have been” (Letters 149, 153) and is the most enduring and enabling feature of Rhys’s writing from the beginning, throughout and including her final years. “The other side” encapsulates and reveals Rhys’s conflicted identity as a Creole
and is mentioned at various points in her writing. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* it denotes the great
cultural and psychological gulf between Rochester, the fortune-hunting Englishman, and
Antoinette, his Creole wife, who explains the malicious behavior of her mulatto cousin:

‘[Daniel Boyd] hates all white people, but he hates me the most. He tells lies about
us and he is sure that you will believe him and will not listen to the other side.’
‘Is there another side?’ I said.
‘There is always the other side, always.’ (106)

In her Black Exercise Book (1938), part of the Jean Rhys Collection of her personal papers
at the University of Tulsa, she indicates “the other side” as the Dominican planter class she
was born into:

I was curious about black people. They stimulated me [and] I felt akin to them…
I could nt [sic] help but realise that they did nt [sic] really like or trust white
people…white cockroaches they called us…One could hardly blame them…
I became an ardent champion of the downtrodden…Yet all the time knowing that
there was another side to it sometimes seeing myself powerful…Sometimes being
proud of my [slaveowner] great grandfather the estate the good old days etc. [sic].
(Rosenberg 20)

Later, in the same text, Rhys says, “I longed to be identified once more and for all with the
other side which was impossible[,] I could nt [sic] change the colour of my skin”
(Rosenberg 20). In one paragraph, “the other side” shifts from plantocracy to Afro-
Caribbeans (the formerly enslaved). Rhys’s ambivalence and dual identification reflects the
moral dilemma of being a member of the Dominican plantocracy while abhorring her
ancestors’ connections to slavery. She seeks to reconcile her conflicted identity or ‘paradox
of belonging’ by creating a victim persona who takes the part of the debased and degraded
slave and, in doing so, attempts to shift her subjectivity from white master to black
subordinate. Rhys’s writing cannot sustain a metaphorical ‘black’ identity because it
conflicts with her colonizer discourse and her racist attitudes towards other West Indians.
In “Let Them Call It Jazz,” Rhys mimics ‘blackness’ through a black (mulatto) Creole protagonist as a way to interrogate racial ‘difference’ in England, a strategy which I will discuss in my third chapter. It is my contention that her “other side” is firmly situated in the attitudes and values of the colonial white Creole, the source of “seeing myself powerful...sometimes proud,” and that her desire to be ‘black’ seeks to understand not the actuality of being Afro-Caribbean, but the embellished and distorted idea of being ‘black’ that white colonizer culture had produced to justify its reductive treatment of subalterns. Rhys longs to share what she perceives to be the freedoms of being ‘black’: “Black girls on the contrary seemed to be perfectly free. Children swarmed but Negro marriages that I knew of were comparatively rare. Marriage didn’t seem a duty with them as it was for us. All this perhaps was part of my envy, which rose to a fever pitch at carnival time” (Smile Please 41).

Rhys’s “other side” has added significance as a place of no specific geographic location or topography. It is a frightening, borderless psychic terrain where time stood still, an essentialized and ambiguous psychological space from which Rhys sought to establish agency and a speaking position in spite of her lack of confidence as an author. She says in a letter dated February, 1934, when she finished the manuscript for her third novel, 

{\textit{Voyage in the Dark}} (1934),

\ldots I don’t know if I got away with it...It’s written almost entirely in words of one syllable. Like a kitten mewing perhaps. The big idea–well I’m blowed if I can be sure what it is. Something to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists–side by side with the present, not behind it, that what was–is.

I tried to do it by making the past (the West Indies) very vivid–the present dreamlike (downward career of girl)....

Perhaps I was simply trying to describe a girl going potty.

You see I don’t even know myself and am really trying to argue it out with myself–anyway it isn’t very important...But I have no self-confidence. (Letters 24)
For Rhys, the passage of time and her displacement from the West Indies to Europe did little to alter or influence her colonial sensibility with its imperialist affiliations and assumptions. Gregg suggests that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which appeared long after the Caribbean had become post-colonial, Rhys uses Bertha’s suicide to express the “death of the Creole mode of subjectivity [that] cannot any longer exist” and that the “white Creole must negotiate a new relationship [and] a recognition of the ontological and sociopolitical autonomy…of other races. Perhaps this was, for Jean Rhys, unimaginable” (Gregg 197-198). I would suggest that Rhys may have understood that her construction of the white Creole was no longer viable in the post-colonial West Indies and that the British Empire was “dead,” but there is little evidence to demonstrate that Rhys’s ideological views evolved to become progressive or contemporary. Certainly the ambiguity in Gregg’s statement cancels its credibility. The trope of decay (and by extension, death) therein is crucial to the discussion of white Creole subjectivity, and this will be featured in my first chapter’s examination of her strategies for constructing ‘whiteness’ and for creating Otherness. It is also linked to Rhys’s constructions of time, which are frequently ‘unworldly’ and dream-like in a way that seems intended to thwart any associations with normal chronology. Rhys’s West Indian childhood and her adult life in Europe existed ‘side by side’ in the way she lived her life and wrote her novels and stories. She once asked, “Am I an expatriate? Expatriate from where?” which evokes the European attitude toward the Caribbean, a place of plural, unconsolidated cultures which the European could only perceive as a “background of nothing” (Emery 13-14).

Unlike the European aesthetics of the 1920s and 1930s which documented the shattered lives of disaffected individuals, Rhys focuses on the inner, solipsistic experience
of her characters. Where her fellow Modernist writers employed metaphors to describe the wounds suffered by the generation that survived World War I, Rhys’s protagonists seem to exist beyond world events and forms of collective experience, (like the First and Second World Wars), and are fixated with their own personal social alienation and an expectation of mistreatment and abandonment (Simpson 6-7). Rhys was consumed by a persistent sense of grievance and a legacy of pain, and used both to draw finely honed portraits of emotional experience in her work, which made no claim to be ‘the truth’ but invited further scrutiny as an honest expression of emotion. Her short paragraphs and fragmented utterances suggest the weary and weak emotional responses of her victimized and damaged characters. Sometimes her protagonists use silence as a tactic to maintain integrity or to manifest the suffocating impact of their social alienation. Simpson explains that “Rhys’s ... vision... presents, with compassion, how the warping of individuals’ lives connects with the warping of their outlooks and expectations... and reflects Rhys’s own self-identifications... her wary and hostile interactions with the people she met and... their readiness to exclude her” (Simpson 5). Her melancholic “other side” is captured in the metaphor provided by the Sargasso Sea, which is weed-choked, stagnant, and in which one is forever adrift and caught between two secure ‘landed’ points. The implicit circularity of being adrift in a Sargasso Sea between the Empire and the West Indies evokes a psychological vacuum which, lacking borders and definitions, defies temporal structure and chronological movement. It is a separate space defined not by what it is, but rather by what it is not, neither Empire/England nor Colony/Island/Dominica, the ‘landed points.’ “The other side” is a state of exclusion and exclusivity through which Rhys came to see and understand herself as “‘culturally racialized’ colonial subject” (Thomas 2001: 92). The
island landscapes featured in the ‘Caribbean’ short stories evoke the same psychological vacuum, with their ocean-surrounded circularity and isolation from other landed points.

Rhys is a self-conscious stylist who persuades by implication rather than by direct statement. Solipsistic by nature, she tells only her own story as a white Creole, and makes no claims otherwise. She takes a different trajectory from other Caribbean writers whose literature is usually directed towards creating a collective voice for their people and for their culture. What is missing from Rhys’s art is a uniquely Caribbean reclaiming of an “original ancestry of all peoples through the transforming powers of the imagination so that what has been irretrievably lost may be recuperated” (Ashcroft 150). Rhys’s dialogue with “the past” is her telling of “the other side,” and while she borrows heavily from her white Creole ancestry, she creates a discourse that is self-conscious enough to see its conditioned and constructed nature. Her critical awareness creates space for anti-colonial observations and insights that run counter to traditional colonial discourse and allow her to effectively “speak back” to England’s demeaning colonial historiography. Helen Tiffin explains that Rhys always projects the judgments of the imperial and colonial cultures she was caught between:

“White nigger” to the Europeans and “white cockroach” to the Blacks, she sees herself as a gauche, immature distortion of the Europeans on the one hand, and a pale and terrified “deformed” reflection of her Black compatriots on the other. [The Rhys heroine is] the distorted reflection of two images, neither of which is really her but which beckon and taunt her with their normality. (Tiffin 1978: 328-329)

Rhys’s version of the imperial-colonial dialectic sets her apart from almost all other West Indian writers, particularly Caribbean writers of the latter half of the twentieth century, whose literature confronts, disassembles, and imaginatively reconstructs a collective history
of the West Indies from the perspective of the formerly silenced. Tiffin observes that "Rhys had always understood that radical importance of text, of the English *book* in the capture and control of colonial worlds" (Tiffin 1992: 67). Rhys appears to be engaged in the textual capture and control of her own, white Creole world, which in turn raises questions about her place in Caribbean literature.

Various critics and certain Caribbean writers, like Edward Kamau Braithwaite, consider Rhys to be a contentious voice for the West Indies because she writes from within a culture of white supremacy with no apparent revolutionary intentions or intellectual connections to other Antillean authors. Rhys claimed, "I don't belong to anywhere but I get very worked up about the West Indies. I still care, I read [Derek] Walcott, [V.S.] Naipaul, [Alfred] Mendes; and I want to write about my childhood there...I was brought up in Dominica...and was able to get a good deal of material out of it" (Gregg 2). Braithwaite argues that "[w]hite Creoles in the English and French West Indies have contributed too little culturally, as a *group*, to give credence to the notion that they can...meaningfully identify or be identified with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea" (O'Callaghan 275). V.S. Naipaul, in his essay, "Without a Dog's Chance," offers a more insightful and sympathetic explanation of Rhys's dilemma as a Creole in Europe:

[S]he never sought to make her experiences more accessible by making it what is was not. It would have been easy for someone of her gifts to have become a novelist of manners; but...she had...no home audience to play to; she was outside that tradition of imperial-expatriate writing in which the metropolitan outsider is thrown into relief against an alien background. (54)
Helen Tiffin observes that Rhys “desire[d]...to identify with the black West Indian population...[an] ‘ideal’ balked by the whites’ own racism and class prejudice...but [she] pioneered disidentificatory routes out of British colonial subjectification...of both white and black West Indians” (Tiffin 1992: 75). Contemporary critics welcome Rhys to the West Indian literary tradition as a qualified “oppressed voice,” which they see as having a special historical provenance. Evelyn O’Callaghan says Rhys and her fellow white, female Dominican writers, Eliot Bliss and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, “represent an ‘outsider’s voice’ which is an integral part of [the] tradition...[a]nd though this perspective may be outmoded or even archaic, [their writing is concerned] with ‘interacting’ racial/cultural orientations” (O’Callaghan 276). Rhys’s sympathies reflect the tensions of a colonial social vacuum that places white Creoles above black islanders and below expatriate whites, and leaves them despised by both cultures. This complicated social standing is the foundation of her white colonizer perspective. Much of her writing pre-dates the post-colonial West Indies and its nascent literature, and does not reflect its sociocultural realities, its racial consciousness or its impulse to reclaim an Afro-Caribbean history. That said, she is the Caribbean’s prototypical post-colonial woman writer and established a literary dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized which advanced the deconstitution of the English canon and the cultural ‘decolonization’ of West Indians.

Rhys’s white colonizer perspective comes into sharper focus when it is aligned with a theoretical model. Mary Louise Pratt developed and defined the term “autoethnography” in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992):

- If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent themselves to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in relation to or in dialogue with those metropolitan
representations. Autoethnography is integral to “transculturation” – how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. (Pratt 6-7)

Jean Rhys articulates her particular “autoethnography” as a white Creole whose self-fashioning allows for a sense of propriety towards the mulatto and the black populations and uses race as an accessory of power, even when it “calls attention to and opens up for discussion the historical and discursive processes by which the white Self in the Caribbean is constructed over and against the black Other” (Gregg 38). Her selection and invention of metropolitan materials shows a critical self-consciousness but does not transcend the assumptions of colonial discourse to become anti-racist or ‘pro-black.’

Rhys’s rendering of her white Creole origins is memoir-based and bears more than a passing resemblance to the colonial Dominica of her childhood between 1890, when she was born, and 1906 when she left for England. Her recollection of family “reveals a culture of sadness and a tendency to hold things at a distance” (Simpson 3). Rhys’s father, William Rees Williams, the second son of a Welsh Anglican clergyman who favoured his first-born son, traveled from Wales to Dominica in 1881 and set up practice as a doctor. However well-intentioned and kind toward Rhys and her four siblings, he was emotionally remote, “he never seemed to notice us at all” (Smile Please 58), and spent money improvidently, with no regard for the anxiety this provoked in everyone around him. Rees Williams held official appointments as Medical and Health Officer to the Port of Roseau and made unsuccessful attempts at elective office. His public stature was frequently compromised by his unprofessional behavior. He was, perhaps, a typical example of what was widely accepted as the “tropical degeneracy” of transplanted Englishmen in the tropics and displayed all the usual excesses associated with it: immoderate social drinking, a fondness for cards and
gambling, an overly vocal participation in local politics, and was outrageously flirtatious with women. Rhys describes the devastating impact of his behavior after overhearing her mother confide in a friend about the family’s financial losses, “This was the end of my comfortable certainty that we were not people who had to worry about expenses. For the first time I vaguely wondered if my father’s reckless behavior, throwaway attitude to money wasn’t a cover-up for anxiety” (Smile Please 35). His occasional public fits of bad temper, combined with accusations of malpractice and failed attempts at elected office, damaged his reputation and made him the target of attacks by local newspapers. Rhys addresses the ‘power of the press’ in many of the ‘Caribbean’ stories, using various scenarios in which English authority is challenged through ‘battles of words,’ which result in the English set turning away from the virulence of the (mainly mulatto) local press and maintaining their dignity through silence. She also gives “tropical degeneracy” substantial attention in the ‘Caribbean’ stories and challenges the term as antiquated rhetoric that reduced the English immigrant to the same level as the white Creole whose ‘whiteness’ is considered suspect because of its close social and biological connections to native West Indians.

Rhys’s maternal family was firmly ensconced in Dominica’s English colonial enclave, almost defensively so, given the vicissitudes of English planter life in Dominica after Emancipation. Paravisini-Gebert remarks, “As planters and slave owners who had settled in Dominica toward the end of the eighteenth century… their pride in being of ‘pure English descent’ must be seen in the light of the struggles for English ascendancy that characterized Dominica during the nineteenth century, and forced them into a posture of militant [and social] segregation” (Paravisini-Gebert 24). Rhys’s mother was a white Creole, the descendent of Scottish slave-owner James Lockhart and his Hispanic wife, who
is referred to by Rhys as “the dark one,” and who, she suggests, compromised the family lineage and bloodlines with her disturbingly dark (i.e. Cuban) features. Her mother Minna was the Lockharts’ granddaughter, whom she remembers as “frigidly inaccessible” and who rejected her as a child. Simpson suggests that her relationship with her parents was the source of Rhys’s “reflexively alienating behavior that was to characterize many of her interactions; and yet, despite it all, her compassion for herself and her determination that whatever she did, ‘I must do it and for me it was right’” (Simpson 3). Rhys’s departure for England as a teenager in 1906 to further her education (as white Creole children typically did), added geographical distance to her estranged relationship with her parents. Her father died in 1910, and she had limited contact with her mother and other family members thereafter. The loss of family and homeland can be seen in her writing as the repetition of a certain defense mechanism, the “cutting off of feelings in the attempt to disavow painful connection with others...whenever confronted by wrenching loss...she saw it in herself and other people, and could write about it with disarming perceptiveness” (Simpson 3).

