

SHARED LIVES, DISPARATE HISTORIES: THE TOPSY-TURVY RELATIONSHIP OF CREOLE WOMEN

*To record the Virtues, and perpetuate the Memory
Of Mercy his dear, beloved Consort,
William Gibbes Alleyne Esq, as a Testimony of
His Sincere Affection, has erected this
Monument.*

*After thirteen years of constant uninterrupted
Bliss with a Partner, who by every Endearment,
sweetened the Joys, alleviated the Cares, &
heightened the Pleasures of the nuptial State, to
his inexpressible Sorrow, & Concern. She was
separated from him on Thursday
August 25th 1774 Aged thirty years.*

*Her Descent from a race of worthy Ancestry
deriving her Lineage from the Honourable
James Dottin, who was President of this Island
three different times and being the Daughter of the
Honourable John Dottin, a Gentleman who for a
series of years filled the Most distinguished civil &
military Stations, in our Community,
Gave her that Consequence among us, which is due
to Birth & Rank.*

*But her exemplary Virtues as a Christian Wife,
Daughter, and Friend,
Added that Lustre to Prosperity, & so far adorned
her Sex & Character: that while living she was
revered, & lamented when dead.*

*For her Loss was grievously deplored by her
fond Parents, no less than by her grateful, &
afflicted Husband.*

▲ A marble commemorative tablet on the wall of St. James Church in Barbados, erected in 1774 by a planter in memory of his deceased wife, eloquently outlines her distinguished (male) lineage and laments his deep sorrow at her passing. In stark contrast to this elegant memorial to a highly esteemed white Creole woman is the certainty that the bodies of her many female slave companions lie in unmarked graves on the unhallowed grounds of the plantation where they would have spent their whole lives together. Shared lives: disparate histories... Such is the condition of the “topsy-turvy” relationship between Creole women on the eighteenth-century Caribbean plantation.

In *Touching Liberty*, Sánchez-Eppler suggests the cross-racial “topsy-turvy” doll as a visual trope for the binary relationship between black and white women and their shared status as property under the patriarchal bonds of marriage and slavery. This doll, which originated in the eighteenth century and was usually made from scraps of cloth and stuffed with rags, combined two dolls in one: a white doll on one side, and a black doll on the other (*****). Sánchez-Eppler points out that the long skirt that hid one (gendered) doll from the other also bound them together. In this discussion, I use the idea of “flipping” between the black and white dolls as a metaphor for the complex relationship between Creole women during the period of slavery in the Caribbean. In an attempt to allow the voices of these women to be heard in the following discussion, and to help manifest their lived experience, I also include direct quotations from both black and white women of the period in the text’s margins.ⁱ

As a site of privilege in an élitist colonial culture, the white female body became a repository for the projection of all that was pure, chaste, and proper according to the British aristocratic ideals of “true womanhood.” From the eighteenth century onward, white Creole women enjoyed a life of relative ease and prosperity in comparison to that of most of the black Creole and Africanⁱⁱwomen who surrounded them. Respected for their (presumed) domestic virtues, high moral values, impeccable appearance, and assumed pedigree, white women performed a crucial role on the plantation as models of societal propriety. More importantly, according to Hilary Becklesⁱⁱⁱ, they performed an important supportive role as “symbolic matrons of the slavery culture.” By educating both their children and their domestic slaves as to their rightful place in life, that is, as subordinate to the white master, they were instrumental in reinforcing the ideologies of mastery and patriarchy. As managers of the plantation household, white women legitimized the plantation system and thereby ensured the reproduction of the colonial project.

■ *Next day I was put up by the vendue master to know how much I was worth, and I was valued at one hundred pounds currency.*

Mary Prince (1831)

■ *... she has to listen to all the stories of the people on the estate, - young, old, and middle aged: all their little jealousies and quarrels she must enter into, and be in short a kind of mother to them all. The negro children must be daily watched; she must see them swallow their physic when necessary; reward the good, and admonish the bad; visit the sick - encourage them - and take, or appear to take, an interest in all that concerns them.*

Mrs. A. C. Carmichael (1833)

In his essays “White Women and Slavery in the Caribbean” (2000) and “Sex and Gender in the Historiography of Caribbean Slavery” (1995), Beckles argues that this had not always been their collective role. He suggests that the social construction of the white woman’s representation as morally “pure” and “domesticated” became popular within the Caribbean in the early eighteenth century in response to the rapidly expanding sugar plantation economy and its growing reliance on black slave labour. Migration of white female indentured servants to the islands had virtually ceased since black female labour had become more economically viable and the few white women that remained had married into the lower levels of the white society or formed unions with free coloured / black men. The consequent shortage of available white women as sexual partners for white men in the planter and middle classes potentially threatened the (racist) colonial mission since this white community could no longer reproduce itself.^{iv} Because of this, it became necessary to remove any remaining white women from manual labour on the plantations and to place them in the domestic sphere where they could gradually attain the required respectability to become wives of the white planters with small holdings.

■ *She said that she would not have nigger men about the yards and premises, or allow a nigger man's clothes to be washed in the same tub where hers were washed.*

Mary Prince (1831)

■ *About this time I asked my master and mistress to let me buy my own freedom [...] Mrs. Wood was very angry – she grew quite outrageous – she called me a black devil, and asked me who had put freedom into my head. “To be free is very sweet,” I said: but she took good care to keep me a slave. I saw her change colour, and I left the room.*

Mary Prince (1831)

On early Caribbean plantations, before the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade, a large percentage of the white population had formed the labouring class as indentured servants. Voluntarily bonded into service, deported from the British Isles as political prisoners, victims of religious persecution, or petty criminals and vagrants, they had lived a slave-like existence in colonial servitude on the plantations. These “poor whites” were promised a plot of land and freedom after a period of five to seven years’ hard labour and often joined the local militia, established small landholdings, or, if fortunate, worked their way up to positions as plantation overseers or managers following their indentureship.

■ *We followed my mother to the market-place, where she placed us in a row against a large house [...] My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still, and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body [...] I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words – as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. I was then put up for sale.*

Mary Prince (1831)

The degenerate behaviour of the women in this white lower class was viewed in Europe as “social evidence of decay and degeneration at the colonial frontier.”^v The use of white female servants in the plantation house had ceased around the 1660s because of the reputation of these female indentured servants as “whores” and “debauched wenches.”^{vi} The growing élitist social culture in the islands made it highly undesirable to hire such women in the house. By the 1660s, white women were also no longer being employed as field hands.^{vii} Exposed to the extreme violence of slavery in the fields, and gradually becoming socially and sexually integrated with the increasingly large black population,^{viii} these women were decried by élite white Creoles who already espoused the virtues associated with genteel notions of white womanhood. Not only would their presence in the fields debase notions of white delicacy, but also their presence in the house as servants would link the white female body to sexual immorality.

White planters became increasingly anxious to stabilize (white) Creole society by asserting the superiority / controlling significance of the white body. It therefore became important to the colonial project to remove white women from any association with the process of sugar production (with its related servility and feminine debasement) and to place them in the white household only as respectable mothers and wives. Here, through their signifying whiteness, they could be useful in socially reproducing the slave system and simultaneously upgrading the white population’s status in Europeans’ eyes, though, as Beckles notes, the aristocratic and bourgeois domestic values of England were not easily imposed on the “metamorphic creole culture of frontier civilization.”^{ix}

■ *More than one proprietor I have seen sink to the grave, under his accumulated feelings of disappointment at finding his character so unjustly attacked, and his worldly prospects completely crushed, while his afflicted family were bereaved of a husband and a father[...]*

Mrs. A. C. Carmichael (1833)

White women were accordingly placed indoors where they assumed responsibility for managing domestic affairs including regulating the domestic slaves. Here, they were prevented from formally socializing with the black population and could be protected from the crudest aspects of slavery. In semiotic terms, they had been transformed into the European construct of upper-middle-class femininity. As Beckles observes,

[the white woman] was now considered unfit for manual labour on account of her endemic fragility; unsuited to physical exertion in the tropics as a consequence of her possession of a faint heart and delicate skin; terrified of male sexuality on account of her chaste, virginal, and jet-white purity; and devoid of lust, gaiety, and passion, having embraced in its fullness the importance of ordered moral discipline and self-denial.
(Beckles 133)

A European construction of womanhood was being superimposed on the (already creolized) white female Caribbean body.