Rhys ancestral connections made her a member of the West Indian plantocracy, a tiny (less than a hundred in a population of about 27,000) (Thomas 1999:18) but powerful white minority comprised largely of plantation owners, like her parents and their families. Rhys’s father and grandfather held senior administrative posts in Dominica which connected the family to the local plutocracy. Both William Rees Williams and an uncle, Acton Don Lockhart, were leaders of the campaign in favour of Crown Colony Rule, and were political allies against the demands and influence of the elective (mainly mulatto) members. Williams was later to become the Crown-nominated chairman of the Town Board until his death in 1910 (Thomas 1999: 59). When British historian James Anthony
Froude visited Dominica in 1887 he was hosted by the administrator and his wife, John and Edith Spencer Churchill, Rhys’s aunt and uncle. Rhys’s parents were well-connected socially and placed in the “upper ten” of the Churchills’ social circle (Thomas 1999: 18). Legitimate social standing, or ‘whiteness,’ was of primary importance to the plantocracy/plutocracy whose privileges and status were completely dependent on the continuation of imperial power and ties to England. Colonial ‘whiteness’ was in continual crisis as a political entity that was threatened by the new phenomenon of “Mulatto Ascendancy” and the steep decline of the British Empire’s colonial prosperity in the Caribbean. ‘Whiteness’ was also a biological construct. Many generations of slave-owning had given rise to widespread miscegenation, which in turn threatened the power of colonial ‘whiteness’ with ‘impure’ bloodlines. Richard Dyer indicates that ‘whiteness’ maintains itself through its ability to reproduce ‘pure’ bloodlines which, in turn, is the foundation of its ‘natural’ capacity and credibility to dominate other races:

[M]iscegenation threatens [racial] purity. Given the actual history of inter-breeding in the imperial history of the past few centuries, it is not surprising that various means have been found to deal with this threat to whiteness. In the US South, elaborate degrees of blackness (mulatto, quadroon, octoroon) were developed…These measures focused on blackness as a means of limiting access to the white category, which only the utterly white could inhabit. In Brazil, by contrast, miscegenation was encouraged on the grounds that the population would gradually become whiter and black[ness]… would be bred out. Both approaches make the same assumptions: that it is better to be white and that sexual reproduction is the key to achieving whiteness. (Dyer 25-26)

Rhys uses the racial distinction ‘mulatto’ repeatedly in her fiction in a manner that is consistent with Dyer’s definition of “degrees of blackness,” and implies that such terms are natural, necessary, and transparent. She also uses the terms ‘coloured’ and ‘negro’ quite casually and unselfconsciously. Savory observes that Rhys “was shaped by a racist society
and was certainly capable of a casual racism endemic in both her Creole upbringing and the Britain in which she lived most of her life” (Savory 14). I use ‘coloured’, ‘mulatto,’ ‘non-white’ and ‘mixed-race’ and ‘Afro-Caribbean’ with conscious discomfort, as race and racial signifiers are difficult to discuss, even when one is making points about racism and ‘whiteness.’ Political, social and biological ‘whiteness’ were critical to maintaining white Creole society in the islands. Colonial ‘whiteness’ was supported and sustained by its resemblance to ‘Englishness,’ and the active emulation of all things English and the strict adherence to British codes and customs. Most white Creoles in the Caribbean, and many non-whites, followed this edict without hesitation. It meant the complete acceptance of England’s ethnographic theories, subsuming narrative, and cultural dominance, something Rhys abhorred as false and demeaning after she had left Dominica to live in England and become an immigrant subaltern. This probably explains why Rhys’s career began in exile, away from the insularity of island society, unlike Phyllis Shand Allfrey and Eliot Bliss.

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert describes Rhys as a writer “whose career did not unfold against the background of Dominican life. Rhys’s Dominica is the island of childhood memory, not the...setting...for mature creativity...nonetheless, the dominant landscape of her formative years” (Paravisini-Gebert 23).

Dominica is implicitly mentioned in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as the honeymoon destination of the newly married Rochesters, who vacation at the “small estate which had belonged to Antoinette’s [Martinique-born] mother.” (56). The estate’s ambiguous location is qualified by two indirect references in the text, “two women [were] gesticulating, talking not English but the debased French patois they use in this island” (56-57) and later when Antoinette contemplates leaving her marriage by “[g]oing away to Martinique or England”
The use of patois is a Dominican racial marker, (not Martinican as Rhys erroneously implies), and is central to the short story “Let Them Call It Jazz” which will be discussed at length in chapter three. Dominica is indicated as the location for some of Rhys’s short stories: “The Imperial Road,” “Pioneers, Oh Pioneers,” “Fishy Waters,” “The Bishop’s Feast,” and “Invitation to the Dance.” Otherwise, the Caribbean is the general location for at least nine of her short stories, a site of colonial ‘otherness’ that presumably requires no precise location or mapping because it is the “other side” of an Empire/Colony binary construction that appears consistently throughout her work.

Like many modernist writers Rhys reproduced the imperialist assumptions of Victorian literature. An early critic, Thomas Staley, suggested that Rhys’s writing “presented an implicit challenge of the entire bourgeois world” (Staley 1). While something of an overstatement, Staley’s remark illustrates the direction and focus of Rhys’s writing, the bourgeois méropol. Rhys spoke back to Europe in a gesture of transculturation that drew on the literature of her childhood, in particular the writings of the British historian James Anthony Froude, whose provocative travel book, The British in The West Indies or, The Bow of Ulysses (1888), was central to the colonial Antillean education curriculum. Inspired by Thomas Carlyle, Froude’s thesis stated that racial greatness relied on certain sustaining features which were under threat in many parts of the (then) colonial world. The English Caribbean of the late nineteenth century was in the midst of great social and economic upheaval, something Froude interpreted and articulated as the dangerous decline of an Anglo-Saxon paradise leading to governance by native non-whites incapable of governing themselves. Rhys reproduced Froude’s historical narrative for the European metropolis and drew from the discourses of her colonial Dominican childhood in a way that mimicked
imperial narratives (Thomas 1999: 10). Rhys explicitly challenged Europe’s constructions of white Creoles, like herself, using narrative to resist the hegemony of England. She did not resist or challenge the assumptions of the colonial discourse and rhetoric that upheld white colonial supremacy. She actively reclaimed her ‘history’ and ‘voice’ as a Caribbean subaltern, and in this way was a forerunner for twentieth-century Antillean writers, but did so from within a narrow historical framework which embraced only the realities of being a white Creole woman.

Rhys’s re-textualized ‘history’ is mounted on a colonial discourse which functions as an instrument of colonial hegemony, particularly in its racial constructions which frequently portray black and mulatto characters as child-like, deceitful and malicious and are seemingly underwritten by an effort to understand the alien ways of the native. At the outset of her writing career, Rhys was an exotic ‘Antillean voice’ and something of a novelty for Ford and his literary circle in post-war Paris, but her authority and credibility as a West Indian writer rested upon the fact that she was, first and foremost, a white person. Being white attracted a European readership that non-white West Indian writers of the first half of the twentieth century could only imagine. Braithwaite notes that, “[t]he anti-colonial consciousness of the period from 1900 produced our first authentic [Afro-Caribbean] novels and witnessed the beginning of native newspaper work and publishing” (Gregg 35). Braithwaite disqualifies Rhys and white Creoles as representative literary voices saying they are “too inextricably mixed into the whole problem to be considered as separate” (Gregg 38). What Braithwaite fails to recognize is that Rhys’s fiction, however mired in a white colonial perspective, opens the field for anti-colonial discourse by unpacking canonical History. That said, her discursive range has limitations that should not be overlooked.
One important aspect of Rhys's colonial discourse is how her work engages with the historical treatment of Emancipation in 1840. As O. Nigel Bolland argues:

With few exceptions...most histories of the British West Indies view emancipation in a less critical light than did the former slaves themselves. A clear distinction is rarely made between the emancipation as an event and emancipation as a human social condition...[focusing instead] on the interrelatedness of the control of the land and labor as key aspects of a structure of domination. (Gregg 17-18)

Bolland's point about the historical treatment of emancipation as an event rather than as a social condition offers a testing point about Rhys and her colonizer perspective. At no time in her writing does Rhys portray the former slavery of the West Indies in the throes of a "human social condition." Her focus, rather, is on the suffering of the white Creoles who, in her handling, become Emancipation's victims. This focus is evident in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where, upon becoming 'free,' the former slaves appear to revel in the ensuing social and economic chaos and seems utterly heedless of the future while the Creole Cosway/Mason family slowly disintegrates. This idea is encapsulated by Antoinette's sarcastic observation that "All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery – why should anybody work. This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous" (17). The key words in this phrase are "prosperous" and "work" which uphold the loss of control over land and labour as of the utmost significance in the years after Emancipation, using the rhetoric of capitalism. Rhys's representation of the legacy of Emancipation in Dominica is a point that I will take up directly in Chapter Two in my discussion of "The Imperial Road" and "Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers."

Rhys's interpretive mode is linked to a common form of colonial mimeticism meant to implement and affirm colonial power through fictions affiliated to the hegemonic
explanatory order. Such mimetic fictions, like Froude's writings, were committed to establishing, "historical accuracy, psychological truthfulness, and humanist perceptions" (Gregg 16). Even writers with a critical disposition, like Rhys, were unable to distance themselves from mimetic inscriptions because they shared the cultural assumptions of such fictions and, "by colluding and displacing a conflictual political relation with a metaphysical and moral contest, their exegesis constituted itself as yet another discourse of colonialism" (Gregg 16). This is most noticeable in Rhys's short fiction, particularly the 'Caribbean' stories, many of which are only a few pages in length and use compact narratives to establish her point of view. At times, Rhys's writing is anti-colonial and depicts white male authority figures as arrogant, morally bankrupt and consumed with self-interest. Seldom does it criticize white Creole women, and when this happens, it is a mother (as opposed to a maternal figure), like Annette in Wide Sargasso Sea or Anna's dying mother in Voyage in the Dark, or Selina's nameless mother in “Let Them Call It Jazz,” who inflicts a lasting wound on the female protagonist through some form of abandonment.

Rhys's discursive/counter-discursive posturing may be explained by the short stories' overt links to British colonial novels in which the West Indies functioned as a primitive and scenic backdrop for the romantic adventures of British characters. In his essay, “The Demise of Empire: Alec Waugh and George Lamming,” Michael Harris places Rhys directly in the colonial novel tradition for having “depict[ed] the West Indies as a breeding ground for moral degeneration” in Wide Sargasso Sea (Harris 143). Yet, her consistent disillusionment with Empire and a constantly shifting narrative consciousness that resists seeing all the action from a single viewpoint keeps her apart from the tradition. She, like Rudyard Kipling and Alec Waugh, colludes with the idea of “colony as an
important psychological outlet... and escape into sexual license... for the British [and] its image as a huge playground” (Harris 146) even if she does not endorse it. She uses different ‘voices’ to give importance to the ‘colonized’ which suggests that their views are as important as the those of the ‘colonizers.’ Such a strategy proposes that the colonial situation be seen as complex and needing a broader perspective. Her allegiances to the old colonial order are shown in the way that the ‘Caribbean’ stories offer a penetrating view of British colonial life: its underlying fear and mistrust and its commitment to maintaining its authority for fear that, without imperial rule’s guiding principles, chaos is imminent, even as the Empire crumbles. There is a strong assertion in her short fiction that the purportedly ‘altruistic’ British colonial mission must be maintained in the interest of West Indian security and economic survival and that, even if English authority was less than ideal, its alternative was anarchy. Rhys makes an equally strong statement that the difference between the British colonizers and the Antillean colonized is one between order and chaos, which she supports with stereotypes that portray non-white subalterns as mindless, resentful, latently violent, rootless and irrational. Harris remarks, “British colonial fiction, whether intentionally or not, often served to provide the English reading public, usually assumed to be misinformed and naïve, with an account of the nation’s rule” (Harris 157).

As a Creole, Rhys does not celebrate the Empire, but she defends its increasingly precarious position by declaring to the post-World War One metropolis that even though “the imperial machine has run down” (Harris 158) it is still vital to saving the West Indies from social and economic ruin.

Unlike the ‘re-constructed memory’ approach used by contemporary black female writers to create a historical space from an ‘inner world,’ Rhys’s literary voice speaks from
an ‘outward’ world of colonial privilege with a view to fight textual control through textuality rather than to inspire revolution. Its inherent ambiguity raises the question of who is speaking in the text: is it Rhys’s voice? is it colonial authority? or cultural ideology? David Spurr answers these questions by saying “it is all of these things, often at the same time” (11) and explains it this way:

In the colonial situation as well as its aftermath, this ambiguity in writing joins with the logical incoherence of colonial discourse to produce a rhetoric characterized by constant crisis, just as colonial rule itself continually creates its own crisis of authority. The anxiety of colonial discourse comes from the fact that the colonizer’s power depends on the presence, not to say, consent, of the colonized. What is power without its object? Authority is in some sense conferred by those who obey it. What they do under extreme forms of constraint does not change their place in the balance....Hence the uneasiness, the instability, the frequent hysteria of colonial discourse. (Spurr 11)

This thesis will explore Rhys’s “other side” as a point of articulation from which Rhys questioned and colluded with colonial discourses. Its title, “Conquering the Conqueror: Colonial Discourse as Autoethnography,” is meant to reflect the divided nature of her narrative with its focus on redressing imperialistic authorship of the white Creole. It is a deliberately ironic title intended to foreground the Rhysian paradox of using the “conqueror’s tools” as a subaltern to re-capture a West Indian history while upholding the same “tools” or historical fictions that had shackled Antillean minds for centuries. Rhys self-consciously resists the cultural estrangement of white Creoles but has no intention to destabilize the colonial discourses that authored the dispossession, dislocation and subjugation of colonized blacks and mulattos. This raises the question: are her ‘Caribbean’ short stories ‘post-colonial’ in the same way as Wide Sargasso Sea is considered to be? Do they creatively and stridently answer back to the English canon, and if so, how? She says in
a 1953 letter to Selma Vaz Dias “All Creoles are not negroes. On the contrary” (Letters 108).

Can writing be ‘post-colonial’ if it speaks only on behalf of a segment of a larger, marginalized group? The analysis that follows will examine Rhys’s divided use of the “conqueror’s tools” in three separate chapters which focus on specific contexts: the ‘authoring’ of mulatto or black characters; the explicit use of travel/imperialistic, or ‘paradise’ discourse in a story about visiting Dominica; and the racial and geographic reversals constructed as the social and sexual alienation of a mulatto woman in England.
CHAPTER ONE

THE WHITE CREOLE ‘AUTHORS’ THE NON-WHITE CARIBBEAN

Early critical discussion of Jean Rhys, generated mainly by the great success of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, assumed that her writing was autobiographical, given her place of origin, her expatriation to Europe, and the direct parallels between her own life and the experiences of her protagonists. More recent analysis, from approximately 1990 onward, treats the autobiographical aspect lightly and gives greater weight to Rhys’s artistic imagination. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys “seeks to articulate the subjective and locational identity of the West Indian Creole of the postslavery period” (Gregg 83). The ‘Caribbean’ short stories present the same artistic initiative, but are situated in another time period, at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, and draw a great deal of their subject matter from Rhys’s childhood. One of their most striking aspects is that they consistently foreground a white Creole viewpoint through the shifting perspectives of participant and non-participant narrators who are often nameless and appear to be Rhys personae. During the sixty years between Emancipation (1834) and the end of the nineteenth century, huge economic and sociopolitical forces altered the English territories of the West Indies. The once blossoming plantation economy had, in the wake of Emancipation, become stagnant, but imperial rule and the white Creole minority remained firmly in command. This was the environment that formed Rhys’s memories of Dominica. Where *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an imaginative re-claiming of Creole history, the ‘Caribbean’ short stories are imaginative
recollections from Rhys’s childhood and reflect the social instability and racial tensions that Emancipation had introduced six decades earlier.

The ‘Caribbean’ stories present a fine balance of myth and memoir in their depiction of the ‘turn of century’ colonial condition. It is almost impossible to distinguish real and veritable recollection from imaginative renderings. Before I deal directly with the stories, I will present a synopsis of the cultural and historical background that informs and dominates them. Plantation colonies like Dominica, with their total focus on export, and lack of interest in creating colonial self-sufficiency (as the apparatus of rule), were completely dependent on England. Created by metropolitan capital to serve the requirements of metropolitan enterprise, the plantation was a monopolizing institution that hoarded all the best resources and smothered any forms of production that would compete with its imperatives. The abolition of slavery had far-reaching consequences for the plantation system and for the British West Indies as a whole. It created social and economic chaos, as former slaves, then eighty percent of the total population, abandoned the plantations in droves to take up subsistence or “plot” farming and small trades (Wesseling 80). This upheaval later manifested itself in a legacy of “persistent and expanding unemployment, of low national income, unequal distribution of what little income was produced as well as the gross underutilization of land” (Strachan 6). By 1887, the local economy had declined to such an extent that tax revenues could not support the public service (Thomas 1999: 17). Imperial rule made no provision for ex-slaves to live independently of the plantation, and forced many to accept poorly paid employment by their previous masters, the planters. Those who resisted this new form of chattel were labeled by the Dominican plantocracy as ‘indolent’ and as the ‘epitome of laziness.’ As Strachan indicates, “Work on the plantation is...a
supposedly civilizing action...Landscape and slave are appraised as one and are saved from wild(er)ness all at once by plantation culture” (Strachan 55). Protecting and exploiting sources of wealth was the imperial mandate, and when plantation enterprise declined, the Empire offered a stern warning to the colonies, as Earl Grey, secretary of state for the colonies, wrote in an 1853 policy statement:

[T]he welfare of all classes...of these Colonies...depend(s) upon...the cultivation of sugar...as their chief source of wealth...[I]f it was to cease, there would be no longer be any motive for the residence of the European inhabitants in a climate uncongenial to their constitution...[I]t is certain that they could not be withdrawn without giving an almost fatal check to the civilization of the Negroes. (Strachan 55)

But sugar production continued to decline as foreign competition and a lack of capital to provide updated technology and wages effectively transferred estate ownership from planters to creditors:

[I]n the mid-nineteenth century, the [West Indian] colonies were no longer economically important for Britain. Planters often pocketed their compensation money, sold their estates, and left the island. Estate owners who decided to stay on, therefore, were faced with a process of considerable restructuring which left many of them destitute. (Olaussen 66)

The white Creole community responded in two ways: by leaving for opportunities elsewhere or by staying on in the hopes that the “veritable Eden” could be revived and restored by new forms of economic development. To meet the demand for labour, contract workers were brought in from other parts of the British Empire, mainly India, as well as from Africa and China (Wesseling 80), a situation that created new social tensions. Efforts were made to attract white settlers from other parts of the British Empire to expand the plantation system, thus reinforcing racial divisions in which whites held power and authority, while blacks, mulattos and newly arrived Africans and Asians functioned as Dominica’s
supporting underclass. Dominican plutocrats and planters maintained their authority and
influence even in the diminishing circumstances of the time as the rigidly hierarchical
divisions between race and ethnic groups remained intact, just as the plantation system itself
had survived, despite expectations to the contrary.

What remained of the white Creole population clung to its Englishness and its
determination as the master class to continue to harness and exploit the Dominican
landscape. Fueled by documents such as Thomas Carlyle’s 1849 “Occasional Discourse of
the Nigger Question” in which the former slavery is blamed for the failure and
abandonment of plantations (Strachan 58), the white Creole population was compelled to
assert its dominance and civilizing influence more than ever with a self-assuring and
sustaining ideology. This ideology emerged as ‘colonizer discourse’ which is essentially
‘whiteness’ articulated in an autoethnographic form that borrows heavily from the English
canon to establish its primacy over the indigenous population.

Rhys creates her literary identity by mimicking colonizer culture. She draws from
the literature of her childhood: fairy stories, the classics: The Heroes, The Adventures of
Ulysses, Perseus and Andromeda, the poets: Milton Byron, Crabbe and Cowper, and also,
Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, Gulliver’s Travels, Pilgrim’s Progress, and The Bible (Smile Please
21). Of particular interest is Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1718), which erects a
quintessential colonial fantasy in which the eighteenth-century Englishman seeks fortune,
suffers despair, and, with God’s help, arises victorious over nature. This text follows
Christopher Columbus’s lead in which the hero survives shipwreck and is delivered by
Providence into what he perceives to be “virgin, flourishing, unpopulated, ready-to-be
mastered land...and] where [t]he indigenous [people]...are seen to be part of the
landscape...[The hero] mimics Columbus [as he] pretends to be Adam, naming every island he sees, but this paradise does not beckon him to become...a native...The inhabitants have no rules [and no civilization] he is obligated to respect...he believes he is free to exert himself...his principal fixation is on potential wealth, possible gain and inordinate power” (Strachan 23-24). Crusoe’s urge to dominate is further satisfied by the ‘natural’ subservience of his slave, Friday, who in combination with the island landscape, realizes Crusoe’s dream of total power in Paradise. Rhys absorbs this text by interpreting the Caribbean as Crusoe sees it; for its Paradise potential as a plantation, and as needing the civilizing influence of ‘whiteness.’ Rhys says “I can still see [in the sitting room bookcase] the volumes of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that I never touched, a large Bible and several history books....” (Smile Please 20). She denies reading the *Encyclopaedia*, but its racist assertions were well known. The following passage appeared in the 1884 edition: “No full-blooded Negro has ever been distinguished as a man of science, a poet, or an artist, and the fundamental equality claimed for him by ignorant philanthropists is belied by the whole history of the race” (Wesseling 54). The Bible has a place in the line of Rhysian influences if one takes into account what Ted Hughes called, “one of the fundamental ideas of our Western Civilization, derived from Reformed Christianity and Old Testament Puritanism...the generally accepted...assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use” (Hughes 129). This biblical concept effectively underwrites the whole imperial mission, which Rhys absorbs into her narrative, along with the archetypes of Adam and Paradise. Rhys’s ‘Caribbean’ stories re-write the colonizer as ‘Adam’ in a West Indian ‘Garden of Eden,’ a failed hero whose self-determination is compromised by his inability to maintain his control of the island environment, in the wake of a new, post-Emancipation, social order.
‘Paradise’ discourse takes on a second meaning in Rhys’s later ‘Caribbean’ stories and becomes linked to twentieth-century travel writing in which The Plantation evolves into The Hotel, a new version of Island Paradise in which ‘Eden’ is re-commodified for the metropolis as mass tourism.

The ‘Caribbean’ short stories make use of the colour dichotomy white/black so consistently that it appears to be interwoven with colonial discourse. For Rhys, racial duality is a fact of colonial life and by extension, a fact of writing, as self-expression is always linked to differences in class, race and gender. For the colonizer ‘whiteness’ is a visual cultural signifier that reflects a ‘universal condition,’ demonstrates superior knowledge, control, worldliness and exemplifies the ‘civilized’ world. It must be highly recognizable and representable because “being visible as white is a passport to privilege” (Dyer 44) in societies stratified along racial lines. In her ‘Caribbean’ short stories, the protagonist and the antagonist are almost always white and black (or mulatto) in that order. Even when several speaking voices blend together in a public forum, for example in “Fishy Waters,” a story in which a newspaper debate motivates various members of the community to articulate their respective opinions of a recent crime, (in a way that suggests that social democracy through editorializing was possible, even desirable, provided it was confined to the realm of ‘civilized’ letter-writing), it is the tensions between racial groups that dominate the narrative. The protagonist is, with few exceptions, a white person, confined by deteriorating circumstances beyond his or her control or understanding, and who functions as the central consciousness of the text. The opposing ‘coloured’ voice, or voices, typically “speak(s) back” to the dominant Creole perspective using language that is often meant to undermine or ridicule “the white cockroach.” Frequently, the coloured voice eschews ‘civility’ and lashes out
verbally and viciously at the white subject with the intent to menace. Rhys does not structure her black or mulatto subjects to engage the reader’s sympathy, even when they are sympathetically portrayed. Only the white Creole is afforded the reader’s sympathy. The coloured subject can be occasionally insightful and astute, but can never triumph discursively over the white Creole. The Other’s speaking positions are frequently aligned with the trope of the “ungrateful native” and reflect the fear and mistrust that permeated the expatriate English and white Creole community.

Rhys’s narrative engages and reflects the writings of Froude whose book, *The English in the West Indies*, derides the state of the Caribbean colonies and their Empire-induced condition of ‘neglect.’ Froude’s large project, according to Trinidadian John Jacob Thomas, who struck back with his work, *Froudacity* (1889), (the best-known piece of nineteenth-century British Caribbean autobiography), was the exclusion of “the Negro vote” and the thwarting of the political aspirations of blacks and mulattos by recommending against elective local legislatures. Froude’s visit to Dominica was intentionally short, and his research was confined to fleeting observations and advice provided by members of the local white Creole community, “his informants,” according to Dominican William Davis, then leader of the Mulatto Ascendancy, who accused Froude of “inflaming past racial hatreds” with “wicked and impolitic…misstatements.” Davis published Froude’s chapters in the *Dominican Dial*, evidently without copyright permission, and editorialized against the book in the same newspaper, noting Froude’s connection to Thomas Carlyle and his explicit use of a “damned nigger’ theory of civilization” (Thomas 1999: 18). Froude’s book made a case for Crown Colony Rule, something Rhys’s father and uncle actively and successfully campaigned
for. Rhys probably had a thorough knowledge of Froude’s book and mentions it by name in another ‘Caribbean’ story, “The Day They Burned the Books” (1953).

Rhys re-articulated Froude and Dominican colonial discourse against this historical background using his motif of “drift” as applied to the general condition of the West Indies. “Drift” is metaphorically connected to the island psyche and denotes a lack of stability and impotence and circular, non-progressive forms of movement. “Drift” encapsulates the Empire’s summation of the mid-nineteenth century Antillean state of affairs, in which Creole authority had ‘failed’ to maintain prosperity and the “insolent” native population had ‘failed’ to understand that abandoning the plantation worked against their best interests.

Froude diagnosed “drift” as the “black man’s equality before the law, and [his] equality in citizenship” (Thomas 1999: 20). Froude’s vision does not hold the Empire responsible for Dominica’s demise, and neither does Rhys. Rather, the logic of “drift” appealed for the corrective restoration of English authority, Crown Colony Rule, at the expense of the non-white population, which was effectively disenfranchised by its enactment in 1898.

Rhys appears to have remained ‘colonial’ in thought and word up to the end of her life. In *Smile Please* she is “wary’ of black people she does not know well or at all; they merge with the mob that surrounded her” (Thomas 1999: 97). In a 1975 interview with David Plante she reveals her complicated relationship to race:

They say we treated the blacks badly there. We didn’t. And who has ruined the island? Who has polluted the rivers? Maybe I do have black blood in me. I think my great-grandmother was coloured, the Cuban. She was supposed to be a Vatican countess. I think she was coloured. Where else would I get my love for pretty clothes? And oh how I envied them, in their clothes, dancing in the street. But what have they done to Dominica? What? It’s all gone. I don’t want to go back. No, never, never. (Plante 17)

I wanted to write my autobiography, because everything they say about me is wrong. I want to tell the truth. I want to tell the truth, too, about Dominica. No, it’s not true
we treated the blacks badly. We didn’t. We didn’t. Now they say we did. No, no, I’m becoming a fascist. They won’t listen, No one listens....
I remember a black man in Dominica walking through our yard...I recall...his dignity...and his unconquerable mind. Do you believe it? (Plante 19-20)

Rhys differentiates between blacks and mulattos, which brings to mind Dyer’s comment concerning racism’s “elaborate tabulations of degrees of blackness” (Dyer 25). Colour designations are constant and continuous in her ‘Caribbean’ stories, but denote only mulattos and blacks, whom she sometimes calls ‘negroes.’ Indentured labourers from Asia and other parts of the world are completely ignored. Dominica’s legacy as a French colony and its sizeable population of white French Roman Catholics receive only passing mention. If a character is white, either European or American, she makes a point of saying so. In the colonizer perspective, colour is the first and the foremost designator of social position and needs to be established quickly as part of the colonizer’s investment in imperialism. Rhys explains and attempts to justify a particular dislike of mulattos as something she is ‘taught’ implicitly:

The...thing that shook me happened at the convent [school]. I was young and shy and I was sitting next to a girl much older than myself...She didn’t look coloured but I knew at once she was. This did not prevent me from admiring her and longing to be friendly.

My father was not a prejudiced man or he would never have allowed me to go to the convent, for white girls were very much in the minority. I tried...to talk to my beautiful neighbour.

Finally, without speaking, she turned and looked at me. I knew irritation, bad temper, the ‘Oh, go away’ look; this was different. This was hatred - impersonal, implacable hatred. I recognized it at once and if you think a child cannot recognize hatred and remember it for life you are most dammably mistaken.

I never tried to be friendly with any of the coloured girls again. I was polite and that was all.
They hate us. We are hated.
Not possible.
Yes it is possible and it is so. (Smile Please 38-39)
Rhys's recollection of this event seventy-five years later remains unchallenged by time. It engages her Creole power of gaze and right of perspective and is totally absorbed in colonial self-perception. It represses any effort to understand the power structures in the relationships between white and nonwhites and, surprisingly, is bereft of hindsight and a mature adult perspective.

Rhys's portrayals of mulattos in her 'Caribbean' short stories are especially emotionally charged and even racist. I will discuss “Again the Antilles” (1927) in this context for two reasons: it has a distinctly racial element and it thematically engages with the complex powers of Western literature to oppress and subjugate. Rhys identifies and foregrounds disparities between texts and truth, and experience and language, and frequently stages them as battles of words. In “Again the Antilles,” one of her earliest works, the solitary, observing and experiencing Self tells a tale based on actual events involving a newspaper feud between Papa Dom, the mulatto editor of the *Dominican Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette*, and a white English planter, Hugh Musgrave. Dom is described in the story as at once “awe-inspiring” and ridiculous:

He wore gold-rimmed spectacles and dark clothes always—not for him the frivolity of white linen even on the hottest day—a stout little man of a beautiful shade of coffee-colour... He hated the white people, not being quite white, and he despised the black ones, not being quite black... ‘Coloured’ we West Indians call the intermediate shades, and I used to think that being coloured embittered him.

He was against the Government, against the English, against the Town Board’s new system of drainage. (39)

This description of Dom makes much of where he registers on the colour spectrum and speculates about his hatred of others based on their ‘colouring.’ Rhys's explicit mention of his opposition to the “Town Board’s new drainage system” is particularly revealing because
her father, William Rees Williams, was responsible for its instigation as the Town Board’s Chairman, according to the Dominican public record (Thomas 1999: 59). Thomas also indicates that Rhys misrepresents the real Papa Dom, Augustus Theodore Righton, in her depiction of him as a “born rebel, this editor: a firebrand” (39) and creates an unflattering portrait that does not match the real and respected figure (Thomas 1999: 57). It appears that Rhys appropriates Righton’s name and reputation to create a composite journalist for the purpose of “speaking back” to the metropolis. The result is suggestive of an overall contempt for Dominican mulattos through a libelous portrayal of one of their most prominent and respected community leaders. The Dominican liberal press allowed mulattos an opportunity to develop power as a group and helped them further their bid for ascendency in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Mulatto self-empowerment through newspapers inspired acrimony in the white colonial population and “created a contestory space that was both political and proto-literary” (Paravisini-Gebert 18). Sir Henry Hesketh Bell, administrator of Dominica (1899-1906), attributed much of his success to his awareness of “the harm that even a single little miserable paper can do” (Hesketh Bell 72).

The following journal entry documented his opinion of the West Indian newspapers:

[The newspapers] are perhaps not very impressive organs, but they have much influence...treating them as irresponsible “rags” [is] a great mistake. The coloured folk, especially, have an immense respect for the “printed word” and are apt to take as Gospel truth everything they see in their weekly journal. If they see nothing but abuse of the Government and Powers-that-be they soon get the impression that everything is wrong and they are an oppressed people....Several years ago...in Montserrat...[a] wicked little rag, which circulated only among the coloured labouring folk assure[d] them...that they were denied justice in every way and the that the real aim of the authorities was to reintroduce slavery...[R]iots broke out [and] the Commissioner was [fatally] beaten....[I] have always tried to impress upon the editors...the responsibilities of their work. (Hesketh Bell 72)
Hesketh Bell recognizes the local mulatto press, but suggests that the “coloured folk” lack a facility for critical thinking and can be incited to riot with little effort. Rhys echoes these sentiments in several of the Caribbean stories, allowing that island voices needed an outlet “in a colony where everyone seemed to write...though [it was] mostly confined to political debate, and where the written word had the strength of conviction and the power to spearhead change” (Paravisini-Gebert 23). Nonetheless, she effectively commodifies local, ‘native’ knowledge for a metropolitan audience and implies, in the manner of British colonial fiction, that the power of the mulatto press created tensions that had dangerous possibilities for the colonial administration, thus providing the metropolis with a cautionary tale and an account of the imperial presence in the West Indies.