In her essay “Text, Testimony and Gender” (1995), Bridget Brereton describes the lives of Creole women gleaned from a number of texts written by women in the English-speaking Caribbean from the 1770s onward. From these texts, we learn that the planter’s wife lived in relative isolation on the eighteenth-century plantation, often being the only white female there, apart from her daughters. Besides governing the numerous domestic slaves, her time was fully occupied with such “arduous duties” as overseeing the stock-raising, attending to the vegetable gardens, and sewing her house servants’ clothes. Control of their children and their domestics were white Creole women’s only source of power and, according to Brereton, “defiance of their authority by the servants was seen as an assault on their power and privileges as women of the élite.”^x

With the social construction of the white Creole female as the epitome of “true womanhood” or the female Colonising Self, came the simultaneous reconstruction of the black female as Colonised Other. Stereotypic traits were inscribed onto each racial body to create a binary. The idealized white female body (sexually pure, submissive, and delicately constituted) depended on the perceived existence of its opposite, the sexualized black female body. The black female was projected as immoral, promiscuous and libidinous, and possessing Amazonian strength, as well as thought to be lazy, dishonest, and indifferent to forming emotional attachments. As Franz Fanon argued when discussing colonial identities, blackness was employed to confirm the white self.^{xi}

■ *I think the slaves, I mean the domestic slaves, the laziest and most impertinent set of people under the sun. They positively will do nothing but what they please [...] There are always three or four to do the work of one, and they laugh in the owner’s face when reproved for not doing their duty [...] They take liberties that no English servant would be allowed to do [...]*

[...] They are a sluggish, inert, self-willed race of people, apparently inaccessible to gentle and kindly impulses. Nothing but the dread of the whip seems capable of rousing them to exertion, and not even that... can make them honest.

Mrs. Fenwick (1814-1821)

■ *When I kept house for Eliza during her confinement, I was several times almost mad with the provocations their dirt, disobedience & dishonesty caused me [...] You would be astonished to hear me scold [...] with a vehemence which on reflection surprises & pains me. Yet every instance of kindness, remonstrance, persuasion, or gentle reproof are so determinedly scoffed at by the greater part of this wretched race, that an excessive propensity to indolence can alone preserve any degree of equanimity of temper.*

Mrs Fenwick (1814-1821)

When Beckles addresses the *relationship* between white and black women, he notes that,

The tendency has been to see the white woman and the enslaved black woman as constituting a bi-polarity within a fragmented notion of womanhood that assured the reproduction of the slave system. (Beckles 1995, 129)

He points out that colonial slave laws dictated that the children of white women were born free, and that the children of enslaved women were born into slavery. "White women and black women were legally constructed as the vehicles on which freedom and slavery, respectively, traveled [. . .]. Womanhood then came to represent the reproduction of two extreme social conditions" (Beckles "Sex and Gender", 130-131). Divided by this very significant racially based ideological difference, black and white women were pitted against each other in the interest of the colonial capitalist enterprise.

What neither Beckles nor Brereton discuss in the works cited so far (or tease out from the literature of the period upon which their work is based), however, is the *shared* relationship between Creole women who lived and worked together in the eighteenth-century plantation House. Often sharing both the confined physical space of the House and its environs as well as acknowledged / unacknowledged blood relationships with many of its occupants across racial boundaries, these women were bonded together by both duty to the master and their prescribed gender restrictions.