“Again the Antilles” is structured using binary oppositions of white/black, refinement/coarseness, and England/tropics. Papa Dom instigates the feud between himself and Hugh Musgrave, an estate owner and a twenty-year resident of Dominica, when Dom covertly uses his position as editor to publish a series of letters that criticize Musgrave, for reasons never revealed. In these letters Dom uses compelling pseudonyms like “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” to gain moral authority in the situation and to establish that his issue is colonizer oppression. Musgrave maintains his silence and his integrity at first, but eventually replies “briefly and sternly as befits an Englishman of the governing class” (40). Then Musgrave commits, according to Dom, “some specially atrocious act of tyranny” (40). Again, there is no specific infraction. The result is “a feud...most undignified, but the whole island was hugely delighted. Never had the Herald had such a sale” (40). Rhys implies that Dom deviously ‘baits’ Musgrave and forces him to defend himself so that Dom can not only profit from the scandal but can also gratify his anti-white sentiments. The feud explodes into a
racial confrontation when Musgrave makes his own attempt at seizing authority in the situation with a demonstration of his 'whiteness.' He corrects Dom's erroneous attribution of Chaucer's words "He was a very gentle, perfect knight..." to William Shakespeare, saying:

you cannot of course be expected to know that...[I]t is saddening and a dismal thing that the names of great Englishmen should thus be taken in vain by the ignorant of another race and colour.

Mr. Musgrave had really written 'damn niggers.' (41)

Papa Dom concedes the error, omits the offending phrase 'damn niggers,' replacing it with "another race and colour," and has the final, victorious word in the matter by saying, "The conduct of an English gentleman who stoops to acts of tyranny and abuse cannot be described as gentle or perfect" (41).

Rhys explores many 'colonizer' issues in this short piece. She erects Papa Dom as the mulatto whose interpretation of the English canon is a pathetic mimicry of the white colonizer. Dom's use of the 'colonizer's tools': his language, his newspaper and his literature (Shakespeare, Chaucer, et al) is self-aggrandizing and ridiculous. She moves from colonial rhetoric to an anti-colonial stance when she critiques the Englishman, Musgrave, when he evokes his 'whiteness' to remind Creoles of all colours that Englishness is the irrefutable proof of cultural canonical and ideological authority. Musgrave is portrayed in a manner that Rhys uses frequently in sketching expatriate English males: arrogant, vain, self-absorbed and bound up in what was held to be the 'moral degeneracy' of the tropics. White male 'moral degeneracy' was expressed in the excessive consumption of alcohol and spicy foods, the overt expenditure of sexual energy, a general lack of sophistication and composure, and little regard for propriety. Such weaknesses are attended by the expatriate's impulse to assert his 'whiteness' in the island setting over all Creoles, and in doing so, to reinforce the strict
hierarchical code that places white Creoles, like Rhys, beneath the English settler population. ‘Whiteness’ is also associated with the concept of ‘spectacle’ and must be highly visible and forcefully asserted when challenged. Musgrave compromises his superiority by allowing himself to be drawn into a ‘battle of words’ with Papa Dom, whose “abominable paper” he never reads. But, once Dom has made a ‘spectacle’ of him with a “scurrilous letter,” Musgrave must correct the obvious slander with a convincing show of his Englishness. Using words to ‘conquer,’ he strikes down the mulatto in a racial war that is publicly staged within the civilized confines of a newspaper as a “feud,” which draws unprecedented public attention, in the manner of a street brawl. Jordan Stouck argues “what sparks the rancour of the debate is less Papa Dom’s attack on Musgrave as a colonial landowner, but rather his mistaken reference to Shakespeare, revered figure of English culture” (Stouck 1). I will argue that Musgrave is more concerned with his ‘spectacle’ as an Englishman and refuses to allow a subaltern to attack his own “revered figure.”

Another colonizer ‘issue’ is Musgrave’s and Dom’s mutual lack of cultural capital, which is demonstrated by their erroneous handling of Chaucer’s poetry. Dom’s eager but limited knowledge of the canon and Musgrave’s error (when he tries to upstage Dom by quoting Chaucer in context, he mixes modern and Middle English) reveal their lack of canonical sophistication (Thomas 1999: 59). Both men are unconcerned with accuracies and use the “feud” as a gentlemanly disguise for their impulses to degrade the other. The argument over Chaucer’s poetry affords Musgrave the pretense of victory over Dom, and as a son of the Empire and heir to its literature, his triumph is assured over the native upstart. But Musgrave’s English refinement is revealed to be a fraud. His openly racist and contemptuous declaration, “damn niggers,” is edited out of his letter. In a way that reminds
one of Hesketh Bell’s comments on newspaper editors, Rhys endows Papa Dom with the
good sense to understand that printing a racial slur could incite the sort of violence he
himself had evoked when he criticized the local Roman Catholic clergy, not to mention
create problems for the island’s administrators. Nonetheless, his use of a replacement
phrase, “another race and colour” clearly communicates Musgrave’s racist pejorative. The
reading public, it is implied, understands the language of colonial discourse and its particular
phraseology, and knows that Musgrave would not have said what Dom printed. Using what
Dyer calls, “his white badge of superiority,” Musgrave, the would-be ‘refined man,’ conquers
Papa Dom’s ‘coarse’ insubordination of him, and his imperialist justification as ‘owner of the
canon’ allows him to continue to regard Dom as his cultural inferior and the mulatto
newspaper as “abominable.”

Rhys shows discursive ambivalence in her construction of Musgrave. Using a
paradoxical strategy of sympathetic familiarity turning into disdain, she portrays Musgrave,
initially, as “dear, but peppery... owned a big estate... and employed a good deal of labour,
but he was neither ferocious nor tyrannical” (40). This sympathetic description reflects the
colonizer value system that upholds the importance of enterprise as critical to island
prosperity and likens the leadership of estate owners, like Musgrave, to a benevolent
paternalism. But, by the end of the story he “stoop[s] to tyranny and abuse” according to
Papa Dom, when he arrogantly declares, “It is indeed a sad and dismal thing that the names
of great Englishmen should be taken in vain by those of another race and colour;” by which he
infers that all non-English islanders, including white Creoles, are “damn niggers” (41).
Musgrave’s “much needed reminder and rebuke” (40) is for those who think they can use
“the conquerors’ tools” and “speak back.” Rhys implicitly condemns Musgrave for
marginalizing her as a Creole, but not for having humiliated Papa Dom who, as the
“firebrand” instigator of the incident, “was by no means crushed [and] replied with dignity”
(40) but, it is inferred, deserves the reproach. Rhys’s racial ambiguity is underscored by the
withdrawal of her interest in the final line of the story when she says, “I wonder if I shall
ever again read the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette*?” (41). In the end, her
colonizer sensibility supplants her disgust for Musgrave, and she too snubs the mulatto
newspaper.

The issue of tropical degeneracy is another site of discursive ambiguity in “Again the
Antilles” and has links to the English canon and the travel writing of the nineteenth century.
Rhys makes a point of detailing Musgrave’s ‘depravity’ as an expatriate: “twenty years of the
tropics and much indulgence in spices and cocktails does have that effect” (40). Rhys offers
her ‘insider’ knowledge of tropical decay in the West Indies to the metropolis and thus
affirms the myth of degeneracy. Thomas indicates that the myth of racial decay in tropical
climes began in 1810 in standard reference books and was popularized by nineteenth-
century travel writing. Signifiers of degeneracy include: disease, sickliness, and excessive
appetites (particularly sexual, which was discursively linked to “blackness”), alcohol, spicy
food and idleness. The deterioration was deemed to be physical and moral, and encouraged
Victorian Anglo-Saxon visitors to keep as much distance from the ‘natives’ as they could for
fear of contamination by association (Thomas 1999: 54). Froude echoed this thinking, but
drew the line at moral degeneracy, saying that white people in the tropics had a superior
capacity for civility and could resist its effects through strong character. In Rhys’s view,
tropical degeneracy has an overtly sexual connotation that comes into view when the
Englishman is ‘seduced’ by the landscape and entranced by the ‘untamed sexuality’ of the
native, whose primitive impulses need to be 'conquered' and contained. Her view is linked to a Victorian theory that colonialism was an acceptable way to export excess sexual energies, thus giving 'men of adventure' opportunities to actualize their sexuality beyond the repressive confines of a 'civilized' Europe (Harris 146). Rhys portrays men like Musgrave as the 'worst sort,' whose degeneracy starts long before they arrive in the islands and whose impulse to exploit and degrade runs unchecked once they assume the mantle of colonizer.

Another form of ambiguity comes through characterizations of stable and reassuring white men, like Dr. Cox in “Pioneers, Oh Pioneers,” who represents Rhys's desire to model 'good' colonizers after her father, even though this image does not fit with the real Dr. Rees Williams of Roseau, Dominica, whose documented behavior suggests some degree of degeneracy. Portraying white expatriate males as 'bad' colonizers engages and affirms the European rhetoric of tropical degeneracy, particularly when she has Papa Dom declare, "It is a sad and a dismal sight...to contemplate the degeneracy of a stock" (40). Writing many years later, after Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys appears to abandon the concept of 'tropical degeneracy' for the "brochure discourse" of the mid-twentieth century, which presents the Caribbean as a 'paradise' for tourism and for pleasure (Strachan 1). I will take up this observation again in my Chapter Two discussion of "The Imperial Road." "Again the Antilles" reflects Rhys's mid-1920s European perspective that 'reported' the imperial condition in the West Indies back to England. Her later work, starting in the 1950s was more in the manner of 'memoir' than 'report.' By then, the beginning of aircraft travel and television had eliminated the need and interest in traditional and colonial forms of travel writing.
Rhys’s characterization of Papa Dom demonstrates the variousness and complications of her racial positioning. Using stereotypes to great effect, she presents Dom as “the uncontrollable other” and “black aspirant to whiteness” (Curry 17), saying he “was a firebrand,” “he was against…,” “he was embittered,” “he was passionate.” As I have already mentioned, Rhys cariactures Augustus Theodore Righton, which is evidence of a discursive collusion with colonial discourse. As Renee Curry observes, “White discourse, although it may employ the figure of the person of colour in the text, will rarely allow that figure to take significant action or to speak. If people of colour do speak, a white writer often constructs a dialect to signify this voice as the voice of the Other” (Curry 18). Dom’s dialect is his overwrought use of language, complete with errors. He is a self-confirming Other for the colonist and is depicted as that most despicable of subalterns, the sort that is openly contemptuous of the English but who has internalized their literature and culture so well that he plays the role better than the Englishman himself. He reminds the reader of Froude’s Dominican challenger, William Davis, who answered back to what he called Froude’s inciting of “racial hatreds of the past” and who contradicted the call for Crown Colony Rule, something Rhys’s family wholly endorsed. Mulatto men, like Dom, openly challenged the status quo and thus needed to be discredited and held down, which would explain why Rhys’s construction of him runs to parody. At the beginning of the story, the unidentified narrator, “gazes” at Dom, but their eyes do not meet, as this would violate the colonizer code by suggesting equal standing. This gaze establishes her authorial control and everything we know about him comes through the reductive lens of her colonizer perspective. Sue Thomas says that “[n]ineteenth- and early twentieth-century tourists often describe the scenery of Dominica as awe-inspiring; the narrator finds Papa Dom…’awe-inspiring,”
which provides another example of Rhys’s impulse to link the coloured subaltern with the landscape (Thomas 1999: 57). In typical Rhysian fashion, his racial category is quickly established as “a beautiful shade of coffee-colour” (39). His arrogant and swaggering postures make him look ridiculous to other people in ways he cannot comprehend. But Dom wins a moral victory over Musgrave in their “battle of words” because it is Rhys’s mandate to appropriate and dismantle the textual authority of English literature. He acquires a limited form of agency, but falls short of generating his own autoethnographic response as a subaltern capable of his own counter-discursive reply.

Rhys uses race explicitly to differentiate between herself as a white Creole and the Afro-Caribbean islanders. Where some common ground exists between both groups, it is always complicated by hierarchical power dynamics and the colonial code. The non-white subject is reduced to being a function of the white subject and has no autonomy. S/he is never shown to have similarities and differences that are anything other than a means for knowing the white Self. Rhys appropriates ‘blackness’ and sexuality for the purpose of transgressing her own narrowly defined role as a white Creole woman. This strategy is aligned with the English idea of a racialized hierarchy of womanhood that places English women at its pinnacle and situates non-white, non-English, and colonial women at the bottom. Rosenberg suggests that Rhys “articulates a [C]reole identity that deconstructs race as an essential category and emphasizes the common ground created by intersections of gender, race and class...[and] formulates a multi-racial identity in the context of political and literary movements that threatened her identity as a white [C]reole...[Rhys] highlight[s] her own oppression [through] forms of enslavement” (Rosenberg 23). I agree that Rhys uses the trope of ‘enslavement’ in her subjective constructions, but I see little evidence of “common
ground” or a “multi-racial” identity. What I see, rather, is an overt articulation of racial divisions intended to categorize and divide rather than to unify.

Rhys’s white colonizer discourse is self-empowering. The desire to be ‘black’ is really the desire to be unshackled from the confinement of white Creole womanhood and to create a space in a culture stratified along colour lines. Her narrative strategy is to write against the Creole stereotype whilst mimicking ideas of ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ produced by colonizer culture and discourse. Rhys never interrogates her privileged status as a white Creole, but she reads herself as Other to reconcile her position between the colonizer and the colonized.

Chapter Two will examine and discuss Rhys’s colonial discourse as it engages with nineteenth-century travel writing and the nascent brochure discourse of the twentieth century, and also with British colonial fiction and the discourse of imperial capitalism in her unpublished short story, “The Imperial Road.”
Jean Rhys’s proclivity for balancing myth and memoir using colonizer discourse took an unusual and unprecedented turn in “The Imperial Road” from fictional narrative to personal essay. This work and her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, are the only non-fiction works in the Rhys opus. “The Imperial Road” was never published and has drawn little in the way of criticism or commentary. The few critics who have written about it are divided over whether it is autobiography or fiction. Elaine Savory considers it to be a “personal essay” (4); Teresa O’Connor calls it “creative non-fiction” (1986: 15), while Peter Hulme describes it as a “lightly fictionalized” (23) re-telling of her only return visit to Dominica in 1936 with her second husband, Lesley Tilden Smith. My analysis takes all of these assessments into account and adds more. I see “The Imperial Road” as travel writing with its personal, eyewitness aspect and as fictional only to the extent that Rhys uses authorial license to add details when factual information is beyond recall or of no aesthetic value. I will take up Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of autoethnography again, “when colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms...in dialogue with...metropolitan representations” (7), and structure my argument on the premise that Rhys models “The Imperial Road” as autoethnography in the manner of nineteenth-century travel writing and British colonial fiction. She engages with both genres intertextually to collude with and to challenge discursive reductions of
white Creoles but, following Froude's lead, tends to use one-sided Anglo-West Indian racial and political views to form her opinions.

Pratt uses another term, “anti-conquest,” to describe a strategy of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects “seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” in travel and exploration writings which are constituted in relation to older, imperial rhetorics of conquest involving a European male “‘seeing man’—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (Pratt). Pratt does not mention Froude, but certainly has his ‘sort’ in mind as the “seeing man.” Froude was an Oxford scholar whose opinions and erudition were beyond reproach in Europe. He maintained that “history had assigned the Anglo-Saxon the duty to rule over less advanced races. The existence of the Empire testified to that fact” (Thompson iii-iv). Furthermore, “emancipation…had wrecked the economy and left the blacks in moral ruin, and [colonies] in material ruin…[B]lacks [were] gaining political equality [but] their ineptitude [would lead to] ultimate ruin…[W]hites would flee, and civilization would give way to the bush” (Thompson 168). Froude maintained that only Anglo-Saxon discipline in the form of British rule could reverse colonial decay and restore prosperity in the West Indies. His book had an important place in Rhys’s family history because it endorsed the political ambitions of her father and uncle. The imposition of Crown Colony Rule brought Sir Henry Hesketh Bell to Dominica as administrator in 1899. Rhys describes the happiest years of her life in the “Zouaves” chapter of *Smile Please* as those which coincided with the tenure of Hesketh Bell, whose “energy and enterprise did much to enhance the prestige of
the English enclave” and to establish cultural practices that brought Dominica into the English colonial mode (Paravisini-Gebert 25).