■ *The female slaves are really encouraged to prostitution because their children are the property of the owner of the mothers. These children are reared by the Ladies as pets, are frequently brought from the negro houses to their chambers to feed and sleep, and reared with every care and indulgence till grown up, when they are at once dismissed to labour and slave-like treatment. What is still more horrible, the gentlemen are greatly addicted to their women slaves, and give the fruit of their licentiousness to their white children as slaves.*

Mrs. Fenwick (1814-1821)

Beckles asks, "What does it mean [. . .] that representations of 'woman', reproduced during the slavery period say more about the origins and character of representation than about the actual lives, experiences, and identity of women?" (Beckles "Sex and Gender", 131). If a (white) postcolonial Creole feminist methodology is applied to examining the scarce *visual* documentary evidence of Creole life available, it becomes possible momentarily to put aside stereotypical versions of plantation life and to retrieve a different understanding of the *lived* relationship between Creole women. Often at variance with the satirical anti-slavery images of a degenerate Creole society and the official binarized (European) versions of Creole history or the black / third world feminist reinterpretations of this history (Beckles, Brereton), this viewpoint, though similarly European-mediated, allows the (silenced) white Creole woman a transitory presence. Through examining the image of her (observed) body interacting with other Creole bodies (both free and enslaved), both the public and private realities of life shared among women living in such close proximity to each other can begin to be appreciated.

The Italian artist, Agostino Brunias, who accompanied one of the British Governors of Dominica to that island in the late 1700s as his personal artist, was one of the few painters to visually record Caribbean daily life. A series of untitled oil paintings in the Barbados Museum's Cunard Gallery show Creole women (slaves, free blacks, free coloureds, and whites) mingling openly together in outdoor social activities. In the first painting reproduced here (*****), a planter's wife and her female companion casually stroll along a country pathway closely followed by their slave girl who carries a folded parasol. In the second painting (*****), a coloured woman and her white female companion are informally seated on upright chairs under a shade tree, being served drinks by a slave woman. Accompanied by their slaves (who are situated behind the central figures but within conversational distance), the white and free coloured women in both

paintings are engaged in activities that mark them as being relatively affluent and leisured. They appear to be enjoying each other's company without the restrictions of genteel codes of behaviour and dress "proper" to their class and racial codification (as specified in Europe). Such cross-racial interaction evidences the interdependent relationship of Creole women in small societies. As Karl Watson notes in *The White Minority in the Caribbean* (1998),

The reality of dependence on blacks in all spheres of activities precluded any meaningful separation of the races. Economics and the psychology of slavery created a shared space delineated by the small physical boundaries of an isolated oceanic island [. . .].^{xii}
(Watson 18)

■ *It is no uncommon thing for a lady of the house or her daughters to collect the young people, and give them a dance to the piano-forte; and to make up gay dresses for Christmas and Easter, which the negro has himself purchased; - for a negro lad thinks nothing of asking his mistress to make a pair of trowsers or a shirt for him...*

Mrs. A. C. Carmichael (1833)

Cross-racial contact on an on-going basis allowed multiple identities to co-exist. Rather than being simplistically divided between rich white planters and oppressed black slaves, it seems that island society was composed of several layers of cross-racial bodies that fit into various social classes. Furthermore, as Watson notes, by the eighteenth century, the slave system (in Barbados) had created "a shared physical and mental landscape". In such a small society, no one could remain anonymous.

[. . .] people communicated with each other, knew each other and possessed a solid understanding of family histories and relationships which allowed them to locate each and every member of society along the socio-economic spectrum [. . .] Both blacks and whites knew each other well [. . .] Intimate contact with slaves on a daily basis over several generations had hastened the process of creolisation for the island's whites.^{xiii} (Watson 19 - 20)

By way of example, Watson notes that "by the end of the eighteenth century, white Barbadian society, although numerically small, was surprisingly diversified and stratified" (Watson 17). He argues against the recognition of an upper-class monolithic white society, citing "latent class rivalries among the white population" between the elite plantocracy (large landowners), the small planters (holders of ten acres or less) and the disenfranchised poor whites who sided with the ten-acre men. A large part of the white population was therefore in the same non-slave owning poorer class as the free coloureds and free blacks.^{xiv} And to complicate matters, on some plantations, elite slaves might be given slaves for their personal use.