In “The Imperial Road” Rhys seeks to “secure [her] innocence at the same moment as [she] asserts European hegemony,” to reiterate Platt. She echoes Froude’s 1888 book some seventy years later, writing about a trip to the Caribbean in 1936. “The Imperial Road” was written fifty years after “Again the Antilles” and duplicates the racial posturing and discursive alliances of this earlier work which shows that her short story writing did not evolve significantly over time. She started writing “The Imperial Road” a few years after Wide Sargasso Sea and around the time her second collection of stories, Tigers Are Better Looking (1968), was published. “The Imperial Road” reflects what Pratt describes as:

[T]he idea of anti-conquest: a system defined in part as a utopian, innocent vision of European global authority [which] deviated from previous hegemony with its preoccupation with the discovery of trades routes and territorial appropriation… ‘Anti-conquest’ hegemony turned its attention to territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources and administrative control of the imperial frontier…Travel and travel writing pursued the project of natural history and European economic expansion by providing the means and momentum for the inland exploration of territories as part of a late eighteenth-century European knowledge-building project. (Pratt 38-39)

Free from the guilt of conquest, the ‘seeing-man’ takes possession of a landscape without violence or subjugation. Rhys feminizes the ‘seeing-man’ into a ‘seeing-woman’ and casts herself explicitly in the narrative role as the returning Dominican native who has traveled back from the metropolis to survey her homeland and claim her West Indian identity.

Rhys erects her travel discourse using a strategy of ‘knowing gone wrong.’ Her narrator arrives in Dominica with the unreasonable expectation that the island she left
thirty years earlier will be much the same as before, although Rhys would certainly have
been aware of (then) recent political developments in Dominica through family and
friends. She met and befriended author Phyllis Shand Allfrey in England during the mid-
1930s, a fellow Dominican and (from the 1960s to 1981) the editor of the Dominican Herald
and later the Dominican Star (Angier 369). They renewed their friendship in 1973,
whereupon Rhys received copies of Allfrey’s newspapers, but this information seems to
have had little impact on her writing (Hulme n. 23, 47). She was aware of the new,
emerging Caribbean literature, but said she did not “read any of the West Indian people”
(Letters 197), meaning writers like Edward Braithwaite, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris.
There does not appear to be any association between what she knew of Dominica and
what she “knows” in “The Imperial Road,” which suggests cognitive dissonance is part of
her discursive strategy. It also suggests that she is “speaking back” to the metropolis to
make a case for white Creoles who are now (in her opinion) Others to Afro-Caribbean
Dominicans, who became politically powerful when British Rule collapsed after World War
One. The narrator “sees” the new Dominica through the filter of turn-of-the-century
Dominica memories, including the ceremony which marked the opening of the road,
presided over by Hesketh Bell. She underscores this point by insisting that “the Imperial
Road couldn’t have disappeared without a trace, it just wasn’t possible” (22).

Unlike conventional travel writing, “The Imperial Road” is not unabashedly
commercial but it fits the genre of colonial travelogue as it was directed to the home
culture, England. It mimics the nineteenth-century model of British travel writing that
insists that texts promote, confirm and lament the exercise of imperial power in the same
way that Froude and others did. As a 'personal' account it functions as “the writing of
history, as a subjective presentation tempered [as much] by the recorder's biases as by the
events themselves” (Wilson-Tagoe 102). “The Imperial Road” was originally drafted in the
late 1960s and recalls a Depression era (1936) Dominica through the lens of a nineteenth-
century viewpoint centred on the idea that only strict Imperial rule could bring the West
Indies back to its former prosperity. The same viewpoint ardently lamented the ‘beginning
of the end’ of British authority in the islands. Savory describes the text as a new direction
for Rhys through which she articulated competing desires to “fictionalize and set the public
record of her life straight” (Savory 15). While this is possible, there is very little on record
to indicate her intentions for this piece, and her recorded comments mention only the
negative reception it received from her publishers. What I see is an appropriation of a
metropolitan mode of representation with which Rhys “speaks back” to the expulsion of
imperial influences and ‘whiteness’ from a West Indian ‘Paradise,’ complete with Biblical
allusions. Her colonizer discourse picks up on Froude’s repeated motifs of “drift” as the
root of Dominica's problems and makes no allowances for the impact of recent world
events and conditions on its economy. It also makes no mention of the West Indian
struggle for independence and the general political unrest throughout the Caribbean. In the
thirty years between her departure and her return, Dominica’s political and socioeconomic
landscape had been altered by different forms of crisis: the ripple effect of World War
One, the end of Crown Colony Rule in 1933, the collapse of the plantation economy and
the abandoning of estates, plus the formation of labour unions for estate workers—all of
which erased any promise of renewed prosperity in the colonial context. As a travel
document, “The Imperial Road” is flawed, obsessive and evokes the same ‘adventurer in a colonial playground’ trope common to British Colonial fiction that Rhys wrote against through the character of Rochester in Wide Sargasso Sea. In typical Rhysian fashion, it offers an alternative account that foregrounds the emotional climate of a (still) fragmented and tense colonial society permeated by fear and mistrust and the possibility of racial violence.

“The Imperial Road” was written in seven drafts of varying length and detail. The original titles of “Return of the Native,” “Mother Mount Cavalry,” and “The Bishop’s Feast,” gave way to “The Imperial Road,” which was written on or before March 24, 1974, the only date noted (on the seventh and final version). “The Imperial Road” shows evidence of Rhys’s declining powers of authorship in the last years of her life, although she wrote actively in the decade after Wide Sargasso Sea, producing Sleep It Off, Lady in 1976. Rhys wanted “The Imperial Road” to be included in Sleep It Off, Lady, but it was not published. Teresa O’Connor explains:

Toward the end of her life Jean Rhys offered many of the private papers and manuscripts still in her possession for sale through the booksellers Bertram Rota, Ltd. Their catalogue listed an unpublished story, “The Imperial Road,” with the notation, “Miss Rhys has stated that her publishers declined to include this story in Sleep It Off, Lady, considering it to be too anti-negro in tone” (7). The work was never published and its major components never appeared in any of Rhys’s other work. (O’Connor 1992: 404)

Rhys’s friend and publisher, Diana Athill, remarks in a letter, dated November, 1984,

[Rhys] often used to talk querulously, or indignantly, about black people, like any other old exiled member of the Caribbean plantocracy: why had they hated ‘us’ so much? Hadn’t they been better off in her youth, when ‘we’ were running things? Look how they had ruined everything since then! Silly sentimental liberals she thought us...She wasn’t surprised when we disliked ‘The Imperial Road’...And I never told her what I really felt, which was that she had lost her grip on her style in that story...it was the voice of her ordinary, non-writing self that one heard.
Her strength had ebbed. (O'Connor 1992: 406)

Elaine Savory, a one-time editor of the *Jean Rhys Review*, acquired permission from Rhys's literary executor and former publisher, Francis Wyndham, to publish "The Imperial Road" in the Vol. 11, No. 2, 2001 edition, using Version Four from the Jean Rhys Papers at the university of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Version Four is the “most finished of all the versions” (Savory 5) and the only one published to date, and I will use it as my primary source.

Unlike her previous writing, Rhys has no ironic distance from this protagonist or from the dark emotional undertones that are consistent throughout it. It is an explicit example of Rhys’s colonizer discourse, and as Diana Athill indicates, situates Rhys firmly in the nineteenth-century West Indian plantocracy system of assumptions and prejudices, even if it simultaneously reveals self-consciousness and a measure of critical awareness. More critical than “querulous,” it insults Afro-Caribbeans and erects the white Creole as the victim of their derision and scorn. It articulates and confirms Froude’s worst fears for the West Indies: that without British rule and Anglo-Saxon discipline, the West Indies would descend into anarchy and revert to a primitive state.

As travel writing, "The Imperial Road" reinforces stereotypes that make the native population and the island landscape exotic and ‘available’ for tourist consumption. This signals a slight shift in discursive philosophy for Rhys. Her earlier ‘Caribbean’ natives were often “indolent” and menacing but powerless, or, like Papa Dom, mimics who appropriate the “colonizer’s tools” by transculturating the English canon and play the part of the Englishman better than he played it himself. Her new natives can be charming and accommodating, but are more often rude, haughty, and insubordinate, all depending on
whether the white person is attached to the new prosperity (tourism) or (like Rhys) connected to the old colonial order of racial and political oppression. No longer subject to the autocratic dictates of Empire, the native Dominican population has and exudes a sense of its own power. Rhys’s travel writing reconfigures Dominica as a geographic space. The island’s former ‘landscape of nothing’ is transformed by the language of tourism into a thing of beckoning beauty by sexualized imagery: “the mountains [were] lovely, mysterious and wild” (17). Colonial travelogue at the turn of the century promoted tourism somewhat cautiously, placing emphasis on the differences between Europe and the ‘uncivilized’ world. It was meant as casual reading and did not overtly “sell” destinations. Travel writing informed the mother country about the goings-on in the Empire, just as Rhys had functioned as an Antillean ‘reporter’ in the 1920s. Nonetheless, it laid the groundwork for contemporary tourist advertising and its representations of a new Paradise in the form of “brochure discourse” (Strachan 1, 96-97). Rhys applies the travelogue model in “The Imperial Road,” acting in a ‘reporter’ capacity and giving it a contemporary (1970s) dimension by presenting Lee (i.e. Lesley Tilden Smith, her second husband) as the twentieth-century tourist who experiences Dominica as Island Paradise.

“The Imperial Road” begins with the narrator and Lee arriving by coastal steamer into the Port of Roseau, Dominica. Their landing is facilitated by pre-arranged accommodations at the La Paz Hotel, which they had read about in recent American “novels.” The general atmosphere of Roseau is pleasant on the surface, but a distinct hostility is revealed in the mannerisms of some of the local people, which prompts the narrator to leave Roseau when a rental property on the other side of the island is made
available through a friend. The couple arranges to spend the rest of their Dominican holiday in the friend’s villa, which, they are told, can only be accessed by boat launch. Her husband is charmed by Dominica and the Dominicans, but the narrator, contrary to her expectations, is not. She says “I was at home but not at home” (19). Her childhood memories of Dominica and the Imperial Road surface repeatedly. She expresses an interest in seeing the Road again, but local people advise otherwise, without explanation. The narrator decides at the end of the holiday that she and Lee will walk back to Roseau on the “old Imperial Road” and two local guides are hired to escort them. The narrator says “everything went splendidly at first,” but the adventure goes badly when the road “wasn’t a road any longer” (20). The narrator injures herself on what has become “a steep, uphill track” making it necessary to seek the help of a patois-speaking black woman who takes the narrator into her home to see to her injury, and while treating her insults her white Creole ancestry. The narrator maintains her dignity with silence and leaves abruptly. The journey back to Roseau is resumed in a rainstorm, where suddenly “there wasn’t a vestige of the road anywhere” (21), only a mule track. When all seems lost, the group stumbles upon an intact portion of the road and “[a] very civilized scene,” a white former plantation house, and its occupants, a white American couple wearing white clothes, who arrange a car to take them back to Roseau. They arrive back safely at the La Paz Hotel, but the narrator cannot understand what has become of the Imperial Road, although her narrative has made everything clear to the reader.

Rhys’s arrival by boat into the Port of Roseau at the beginning of the story duplicates Froude’s arrival forty years earlier by the same means. Froude says as he arrives,
"I was anxious to learn what we [the English] had made of an island so highly valued during the Napoleonic wars which we had fought so hard for...[T]he most beautiful island of the Antilles and the least known" (Froude 113-114). Several decades later, Rhys, the returning native, approaches Roseau in the same way, identifying herself as a first person narrator using "I." She is anxious to re-discover Dominica, but the opening dialogue with a "coloured" passenger suggests that her expectations will be in conflict with what she finds.

I was on the deck, talking to a young coloured man.
"Aren’t they lovely?" I said. Yes, mysterious and wild. Not changed. As I remembered.
"You have visited Dominica before?" He said smiling.
"I was born here in Roseau. I was sixteen when I left."
His expression changed at once. He gave me a hostile look then walked away.
I was far too excited to worry about this. (17)

We’d booked a room at the Roseau Hotel La Paz and I was very relieved when I saw it. Cool. Spacious. Twin beds. Bathroom next door. Couldn’t be better.
There had been no hotel on the island in my time and I felt responsible.
My husband, Lee, had wished to spend his holiday in South America. But I had asked him so often to stop at Dominica that he consented. Dominica is a small, beautiful and now neglected island between Martinique and Guadeloupe. (17)

The narrator willfully ignores the young man’s hostility, and directs her attention to what she remembers: the landscape, and what is new: the hotel and its comforts. She advises the reader that Dominica “had no hotel...in my time and I felt responsible” and that the island is “small, beautiful and now neglected” thus situating herself in its past and present. Her comments evoke Froude’s prediction that the end of British rule would allow “the West Indian” garden to revert back to its state of wildness and chaos. The phrase “now neglected” explicitly points to an intersection where her colonizer discourse and her travel discourse meet, through which Rhys makes a claim for authenticity of her opinion. Her colonizer discourse enters into dialogue with the colonial travel writing form to create an
autoethnographic response using English idioms and its viewpoint as the mobile culture.
English travel journals traditionally made the case for a strong imperial presence, and through her travel writing Rhys laments the loss of colonial enterprise in the sense of a Paradise Lost. Imperial rule, according to the colonizer, created and maintained a ‘paradise’ in the wilds of the West Indies, and in Dominica, its greatest monument was the Imperial Road. Roads were the “pre-eminent sign of modernity… and, since Dominica is virtually all mountains…[the Imperial Road] stands as an archetype in this respect” (Hulme 25). Thus, the Imperial Road functions as the colonizer’s symbol for power and authority.

The road’s disappearance is synonymous with an erasure of the white Creole as a historical entity. Without the road, there is no past and there can be no future, at least in a colonial context. The narrator’s obsession with its existence and her denial of its demise—“Nothing left of the Imperial Road? Nothing. It just wasn’t possible” (22) is the overwhelming evidence of the demise of the colonial Creole. Repeating this question over and over functions as a lament for the loss of ‘Creoleness,’ and the loss of the British colonial Eden. Rhys as “seeing-woman” cannot accept that her society, like the Imperial Road, has decayed and disappeared.

Crown Colony Rule had governed Dominica until 1925 when elections to the local legislature once again took place. Hulme observes that “Dominica became the regional centre for constitutional change, the need for which was stated in C.L.R. James’s ‘The Case for Self Government,’ published in 1932” (Hulme 42). Much of the island’s political discontent was channeled into “vituperative discussion in the local press” which protested the “corrupt misapplication of public funds” (Hulme 42). In 1933 the outgoing and
exceedingly unpopular Administrator, W.A. Bowering, wrote to the Colonial Office,  
“Dominica has always been bad but it is now surpassing the bounds of safety and, in my opinion, unless early steps are taken to check and suppress the seditious, disloyal and anti-Government preaching of the disaffected politicians, there will be very serious trouble” (Hulme 42). When Bowring nominated one of Rhys’s cousins and (then) manager of the Geneva Estate, Norman Keith Lockhart, to the local council following a mass resignation by its elected members in 1932, the estate was burned down and destroyed. It was widely rumoured that the house was torched but no one was charged. When the Lockhart family was compensated for its loss by the local government, a huge public outcry made the Lockharts “intensely unpopular” in Dominica (Hulme 42).