The resultant cultural hybridity / creolisation characteristic of this interracial Caribbean space becomes evident in the way Brunias' women are represented in his paintings. The artist depicts their mode of dress - the "different styles of tying the madras headkerchiefs, of wearing the accordion-pleated petticoat, strapped bodices, and silk 'foulards'"^{xv} - and their mannerisms, in great detail. Painted for a European audience, and functioning as a visually over-determined record of the "exoticism" the artist perceived in the English-speaking islands,^{xvi} the paintings nevertheless provide tangible evidence of the "Africanisms" adopted by Creole whites at the level of expressive culture. In the paintings, clothing functions as a social indicator of class. The appropriate walking length of the women's skirts, their visible shoes, and their elaborate headdresses mark these women as a privileged class. However, differences between the women are also apparent: in Plate *****^{xvii}, we see that the white woman wears an elevated white bonnet while the free coloured woman wears a more loosely arranged and colourful head-tie. Their brightly coloured striped skirts, ruffled blouses, loosened stays, and wrapped heads show the influence of African culture on European dress. The slave woman wears similar attire, though plainer in style.

In the painting shown in Plate *****, the slave woman walks barefoot behind her mistress and her companion, indicating her lower status. The two white women wear loose flowing (immodest) white dresses and one of them carries a fan. Their clothes and bodily mannerisms all function as important visible signs of creolisation. The white woman to the right shows an amount of décolletage permissible for a European married woman and her veiled hat mounted atop a head-tie and colourful jewelry mark her as the mistress of this little group. Yet, in these paintings, the white body, in particular, is not recognizable as European in its general appearance and habits – a visual peculiarity that affirms its Creole *difference*.

A shared history of patriarchal and / or colonial oppression also characterized the lives of eighteenth-century Creole women. In her book *Slave Women in Caribbean Society* (1990), Barbara Bush emphasizes the fact that white male patriarchal authority subjugated *all* women on large sugar plantations in the later period of slavery. Though her work focuses on the experiences of “the ordinary black woman slave” in the fields rather than the coloured domestics or white mistresses in the House, it is useful in understanding the mutual socio-sexual exploitation that Creole women experienced.

With marriage, the white woman’s property was legally transferred to her spouse, assuring her second class status as subordinate to her white husband (master).^{xvii} Although legally “free”, in essence white Creole women became chattels through marriage and exercised little choice in varying their role from that which was expected of them. Excluded from holding public office and participating in political or church administration, their views were not sought or recorded. “Even when disturbing crises, such as slave revolts, surrounded and impacted upon their lives, their voices were silenced by officialdom and subordinated even to those of free non-white males” (Beckles, “White Women and Slavery”, 668).

Within the walls of the patriarchal Great House, with its system of enclosed spaces, the white woman, in her elevated femininity, also became a symbol of the white man’s most valuable *property*, a possession to be carefully protected. The master held his white Creole wife’s body in custody for his own exclusive use. Because children born to her were legally free, and in order to perpetuate the supremacy of the white planter society, she had to be safeguarded from social or sexual relations with the black man.^{xviii} A central colonial fear became the potential rape of the white female body by the black male body, an act that would grow to signify black insurgency in a white colonial world. Of course another fear for the white Creole woman involved suffering at the hands of violent and / or drunken spouses used to the absolute obedience of *all* of their subjects.^{xix}

■ *My old master often got drunk, and then he would get in a fury with his daughter, and beat her till she was not fit to be seen. I remember one occasion [...] I found my master beating Miss D- dreadfully. I strove with all my strength to get her away from him; for she was all black and blue with bruises. He had beat her with his fist, and almost killed her.*

Mary Prince (1831)

■ *[...] the relief of no longer being exhausted with nights of watching, shame & terror of what evils intoxication might involve her in before the dawn of the morning; & what still more reconciles her to her hard destiny is that her children are saved from witnessing the errors of their father & that she shall bring no more little beings into life to have but one protecting parent.*

Letter from Mrs. Fenwick in which she comments on her daughter Eliza’s relief following the desertion of her husband (1814-1821)

The repression and domination of white Creole women under patriarchy was clearly symbolized by their severely restricted sexual freedom. White Creole women were the property solely of white men. In contrast, black slave women had sexual relations with both black and white men. Often, white men sexually exploited them through rape and enforced sexual services as “a ‘normal benefit’ of masterhood” (Beckles, “White Women and Slavery”, 661). According to Beckles, this act of masculine power functioned to make the enslaved feel inferior and emphasized their role as “reproducers” of labour.