Rhys’s colonial discourse and its investment in racial stereotypes are in full evidence throughout “The Imperial Road.” As I discussed in Chapter One with reference to “Again the Antilles,” Rhys consistently uses colour designations to identify her characters almost as frequently as she names them. She offers her views as if they are natural and transparent, “The place was crowded with coloured men. And here I must explain that “coloured” to me meant those of mixed race. Negroes were black, but there were no Negroes that I could see and no women except myself and Violet” (17). At this juncture the narrator makes a small, but significant error. She identifies Violet two lines previously as “A very black girl with bright eyes and a white smile,” then indicates, “there were no Negroes” when she has already identified Violet as one. This slippage would suggest that Violet is not a typical “Negro” because she “serves” and is a “good” black, or that the narrator’s perceived ‘whiteness’ had been compromised to the extent that she sees herself as more similar to
Violet than distinct from her. In Rhys’s colour scheme, racial behaviors and characteristics are frequently signified by place of origin, particularly if the character is Afro-Caribbean. An example of this is in her description of one of the guides, “the grimmest Negro I have ever seen. He came from Martinique” (20). Her racial stereotyping is loaded with prejudices and assumptions that signal how a coloured character is likely to behave or respond in an interaction with white characters. In this context mulattos are “smiling but deceitful” and “hated everyone,” blacks are “child-like,” “jabbering” or “sullen.” White characters, like the Americans dressed in white clothing in the white plantation house, represent ‘civilization’ and evoke the colonial tenet that ‘only white men could save each other.’

The narrator’s encounters with non-white islanders result in serious affronts over race and the old colonial order. Some of the encounters involve dialogue while others do not. Often the male characters ignore her, but it is not certain if it is because she is female and in the company of her husband, or simply because she has revealed herself as a white Creole. Local mulattos are especially rude to her while politely deferential to her white English husband. At the end of the story, having supposedly made her case, she remarks on the mulattos’ incorrigible behavior, “That’s how they are. That’s how they are” (21). Hulme says “Rhys had a deeply troubled but nuanced sense of racial categories… [S]he had grown up with questions of race and was clearly not about to stop discussing those questions now [in the early 1970s]” (Hulme 39). He cites this comment from a passage in Version Seven of “The Imperial Road,” “for me coloured people were half white or quarter white. Black people were negroes. It seemed that the English way of labeling all
races except their own coloured led to a lot of misunderstanding and confusion...some were beautiful and very intelligent; some had the worst qualities of both races—they were often trouble-makers and often treacherous. They hated” (Hulme 39).

It is the mulattos who communicate the new island status quo to the narrator, even though she actively resists this information because it effectively strips her of her former white Creole colonial privilege: “I had learned that any reference to the island when it was governed by the English was met with silence and a pained, annoyed expression” (18). Hulme observes that “the coloured character...is in many ways the hinge on which [the story] turns, in literary terms the Iago [character]” (Hulme 39). The mulattos impose silence on the narrator and make it clear to her that in the new Dominica she must deny her past in order to be tolerated, which functions as a reversal of the previous colonial order in which the non-white subaltern had no voice. The act of silencing signifies her ‘victimization’ by the black majority. Where she once was a privileged white Creole, she is now a pariah. The essence of her autoethnography is: ‘I have been Othered in my native island in the same way that England has Othered me.’ The act of ‘othering’ represents a reversal of the colonizer/colonized binary in which those without authority have no right to speak, much less “speak back.” When she is abused by the black woman, who says “I know who you are and for one of your family I would do nothing. I do it for your husband for I hear that he’s a good man and kind to all” (20), the affront is so forcefully exerted that the narrator is rendered speechless but she shows no sign of understanding the black woman’s inexplicable hatred. This is clearly the central scene of the story, and although no explanation is offered, the reasons for the black woman’s outburst must have been known
to the narrator. Rhys’s family connections through the Geneva Estate and the Lockhart family, and her relatives’ active (and indefensible) attempts to block the political independence of Dominica, are words that cannot be spoken in fiction or in fact, and constitute cognitive dissonance in the form of racial amnesia.

After their harrowing experience in the tropical forest, the Tilden Smiths are effectively rescued by white Americans whose “civility” restores order to their situation. The narrator says, “I hadn’t the remotest idea of which way to go, or how to get on to any sort of road” (21). The Americans, unlike most of the natives, are happy to be of assistance, and have convinced the mulatto driver, against his own judgment, to wait for them. The driver complies, but he is angry and will not speak, “nor did we. Indeed no one spoke and it was getting dark” (22).

Once back at the La Paz Hotel, the narrator’s “voice” is restored along with her gentility and self-assurance. She cognitively dissembles the day’s events, saying “I felt I’d been quite right all along. It had been a wonderful adventure and worth it” (22). The narrator’s colonizer perspective emerges intact from serious challenge, and in a great show of denial she concludes, “those men must have taken us wrong” (22). Her suspicions about the blacks and mulattos have been validated: they are dishonest, vengeful and untrustworthy and incomprehensible. To echo Froude, the island may be beautiful, but behind its exotic façade the absence of English authority has allowed the ‘weeds to overtake the garden.’ The narrator’s final words express her true feelings of bewilderment, “Nothing left of the Imperial Road? Nothing? It just wasn’t possible” (22).
Although lacking in polish and decidedly lacking the “emotional tautness that identifies Rhys’s best and most finished writing” (Savory 14), “The Imperial Road” travels a full narrative circle in its description of the narrator’s cross-island quest to reconnect with her native island. Rhys’s storyline follows her usual course of romanticism leading to unexpected revelations and ending with ironic twists and disillusionment. The narrator’s visit begins with eager anticipation, but ends with her bitter realization that her home and history, like the Imperial Road, are irrevocably gone. Angier says this loss became “obsessive” in Rhys’s final years, “the feeling that her world had disappeared, and was being forgotten and lied about. Black people were claiming now to have been oppressed by her father’s generation when, in fact,–she felt–they’d been helped and respected” (Angier 607). The narrator makes no attempt to analyze Dominican society; she is concerned only with making connections to her colonial childhood. Her idea of “the other side” seems to have abandoned its previous identifications with slavery and ‘blackness’ to become almost void of sympathy for Dominicans. Rhys uses a good/bad native binary in “The Imperial Road” in which mulattos are designated as ‘bad’ natives and Afro-Caribbeans as ‘good’ natives. This binary represents a deliberate effort not to ‘know’ the Other and is further evidence of Rhys’s colonizer discourse. Savory notes that “[t]he narrator is quite open about her old racial insecurities, resentments and fears, [and] often disturbingly let[s] them be the unchallenged filter in judging what she sees and hears of the people she meets in Dominica” (Savory 13). Rhys’s hostility and contempt for her fellow Dominicans endow this story with a visceral quality that reveals the emotional impulse behind the writing and the considerable tensions between racial groups. Rhys actively
solicits the reader’s sympathy by making it clear that her ‘reality,’ the discomfort of a colonial white child returning as adult to the reality of a post-colonial Dominica, is the only important ‘reality’ in the story. Rhys mourns the loss of Creole colonial life as ‘paradise lost,’ whose access point was the Imperial Road, literally and figuratively. No other character is permitted to speak or challenge the narrator’s authority. The privilege of discourse belongs only to her. The white colonial child has lost her home with no possibility of repatriation. She has been displaced and ‘expelled’ from her colonial ‘paradise’ by blacks and mulattos, and her exile is complete.

The Imperial Road was meant to bring Dominica back to its former state of ‘paradise’ through a renewed form of colonial prosperity. In Rhys’s story the road’s disappearance confirms what Froude predicted would happen: without British rule and Anglo-Saxon discipline Dominica would ‘go back to the bush,’ and become the antithesis of ‘paradise’ in the colonial context. In the late nineteenth century, anxieties about continuing economic decline and the rise of the mulatto merchant class inspired local white authorities, including Rhys’s father and uncle, to campaign for Crown Colony rule using a rhetoric of ‘salvage,’ which was a thin veil for the fundamentally racist idea that “only white men could save Dominica” (Hulme 32). White men, that is, who believed they had an obligation to ‘civilize’ the non-European world, and to whom the earth represented a “God-given heap of raw materials for [their] exclusive profit and use” (Hughes 129). This view saw no alternatives to the colonial model for the purpose of capitalist invigoration, and pursued new enterprise using Froude’s rhetoric, “[Dominica] was once prosperous. It might be prosperous again…” (Froude 153).
Most of Dominica's development had been confined to its shoreline and only modernization through road-building could, according to the Dominican plutocracy, bring renewed prosperity. Furthermore, as Pratt indicates, the interior of the island needed to be developed as part of the colonizer imperative.

Unexploited nature tends to be seen in [travel writing] as troubling or ugly, its very primalness a sign of the failure of human enterprise. Neglect became the touchstone of a negative esthetic that legitimated European interventionism... Primal nature was either uninteresting or indecipherable...the forest is textualized not as a site of meaning, but of absence of meaning; beauty is found in domesticated landscapes. (Pratt 149-150)

Hesketh Bell made the following observations, “The interior of the island is entirely untapped and only a fringe of land around the coasts is cultivated. All of this shows that there is a great deal to be done if the colony is to be put into good shape...At present Dominica is stagnating” (Hesketh Bell 25). His thoughts expressed the sentiments of the prevailing white colonizer discourse, and provided the momentum for the modernization that was to follow. Part of Hesketh Bell’s plans included increasing the white settler population by inviting suitable candidates from England and other parts of the colonial world with his 1904 booklet, Hints to Settlers, which attracted “quite a considerable number of people” (Hesketh Bell 82). By 1905, road-building and other modernizations, including 200 miles of telephone lines, prompted him to say, “At this rate we shall soon have most of the amenities of life enjoyed by people in the Old Country” (Hesketh Bell 82). The ‘Old Country’ was England, and all modernization efforts were really intended to create England in the Tropics. His plan was to develop (or exploit) the island through an expanded form of commercial agriculture and its major condition was a stable white settler community
protected by an ideology of racial segregation. By December, 1905, Hesketh Bell's efforts proved to be in vain. Despite attracting new settlers and the much-needed funding from England he says in a journal notation dated December 30th, “It is grievous to have to relate that my scheme for opening up the interior of Dominica has resulted in failure. Unfortunately, the degree of policy which was essential for the success of the project was not secured” (Hesketh Bell 94). Part of the demise of Hesketh Bell’s plan was connected to the illogical route taken by the Imperial Road that made it vulnerable to destruction by fierce interior conditions and challenges of building in mountainous terrain. None of this information is included in “The Imperial Road” or in Smile Please. Hesketh Bell and the plantocracy put the blame for England’s and the white settlers’ losses firmly on the adversarial climate and its “indolent” (non-white) labour force, as if bound together in conspiracy. “Typical Dominica” was the common explanation for all the island’s woes.

Another of Rhys’s short stories, “Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers,” written in the 1940s, is connected to the Hesketh Bell story and “The Imperial Road.” This story has a similar “anti-negro” tone, but it did not draw the same negative response from Rhys’s publishers as “The Imperial Road.” “Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers,” was included in Sleep It Off, Lady, the same collection for which “The Imperial Road” had been refused, and suggests Rhys’s publishers had rather ‘fluid’ ideas about what constituted an “anti-negro” tone.

The main character of “Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers” was based on a real person, like Papa Dom, a Mr. Ramage, who had come to Dominica in 1897. In the story he is portrayed as the quintessential settler candidate, “a handsome man in tropical kit, white suit, cummerbund, solar topee” (276). He is visually linked with traditional male colonial
power and authority and appears destined for great success. In the manner of British colonial fiction, Ramage is associated with a return to a primordial life and “initiations into manhood by turning one’s back on civilization” (Harris 146). He buys a derelict estate on the Imperial Road, “as remote as possible,” citing the need for “Peace, that’s what I’m after [and not] good interest on capital” (277). Ramage seems quite unsuited to estate life and for the role white society expects him to play. He lacks leadership qualities and a traditional masculinity, has “feminine hands” and a passive, distracted outlook. He shuns the white community and defies its social code by marrying a mulatto woman who “wasn’t a very nice coloured girl...She was dressed to the nines, smelt very strongly of cheap scent and talked in an aggressive voice” (277). He appears to fall victim to the ‘degenerative’ powers of the Tropics, and by 1899 regresses to the point of suicide. By then, his behavior has made him a spectacle of ‘blackness’ and quite the opposite of the iconic “spectacle of whiteness” (Dyer 44) he portrays on arrival. He is labeled “white zombie” by the local mulatto and black community as a final indicator of his fall from grace. Like Adam, he is an outcast from Paradise, in the Caribbean sense. The real Ramage experienced a similar fate, and (apparently) regressed into mental illness. Hulme explains that “[he] concentrated on digging holes...Month after month...he told enquirers he was digging a private road to China [which] stands as a parody of Chamberlain and Bell’s modernizing efforts: much digging to no ultimate purpose, and with moral laxity, madness, and death—probably all three—as the final outcome” (Hulme 32).

Rhys appears to have altered and fictionalized the real Ramage story in a gesture that writes against European hegemony and is effectively anti-discursive. She erects
“Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers” to function as an allegory of the failure of Hesketh Bell’s vision for Dominica and the failure of Empire, and explains “The Imperial Road” to a limited extent. When one reads one text in conjunction with the other, “Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers” seems to mock Hesketh Bell, and by extension Froude, and the turn-of-the-century effort to modernize Dominica. “The Imperial Road,” by contrast, endorses colonial discourse and laments Hesketh Bell’s failure and Dominica’s purported return to the ‘bush.’

“The Imperial Road” earned a dubious reputation in the publishing community in spite of not being published. Alec Waugh, a well-known English travel writer and brother to Evelyn, consulted Rhys in the early 1950s about Dominica. Waugh had written about his own experiences on the Imperial Road during a trip to Dominica in 1938 in a story called “Typical Dominica.” His ordeal of attempting to cross the island after being told it is a “nice little walk” matches Rhys’s story, “It was raining all the time...the road [was] sliding...I would not make that journey twice” (Waugh 301). He, as a travel writer, analyses the issue of the Imperial Road, using sentiments that remind one of Rhys’s colonial discourse:

I had heard so much talk about that road...I could not measure the cost and difficulty of maintaining it...I am...familiar with the inherent laziness and inefficiency of West Indian labour [and] the diminished resources of the British Empire...and how profitable are the uses to which in other sections of the Empire capital and labour can be put. (Waugh 302)

Waugh as outsider-appraiser picks up and continues Froude’s colonial travelogue with its emphasis on profit and resources. It echoes what Hesketh Bell and Rhys say in their colonial rhetoric about what went wrong with the Imperial Road. He reflects an increasingly pessimistic English perspective on colonies and their viability in “Typical
Dominica” and says the island suffered from “[i]ll luck accompanied by ill-management [and a] desperate defeatism...[Dominica] was in the red for keeps. It was up to the Imperial Exchequer to take care of it” (Waugh 275, 277). Waugh, like Rhys, “describes the dissolution of Empire in a Caribbean island as perceived by the rulers...in which there is no longer a future in the West Indies for the white man...in contrast with earlier colonial attitudes of assurance and confidence” (Harris 147-148). The distinct similarities between “Typical Dominica” and “The Imperial Road” allow for the possibility that Rhys may have modeled her story on Waugh’s 1948 travel piece. In the manner of British colonial fiction, both stories display the authors’ attraction for the island and a high regard for the order and duty for colonial administrators and their imperatives.