It is perhaps in their connection to the white master that the intertwined relationship between black and white Creole women in the plantation Great House is most emphatically defined. Though Bush theorizes that white women suffered from jealousy of black women because of their sexual relationships with their husbands and sons, she also suggests that they promoted the use of black women’s bodies by white men by socializing their offspring to accept this as a “natural” part of achieving manhood (Beckles “White Women and Slavery”, 664). *In A Voyage in the West Indies*, John Waller, writing in 1820, states,

I am concerned to bear testimony to the immorality which prevails in this respect, and to detract from the high character which I would gladly assign to the female part of the community. They are doubtless as chaste and virtuous as those of any part of the globe, but they have been accustomed to witness incontinency in almost all their acquaintance of the other sex, and frequently in their father and brothers, who openly keep their mulatto mistresses; so that it is not accounted the slightest degree infamous; nay, it would excite much more surprise in a Creole lady, that a man should be without one of these mistresses, than that he should have one.

The unique condition of sharing the body of the white master was no different for women in eighteenth-century aristocratic and bourgeois households back in the mother country. However, in the Caribbean, the act of coupling between the white master and his black slave (miscegenation) meant that the offspring of such extramarital unions bore visual signs of difference (and similarity) which visibly proclaimed the act. The white mistress of the House could not turn a blind eye to such obvious liaisons though she would be forced to maintain her silence in order to preserve her family’s societal status. Because a mulatto slave (the product of such a union) would never be sent into the fields, slave women sometimes used sexual relationships with the master to acquire social mobility. Their offspring would be employed in the domestic sphere and would often be manumitted upon the death of the master, though during his lifetime they would be expected to serve him as a slave.^{xx}

■ *The overseer’s chère amie, and no man here is without one, is a tall black woman, well made, with a very flat nose, thick lips, and a skin of ebony, highly polished and shining. She showed me her three yellow children, and said, with some ostentation, she should soon have another [...]*

Lady Maria Nugent (1801-1805)

■ *I strongly suspect that a very fine mulatto boy about 14 who comes here to help wait on the breakfast and luncheon of two young ladies, our pupils, is their own brother, from the likeness he bears to their father. It is a common case and not thought of as an enormity.*

Mrs. Fenwick (1814 – 1821)

With the rampant practice of miscegenation between the white master and his slave women as a given, we may return to looking at the portrait of *Seale-Yearwood Esq.* (*****) examined in a previous essay. When we examine the physiognomy of the two figures portrayed more closely, we see that it is evident that what we are looking at is really a “family” portrait. The male slave

butler standing behind the seated planter bears a remarkable resemblance to his white master. Of obvious mixed racial heritage (either mulatto or quadroon), his facial features (especially his long prominent nose and receding hairline) closely mirror those of the planter. It becomes clear that the slave is in fact the planter's *son* – the fruit of his licentious relationship with one of his slave women.

The slave *mistress* whose body has been exploited and the planter's wife (plantation *mistress*) whose sexual role has been usurped are both absent from the painting and effectively silenced in the name of colonial and patriarchal domination. The presence of such a portrait in the house where both women lived would have served as a constant reminder of the role of the slave mistress and reinforced both women's subjugation. Was it a cocky pride in fathering this son that allowed such a portrait to be commissioned by the master and displayed within his house?