“The Imperial Road” also brought out anti-colonial sentiments in the writing community. Hulme remarks that, “the language of English liberalism in the 1960s...the language of Rhys’s London friends...hurried to make sure that everyone was treated equally and that offence was never knowingly given...[Her friends] were queasy about race and [in their vernacular Rhys was]...prejudiced” (Hulme 38). “The Imperial Road” inspired writer Paul Theroux to write the story “Zombies” (1980) He models his protagonist, “Miss Bristow,” on Rhys, and describes her as an elderly alcoholic from the West Indies, who “[a]t eighty-two...felt like a corpse” (Theroux 18). “Miss Bristow” has made one unhappy visit to “Isabella,” the island of her childhood and remembers that, “I couldn’t bear it. Everything has changed. I was lost” (21). Her story, “The Imperial Ice House,” is turned down for publication by her publishers because of its racist overtones. Miss Bristow denies that her story is “anti-negro” saying, “It is not about race. It is about
condition” (Theroux 29). The story ends with Miss Bristow’s paranoid, alcohol-induced, recurring hallucinations of the “Zombies” who come to haunt Creoles who have not yet learned to recant their colonial rhetoric and their racial prejudices:

She was not imagining these ghastly faces, the teeth, the red eyes, the dredlocks … She saw them now… They had swarmed like rats from the island and now they were here, lurking; they had gained entrance…but still she said, “You are right” and “Yes, yes” hoping the words would drive them away. Her agreement was merely ritual… [It made the fright worse but enabled her to bear it. (Theroux 29-30)

Theroux follows up this story in “World’s End” and Other Stories with his own version of “The Imperial Ice House” (1980) in which a pre-Emancipation colonial planter is murdered by two of his male slaves when he coerces them into moving a large shipment of ice a great distance along an ‘Imperial’ road only to watch it melt by the end of the journey. The story, narrated by an unnamed Creole, imitates Rhys’s style with the intent to parody her (O’Connor 1992: 404). It answers back to the colonial discourse implicit in “The Imperial Road” by taking an anti-colonial view in which the colonizer deserves his fate for his inordinate cruelty and lack of compassion. In this rendering, Theroux means to foreground the evils of colonialism and its discourse in contrast to its outward ‘civilized’ appearance.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Rhys’s colonial discourse did not change significantly over time; it actually seems to have become more racist and strident in her final years when she wrote “The Imperial Road.” Nonetheless, Rhys was aware that the Caribbean had embraced tourism as a new form of capitalist invigoration and imperialism. Strachan indicates, “The plantation system was created by and for foreign capital… [Caribbean] tourism has grown out of and sustains the plantation economy [and] has
become dedicated to offering “paradise” to tourists...feeding metropolitan escapist fantasies [while] it resuscitate[s] the...master-slave culture of [colonial times]” (Strachan 6-11). Rhys anticipates modern tourism in the West Indies through “The Imperial Road.” In contemporary travel discourse the Hotel replaces the Plantation House as the institutional means by which to render an ‘unprofitable’ landscape profitable. She realizes this development through her structuring of the husband character, Lee, whom the islanders treat with courtesy and respect, even as an Englishman, because he represents a new opportunity for prosperity beyond the colonial model.

As autoethnography, “The Imperial Road” is an act of textual re-colonization in which Rhys re-situates herself as a Creole in the face of perceived historical obliteration. Using the trope of ‘paradise lost’ and the Imperial Road as its metonym she reconstructs white colonial history in Dominica. She seeks to authenticate this history by fashioning herself into the narrative as an “eye-witness.”

As travel writing, “The Imperial Road” engages with British colonial fiction to make a case for the “seeing-woman’s” colonial impulse to survey and possess. It extends the binaries of man/colonizer to woman/colonizer in a gesture of self-empowerment. Rhys uses colonial and anti-colonial discourse and rhetoric to engage the sympathies of the reader. Whether or not the reader endorses her “victim” status is another matter.

In my next chapter I will discuss Rhys’s use of ‘blackness’ as a means to explore and secure her own provisional identity as a white Creole and as a racialized subject in England. This discussion will examine Rhys’s use of a female mulatto subject as protagonist in the story “Let Them Call it Jazz.”
CHAPTER THREE

“INSIDE AN/OTHER SKIN”:
THE ‘OTHER’ WOMAN IN “LET THEM CALL IT JAZZ”

In “The Imperial Road” Jean Rhys transformed her experience as a returning Dominican expatriate into a work of non-fiction that emulated and mimicked the travel writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In “Let Them Call It Jazz” Rhys explores how English racial cruelty affects the colonized subject using the persona of a mulatto woman, a unique racial construction that does not appear in any of her other writing. As I have discussed in my previous chapters, Rhys consistently uses named and unnamed narrators to explore plural and conflicted identities as a Creole woman which she articulates through an autoethnography that “speaks back” using the techniques and aesthetics of the English canon, ‘the colonizer’s tools’. The distinguishing features of her work are its colonial discourse and the implicit cultural criticism that comes from re-writing Europe’s inventions of its (white) Others. In “Let Them Call It Jazz” she appropriates ‘blackness’ and commodifies it for the purpose of “speaking back” to the metropolis.

“Let Them Call It Jazz” was conceived in the late 1940s but not published until February, 1962 in The London Magazine (Thomas 1994: 186). Like many of her works, it underwent a lengthy writing process from ‘event’ to completed version, and features the dark emotionality of the real-life circumstances which inspired it. Originally titled
“Black Castle,” “Let Them Call It Jazz” recreates a gloomy episode in which a self-described
“desperate” and unhappily married Jean Rhys, (now living with her third husband, as Mrs.
Max Hamer, in Beckenham, south of London), processes into fiction her ‘victimization’
(however contentious) by the English justice system. According to Angier, Rhys’s personal
circumstances had deteriorated since the 1945 death of her second husband, Leslie Tilden
Smith. In the years following the Second World War, Rhys subsisted on a small living
allowance, and in 1947 married Tilden Smith’s cousin, Max Hamer, an unsuccessful lawyer
and sometime gambler. Their marriage was complicated by money problems and by Rhys’s
increasingly drunk and violent behavior. In the space of two years, 1948 to 1950, she
appeared at Bromley Court eight times for various offences, mainly for being drunk and
disorderly and occasionally for assault (Angier 453). Her frequent appearances attracted the
attention of the local press. On November 24, 1950 the Beckenham and Penge Advertiser
reported one such episode under the headline “Mrs. Hamer Agitated,” in a lengthy account
that included much humiliating detail. Rhys was the subject of another newspaper item
around the same time, in the New Statesmen, which ran an advertisement seeking “Jean Rhys
(Mrs. Tilden Smith).” The notice was placed by an actress, Selma Vaz Dias, who had adapted
Rhys’s novel Good Morning, Midnight (1939) into a radio monologue and needed her
permission to perform it. All of Dias’s previous attempts to find Rhys led nowhere, and it
was presumed that Rhys had died. Rhys answered Dias’s notice and gave her permission to
perform her adaptation of Good Morning, Midnight, at which point Vas Diaz expressed an
interest in Rhys’s short stories as future monologue material. This gave Rhys the impetus to
consider writing again after many years of no new work. She describes this to a Peggy Kirkaldy in a letter dated April, 1950,

It was then or not so long afterwards that the BBC girl Selma advertised for me. I saw her and liked her. It meant a lot to me and I began to wake up and make plans to come alive again.
I wanted to do a thing about Holloway [Prison] to be called Black Castle –.

(Letters 76)

Rhys was pleased and flattered by Dias's attention, but had reached a personal low point. Around this time she was forced to liquidate her belongings in order to raise money by which to live. In a March, 1950 letter she reflects, “I wanted to write again so badly for the first time in years... I belong to a past age really or a future one. Not now” (Letters 71). Rhys intentions were complicated by her chronic alcoholism and financial instability, along with the continuous upheaval of temporary living arrangements. Her husband presented another source of difficulty. In May of 1950, Max Hamer was convicted of fraud and sent to prison for two years, leaving Rhys to fend for herself.

The real life episode that Rhys later turned into “Let Them Call It Jazz” occurred a year earlier, on May 6, 1949, when Rhys was found guilty of assaulting a neighbour and sent to Holloway Women’s Prison for several days of psychiatric observation. She describes her ordeal in the aforementioned letter:

One day the man in the flat upstairs was rude to me. I slapped his face. He had me up for assault. I had no witnesses. He had his wife and umpteen others. I began to cry in the witness box and the magistrate sent me to Holloway to find out if I was crazy. The Holloway people said I wasn’t crazy and sent me back to the magistrate who told me not to be violent any more [sic] plus fines of course. After that I sank into apathy as they say. (Letters 76)

Rhys’s reconstruction of her Holloway experience in “Let Them Call It Jazz” is essentially a tale of victimization and of entrapment in which the colonial ‘outsider’ is forced to recognize
her reduced social status in England, the mother country. Already situated at the lower end of the social order as non-English, Rhys’s typical Creole heroine has no money or resources (in a country where property and ownership are synonymous with respectability) and is without the protection of a husband or a father. In “The Imperial Road” the colonial ‘outsider’ loses her ancestral privilege in the face of new political realities in her home island, but still has the benefit of her marital status and her middle-class standing. In “Let Them Call It Jazz,” Selina Davis, a mulatto woman without a husband or family, lives in diminished circumstances that are reduced further by an altercation with English law that foregrounds the trope of imperial nation and colonial subject. This trope is repeated by her later incarceration in Holloway Prison in which the debasement and degradation of slavery and ‘entrapment’ are evoked when she is ‘caught’ and deprived, at least temporarily, of all personal freedom. Selina is reminiscent of another Rhys heroine, Marya, from Rhys’s first novel, *Quartet* (1928), who, as a recent arrival from the West Indies, admits that she felt “she [was] playing some intricate game of which she did not understand the rules” (*Quartet* 25).

In spite of her advanced years and enhanced understanding of English culture, Rhys, writing in the 1950s, portrays England as an invincible force in which institutionalized masculine hostility, in the shape of the law, the professions, the police and bureaucrats, is always pitted against the female person (Smilowicz 93). This is a clear expression of “speaking back” to the mother culture, not as only a Creole, but as an engendered subject. In Rhys’s schema, the colonial woman occupies her own psychological and cultural island within the nation island of Great Britain, and is more ‘colonized’ than when she lived in the colonial world of the West Indies. With this in mind, I have broadened my definition of the
‘Caribbean’ stories to include “Let Them Call It Jazz.” This story serves to indicate that the condition of being colonized does not require presence in a ‘colonized’ space as colonizing discourses exist beyond the geographical realm and can cross racial, class and gender boundaries.

Rhys’s impulse to start writing again after nearly a decade of inactivity appears to have been revived in part by the humiliation of having her ‘crimes’ reported in the local newspaper. She says in a letter dated Oct., 1949:

I’m seething to write an article tho’ [sic] I couldn’t manage a book— but it would not be published. Firstly because I fear that a good deal of gossip has got around...and done me no good. Secondly, because the whole business is on the hush hush list like much else...[Americans] have one great virtue, they don’t stifle criticism...But not here! The English clamp down on unpleasant facts and some of the facts they clamp down on are very unpleasant indeed, believe me. (Letters 56)

Far from contrite, Rhys seems obsessed with casting her ‘victimization’ into the realm of national conspiracy, with the English presented as gossiping, manipulative and dishonest.

Her reference to being the victim of maligning gossip is particularly noteworthy. In three of her stories, “Fishy Waters,” “Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers,” and “Again the Antilles,” newspaper articles and gossip are interfaced as official discourse and counter-discourse respectively. As the official record, newspapers are associated with those who hold power and with those who seek power. Gossip, in this context, functions as the voice of the powerless, but it can be equally forceful in its rhetoric and influence. Rhys demonstrates exceptional sociological acuity in the ‘Caribbean’ short stories where newspapers and gossip supply a portion of the narrative and operate as an outlet for social and racial tensions. When Rhys becomes the subject of newspaper writing and is (allegedly) gossiped about, her acuity vanishes, and she
perceives newspapers and local people's opinions as part of the state apparatus to oppress and suppress. When Rhys refers to people as "English" or simply as "they" and "them" she is speaking from the margins. Her paradox of belonging is articulated by Selina, "I don't belong nowhere [sic] really and I haven't money to buy my way to belonging" (175). Rhys passes judgment on the English with the same contempt she used against mulattos in "The Imperial Road" when Selina says, "They are like that here, and better not expect too much" (174).

In "Let Them Call It Jazz," Selina, a young seamstress and recent arrival from the Caribbean, tells her story of trying to find a better life in England. Her situation is complicated by racial discrimination at every turn, from landlords, police and particularly from neighbours, who discourage her presence with insults and threats. After being robbed of her savings and evicted from her Notting Hill bedsit for being unable to pay rent, she is offered protection by a shadowy Mr. Sims, who, it is implied, attempts to recruit her into prostitution. Suddenly destitute and without resources, Selina accepts his offer of a flat, where she is further antagonized by a racist couple. She is arrested twice—once for being drunk and disorderly, and a second time for breaking the couple's window after they verbally attack her. On the second charge she is sent to Holloway Prison. Humiliated and frightened, and, having no faith in the justice system because of her mistreatment, she retreats into silence to maintain her integrity. Eventually released, she is transformed by her experience and vows "not to be frightened of them anymore" because she "knows what to say" (174). She eventually finds work and a place to live. At a social gathering she shares a song she heard sung while in Holloway with a white musician, who appropriates it and successfully
markets it as his own work. When he sends her a token amount of money for the music she is devastated by the ‘theft’ of her artistic expression, but reconciles it by taking back authority over her self-representations and her property. She thinks “[s]o let them call it jazz…and let them play it wrong. That won’t make no difference to the song I heard” (175) dismissively, in a gesture that shrugs off other peoples’ perceptions of her and their appropriation of her art.

One characteristic of modern women’s fiction is the re-creation of female experience using what is personal and private in contrast to the prescriptions of the male canon. Often called ‘autobiographical’ because of the continual crossing of self and other in which public and private spheres are seamlessly connected, women’s writing communicates ‘truth’ through individual experience. Gardiner observes:

The woman writer uses her text, particularly one centering on a female hero, as part of a continuing process involving her own self-definition and her empathetic identification with her character. Thus the text and its female hero begin as narcissistic extensions of each other. (Gardiner 187)

Rhys structures Selina using her own experiences as a young, pre-World War One émigrée to England and merges it with the social upheaval of the post-World War Two wave of Caribbean immigration to the British Isles. In keeping with her usual practice, she suspends chronological time and fixed identities, and chooses to foreground the timelessness and interiority of her subjects. Selina’s experience of England becomes increasingly dream-like, and eventually turns into a nightmare. Her gestures and movements become like those of someone in a trance, less human and more mechanical. Her voice fails while singing “Don’t trouble me Now,” and she is silenced: “I have no spirit…my own song it go right away and
never come back. A pity" (168). She takes solace in alcohol and sleep medication saying, “more and more I think that sleeping is better than no matter what else” (166). By the time she arrives in Holloway she has become almost detached from reality, “Some of what happen afterwards I forget, or perhaps better not remember. Seems to me that they start by trying to frighten you. But they don’t succeed with me for I don’t care for nothing now, it’s as if my heart like a rock and I can’t feel” (170). This dreamspace allows her to preserve her psychological integrity in the face of invalidation by English society. Thomas indicates that Rhys “alludes in ‘Let Them Call It Jazz’ to two generic first-wave British feminist narratives – the militant suffragette as martyr and the perils of the working woman” (Thomas 1994: 186). Selina’s prison experience specifically mentions aspects of the 1914 suffragette experience in Holloway (an important rite of passage for members of the Women’s Social and Political Union): attempted suicide by throwing oneself over a railing and hunger-striking (Thomas 1994: 188). Selina observes “I notice the [staircase] railing very low on one side, very easy to jump” and “[t]he woman ask me sarcastic, ‘Hunger striking?’” (171). The inference made by these historic references is that women’s shared experience is universal and that gendering is its own truth and affects all women, no matter the time or the place.

Rhys’s point of female identification is in linking herself with a coloured woman through what she assumes is a shared and equal oppression in a ‘we are all the same’ strategy. This linking of Other and Self exudes an “innocence of racism” that allows the white person to deny associations with the masterful, dominating race and to abstain from the dismantling of racist institutions (Curry 14-15). By refusing to name and to undo her “innocence,” Rhys is in collusion with perpetuating racist (albeit colonial) discourse. Thomas says that British
law in the 1950s did not recognize racial, sexual or class discrimination as a defense in mitigation, and used a form of ‘colour blindness’ that was not the selected perception of the colonizer, but effectively protected those who practiced such discrimination.

The established legal view held by the government and the judiciary was that the law should be impartial, and should not distinguish between classes or types of people, including racial groups. The problem with this ‘colour blind’ approach was that it left no legal grounds for prosecuting those who practiced racial discrimination. (Thomas 1994: 190-191)

This passage, based on a 1988 study of race relations by Edward Pilkington, explains how racketeering landlords in Notting Hill in the 1950s could abuse the uncontrolled tenancies of recently arrived black Caribbeans, and how the law effectively failed to protect these new immigrants. Rhys’s sometime critical awareness reveals itself in how she works this issue into Selina’s story. It is also possible that she wanted to strike back at unscrupulous persons who might have abused her as a tenant (in Rhys’s novels the protagonists are almost always the victims of their landlords). The prevailing atmosphere in England of indifference to racial issues indirectly supports Rhys’s colonizer discourse by denying discriminatory practices in any way that may have given her cause to consider her own. Here, the echoes of a colonial experience are unmistakable. Rhys uses her mulatto heroine as a narcissistic extension of herself by which she imagines herself as ‘black’ and reduces her non-white subject to being a function of her conceit. As the product of enterprise and imperialism, colonial discourse and the ‘whiteness’ it fosters are always predicated on racial difference and radically unbalanced relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. Rhys’s construction of ‘oneness’ with a Caribbean mulatto is an act of domination, and not of solidarity. As Dyer says, “white people have power and believe they think, feel and act like and for all people…unable to see
their own particularity [they] cannot take account of other people’s... thus [they] create the
world in their own image” (Dyer 9).

Even where an argument of a shared metaphorical ‘blackness’ through gendered
oppression might be successfully mounted, the fact remains that the Other woman is more
likely to be structured as without autonomy or individuality and to exist outside the
patriarchal order without a family history or a ‘legitimate’ name, unlike the white woman.
In the colonial scheme, the mulatto, being the product of miscegenation, is socially
illegitimate and needs to be made legitimate by white domination. Representing herself as a
mulatto woman is problematic for Rhys because it does not allow space for racial or cultural
conflicts of representation or for an alternative to her colonial discourse. Rhys equates racial
oppression with explicit victimization, while holding ‘legitimacy’ as a white woman with
ancestral ties to the mother country (Rhys’s father was born in Wales in 1853). At no time
does she consider that the coloured Creole woman might suffer even greater mistreatment
than she herself. Rhys’s perceived ‘blackness’ is not the same as being mulatto. Being a
‘black’ white person is a selective perception; being mulatto is a fixed and unchangeable
reality.

Rhys’s colonizer discourse extends the binary opposition of black/white to
white/Creole for the purpose of championing the white Creole woman. Her mimetic
impulse compels her to self-inscribe herself on a mulatto woman whom she conceives in the
colonial sense of being linked to the island landscape and a part of its offerings. Her
authority is established through a demarcation of the Other’s identity and difference. As
David Spurr argues,
Members of a colonizing class will insist on their own radical differences from the colonized as a way of legitimizing their own position in the colonial community. But at the same time they will insist, paradoxically, on the colonized people's essential identity with them. (Spurr 7)

Rhys's construction of a mulatto woman without any reference to the reality of being a mulatto woman in Britain (apart from tenant/victim) has a generalizing effect that implies it should be read as a statement of the Creole condition in England. At no point does it allow larger social realities, like the race riots of 1958, or the very different reasons for her own arrests and incarceration in Holloway to puncture the narrative and interfere with her aesthetic purposes.

Rhys's minority status in England is a reversal of her upper-class position in the West Indian plantocracy. As an uninvited immigrant and a member of the former Creole elite, she reminds England, the imparter of "civilization," of its former collusion with slavery and of the excesses of Imperialism. As Strachan observes, "Planters' children born in the Caribbean ceased to be English and became Creole...[T]hey had moved one step out of the circle of civility. Their contact with blacks was seen as evil, tainting" (Strachan 71). This constitutes a reversal of the racial superiority flaunted by white Creoles in the colonized world and effectively shatters any claims to a much-coveted but unreachable Englishness in the mother country. 'Whiteness' for the expatriate Creole in England presented a 'paradox of belonging' and a crisis of identity. According to Dyer, 'whiteness' was an attainable, flexible, and varied category, and subject to a movable criterion of inclusion, which situated the Creole closer to the 'wildness' of 'lesser' whites, like the working-class Scots and the Irish, than to the English (Dyer 57). For Rhys, being a Creole in England was much like being a mulatto in the colonial West Indies.
Rhys uses Selina to dismantle the reductive impact of her 'less-than-white' and categorized position in the English social order to make the point that England has 'coloured' her as a Creole. This presents a unique deviation for Rhys considering that she portrays mulattos in her other short fiction consistently as devious, untrustworthy, duplicitous and consumed with hatred. It is my contention that she uses the idea of 'being black,' as I discussed in my introduction, and that Selina functions as a declaration of metaphorical 'blackness' and not the real condition of being of mixed-race. Lucy Wilson says on this point, “Rhys, like her protagonists, envies the black Creoles because they have “more freedom, particularly sexual, than the white islander who must conform to the constraints on the colonist” (Wilson 441). By constructing herself as mulatto Rhys “speaks back” to the metropolis and announces ‘I am black because you have made me so’ in a gesture of defiance and self-empowerment.

Rhys does not use explicit racial signifiers like ‘mulatto’ or ‘black’ in “Let Them Call It Jazz” as she does in “Again the Antilles” and “The Imperial Road.” The nearest reference is when Selina’s neighbours say, “At least the other tarts that crook installed here were white girls” (167). Her racial origin is established, however vaguely, when she talks about her parents, “my father is a white man and I think a lot about him…I too small to remember when he was there. My mother is a fair-coloured woman, fairer than I am they say” (164). Rhys confirms Selina’s racial identity by underwriting the story with a historical subtext that draws on specific events in the Caribbean from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Veronica Gregg, many Dominicans left in the 1880s for the building of the Panama Canal, and an estimated seven thousand people left the island in 1893 for
employment in the Venezuelan oil fields (Gregg 180). These events connect Selina to colored Dominicans and explain her orphan status.

[M]y father is a white man...my mother is a fair-coloured woman...
She have a chance to go to Venezuela when I three-four year old and she never come back. She send money instead. It's my grandmother take care of me. She's quite dark and what we call 'country-cookie' but she's the best I know...I can sew very beautiful--so I think I get a job in London perhaps...
I wish I could see my father. I have his name--Davis. But my grandmother tell me, 'Every word that comes out of that man's mouth a damn lie. He is certainly first-class liar, though no class otherwise.' So perhaps I have not even his real name. (164)

Implicit in this passage is a discourse of 'breeding,' which is one of the essential idioms of [Anglo-Saxon] racism and integral to model[s] of racial degeneration focused on certain peoples and places as "breeding grounds" for vice and disease (Thomas 2001: 10). In colonial discourse, mixed-race coupling is analogous to 'wildness' and considered an affront to the rigidly heterosexual model of marriage and procreation within one's racial group. As the child of a mixed-race couple, Selina functions in the text to contradict and deny the patriarchal order's tradition of civility, but Rhys does not go as far as to challenge its hegemonic exemption of the mulatto from a 'proper' patriarchal lineage. Rhys raises the spectre of miscegenation again through the mention Mr. Sims's "other tarts" (167), which indicates him as a pimp and Selina as the likely object of his urge to exploit. The suggestion of interracial sexuality provides another example of the imperial/colonial binary when Selina is threatened by the prospect of a repeat 'colonization' by being coerced into sexual slavery.

Racial stereotypes appear frequently in "Let Them Call It Jazz." Selina's white father is "a liar," and has abandoned her in infancy and forfeited her birthright. This act is repeated in each encounter with the English who take what is rightfully hers and abandon her to the
point that she is publicly obliterated. When Mr. Sims kisses her “like you kiss a baby,” he promises to return, but like her father, is never heard from directly again. Her “light-skinned” mother has abandoned her too, providing money instead of maternal solace after leaving her for material benefits elsewhere. Selina’s dark-skinned grandmother, with her connections to the island ‘motherland’ and its rural landscape, is the only person capable and willing to raise her. The grandmother is a typical Rhysian construction wherein the older black woman is sentimentally portrayed as connected to the native matriarchal order: the mother of many but the wife of no one. This constitutes a ‘mammy’ stereotype in which the black woman is the counter-part to white colonial womanhood, and functions as a servant-protector in ways that are commensurate with colonial values. By contrast, ‘grandmothers’ in the writings of black Caribbeans are remarkably different, says Strachan:

Against a discourse of the white father God, nature [is conceptualized] as divine mother and black mothers and grandmothers [are] her priestesses...Nature is the resistant culture of the colonized...In their trials, in their slaving...in their faith, [and] their magic...all grandmothers are eternal and divine as the land that is also mother...any hope for self direction in the Caribbean people depends on the recognition and preeminence of the grandmother [for her] teachings and folk knowledge. (Strachan 251-252)

Rhys’s handling of black matriarchy is ambiguously portrayed as the feminine counterpart to patriarchy, nurturing and noble, but powerless and impoverished and confined to influence only within the domestic realm. In “Let Them Call It Jazz” Selina summons the memory of her grandmother to revive her spirit, and imitates her carnivalesque behavior in public—something the English interpret as “obscene” and which makes them “stare as if I’m a wild animal let loose” (161). Selina is portrayed as vocal but cowering, and eventually becomes silent to the point of being mute, which suggests that she is inherently passive. After her
experience in Holloway, when her 'taming' as 'a wild animal' is complete, she is able to speak again. She concludes that in order to succeed she must be deceitful and duplicitous, “I know what to say and everything go like clock works...I lie and tell them I work in very expensive New York shop. I speak bold and smooth-faced, and they never check up on me...I make a friend...Clarice, very light-coloured, very smart, she laugh at some of them [customers] behind their backs” (175). Selina is portrayed sympathetically throughout the story until the end when she learns how to fit into English society by becoming the sort of ‘hating’ and mocking mulatto that Rhys despises in “The Imperial Road” and parodies in “Again the Antilles.” The ‘new’ Selina aspires to ‘whiteness’ with her will to succeed and exudes ambition in a way that suggests a presuming attitude and a sense of entitlement, much like Papa Dom.

Much has been said about the ‘stylized patois’ spoken by Selina. Several critics contend that Rhys shows a value for Caribbean authenticity by using this form of speech/ dialect. But Creole languages are traditionally associated with a negative image and with extreme marginalization. According to Susanne Muehleisen, “[Creoles] have been ranked with baby talk, child language, foreigner talk, and with other instances of nonnatural language that do not serve normal societal communication needs nor the full cognitive needs of the human species, [Creoles] have been the most stigmatized of the world’s languages” (Muehleisen 24). While it is certainly arguable that Rhys significantly raised European awareness of West Indian island culture, and of black people and the Creole language in the first half of the twentieth century, her use of patois is problematic. Selina’s patois has its roots in the French language, which Rhys ignores, along with the rest of the French
influence in islands like Dominica. Secondly, the patois sounds more like poor English and less like a musical dialect. Lucy Wilson correctly describes Selina’s patois as “lilting, foreign-sounding speech patterns,” (Wilson 442), but its authenticity is debatable. In my opinion, Rhys uses ‘stylized patois’ in a reductive way that makes Selina appear childish and less cognitively engaged than the English and does not promote the authenticity or value of native Caribbean languages. Making Selina’s language a patois serves to differentiate between ‘normal’ canonical English and (what is often and reductively perceived as) the limited linguistic expression of native, non-white Caribbeans. It also marks an important division between colonizers and colonized. The colonizer speaks using standard, (canonical) English, whereas the colonized use the purportedly lesser patois. Thus Rhys infers that when the colonized use canonical English, like Papa Dom, they cannot help but falter because English is not their language.

Rhys deserves credit for highlighting Jazz, “the emancipated Negro’s music...the perfect expression for the rootless, ‘cultureless,’ truly ex-patriate Negro...[and] a mode of New World creative protest” (Braithwaite 336-337). Edward Kamau Braithwaite says Jazz is not a West Indian musical form or “slave” music, but is, rather, “the music of the free man who, having left the [West Indian] countryside of his shamed and bitter origins, has moved into the [European] complex, high-life town...” (Braithwaite 336). Jazz becomes Selina’s artistic property in England, even though it is susceptible to appropriation by white musicians. As the cultural expression of Caribbean Diaspora it signals her successful transformation from West Indian immigrant to urban expatriate. Braithwaite says, “Jazz is played in an Africanized manner on European instruments” (337), which is an extension of
‘using the master’s tools’ for the purpose of musical expression. In spite of the racial stereotyping in “Let Them Call It Jazz,” Rhys effectively exposes sexist exploitation and how it undermines a woman’s psychic space. That said, black and mulatto women cannot stand metaphorically for Creoles, no matter how oppressed the Creole woman may be, or how much she may desire to have their “freedom.” To make one a metaphor for the other constitutes a flagrant disregard for the institution of slavery and its legacy of oppression.
CONCLUSION

I began this project with the aspiration to identify and interrogate the uniquely colonial discourse of Jean Rhys’s ‘Caribbean’ short fiction by placing it in a cultural and historical context which, for the most part, is not addressed by critical analysis of her work. In the process of interpreting and sometimes re-interpreting her particular autoethnography, her ambivalent ways of “speaking back” to the metropolis, certain concerns came to mind about the implicit and (sometimes overtly) racist aspects of her writing. These issues were disconcerting to the point that I became concerned that this study would lead to a reductive portrait of a talented author. In the end, I had to reconcile the matter by recognizing that Rhys did not set out to be a racist writer; she merely reflected the racial rhetoric of the times she lived in, especially her early years in colonial Dominica. This aspect is underscored by the way in which her racist views reflect the attitudes and values of the imperial/colonial world prior to the First World War, and are not influenced by the movement of mainstream European thought toward a concept of race as an oppressive social construction. Rhys maintained her colonial perspective, but actively denied that her views were racist, even when challenged by her publishers over her “anti-negro” tone in one of her last stories, “The Imperial Road.” It appears that her racial views became more strident with time while European thinking moved in the opposite direction, becoming more liberal and less tolerant of colonial racism.

In my preceding chapters I have demonstrated Rhys’s familial, cultural, historical, and canonical connections to the colonial discourse of the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries, a time when “fully-fledged colonialism was only just beginning...when European empires were at their largest [and] colonial exploitation was being undertaken with renewed vigour, and imperial consciousness was stronger than ever” (Wesseling 247). Rhys, as a young writer, addressed this “imperial consciousness,” with her first collection of short stories, many of which are situated in the West Indies and report the ‘indigenous condition’ back to the Empire. When colonialism seemed a thing of the past after the Second World War, she shifted her authorial focus from ‘colonial insider’ to ‘colonial memory writer’ but her racial rhetoric did not evolve. Instead, she lamented the loss of England’s West Indian “Paradise” and along with it her colonial heritage and Creole identity. She continued to “speak back” to England, the mother country, but only to protest her social marginalization as a foreigner and as a woman.

At the end of my introduction I posed the question: are Rhys’s short stories ‘post-colonial’ in the same way that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is? Can writing be ‘post-colonial’ if it speaks on behalf of one segment of a larger marginalized group? Michael Harris says that post-colonial writers “seek to address what they perceive as inaccurate or incomplete portraits of their people and culture in British fiction...and often go back to their country’s colonial past to explain and account for the confusing present day...in which the story of the private individual is always an allegory...of the public third-world society and culture” (Harris 184-186). Seen in this light, Rhys’s fiction, the short stories and the novels, qualifies on all counts. But, if one takes into consideration his comment, “No longer is the Third World person the strangely alienated “Other”...threatened with extinction by the disrupting, outside force of British colonialism” (Harris 185), the reverse seems true. *Wide Sargasso Sea’s* narrative is dominated by its connection to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* as autoethnography, and its
heroine, Antoinette/Bertha, is indeed an Other whose demise is brought on by the force of colonialism. But 'othering' in Rhys’s ‘Caribbean’ short stories and in “Let Them Call It Jazz” suggests something else. Rhys’s colonial discourse supports and colludes with ‘otherness’ to empower the white Creole and to reclaim her identity and history. Harris says, “the colonized...the slaves, always knew more about their colonial ‘masters’ than their colonizers knew of them” (Harris 185). Rhys’s short fiction falls short of offering the ‘mutual understanding’ and vision of cultural multiplicity offered by current post-colonial literature. Her work is intellectual and imaginative but Anglocentric and concretely situated in the interregnum between the colonial West Indies and the end of the British Empire.
WORKS CITED