In the stage play *The Fair Barbadian and Faithful Black* (1835) and in the novel *Creoleana* (1842), both written by a (white male) Creole author, J.W.Orderson^{xxi}, there is blatant recognition of the practice of miscegenation between white men and slave women. As John Gilmore notes in the Introduction to the republished versions of this play and novel (2002),

Orderson is quite open about the sexual exploitation of black women by white men which was a constant feature of Barbadian slave society, and about the temptation held out to black women to use such relationships as one of the very few ways open to them to improve their position in such a society where on every hand they faced the constraints imposed on them by race and class. (14)

In the novel, the mulatto slave girl Lucy (the "illicit offspring" of Mr. Fairfield's relations with a slave "amour"), is given to Miss Caroline Fairfield (Mr. Fairfield's legitimate daughter) as "a lady's maid" so that "she could without impropriety be introduced [. . .] into his family" (33). The alliance between these half-sisters, Lucy (who possessed "a tolerably fair complexion") and Miss Caroline (whose complexion was "of the most transparent whiteness tinged with a delicate roseate hue") typifies the topsy-turvy relationship of Creole women of different races within the plantation House. As the novel progresses, we learn that Mr. Robert Mac Flashby, Miss Caroline's Irish suitor, has been intimate with Lucy (in spite of her engagement to a free coloured man named Joe Pollard, more suitable to her station in life). Though she has won "the entire confidence of her young mistress", Lucy nevertheless goes behind her mistress' back and secretly pursues her own relationship with Mac Flashby.^{xxii} The discovery of the affair and her pregnancy lead to her downfall.

In the play, Tom Applebury, the fiancé of Emily (daughter of Judge Errington, a wealthy Planter) similarly pursues a slave woman with whom he can enjoy sexual relations. The slave woman in question is the Judge's "confidential black servant" Hampshire's daughter, and the discovery of this liaison leads to great consternation on the part of both Hampshire and the mistress of the house, Miss Alice (Emily's aunt). Alice accuses Tom of "rude conduct to that innocent black girl, poor Hampshire's daughter" and Hampshire exclaims "Oh, Mas Tom! [. . .] I sooner you da kill me pick'nee than you go make she bring shame upon me face [. . .]." When Tom denies any wrong-doing, Hampshire passionately insists, "No, you want for bring shame 'pon she. My poor child tan you, do Miss Alice work – wait upon nyung Missy; neber do wrong; and now you want for make she wicked! I no want my child for bring mulatto!" (169).^{xxiii}

The complicated relationships between (white and black) Creole women who were resident in the eighteenth-century colonial Caribbean plantation Great House must have necessitated careful negotiation. Often related to each other through blood (though this fact would have remained unacknowledged) these women shared much more than simple daily life within the physical space of the House. Subjugated in their roles as wives and slaves respectively, they were bound together by the dictates of patriarchal masterhood. Like a topsy-turvy doll, they were "flipped" from one to the other according to the whim of the master – each one successfully negating the presence of the other beneath her long skirt.

It is interesting to note that in Jean Rhys' *post-emancipation* novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is also a topsy-turvy relationship between the (white) Creole girl, Antoinette, and her little black Creole soulmate, Tia. Here, the author articulates both the abyss and the bond that exists between the girls following the burning of Antoinette's family's plantation house. In the ensuing furor, with the villagers turning against the white Creole family, Antoinette runs towards Tia only to have her throw a stone at her. In that moment of betrayal, Antoinette recognizes her predicament. "We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass" (38). Through Tia's reaction, Antoinette finds her "other" self, the flip side of her identity. Later in the novel, when Antoinette's husband sleeps with her female servant, Amélie, in the gallery outside her bedroom (while she lies asleep inside), the rejection she faces at the hands of the black Creole Other is further intensified.

Undeniably, Creole women have shared an intertwined (though unequal) history. Ideologically pitted against each other in colonial terms, they have nevertheless shared deep connections with each other through familial ties and intimacy with the white master's body - ties that are perhaps greater than most postcolonial Creoles may be willing to admit to.

ⁱ It is important to note that, as was discussed in an earlier essay, these voices have been articulated for the most part in the interest of the British anti-slavery movement and its documentation of the "difference" displayed by (white) Creole culture. There are no direct quotations from white Creole women – the white female voices are those of Europeans who sojourned in the islands. However, despite the obvious biases, these voices still open up a small space for understanding Creole women's lives.

ⁱⁱ The term "African" refers here to slaves who had been brought directly from Africa.

ⁱⁱⁱ Beckles, "White Women and Slavery", 668.

^{iv} This was true of islands like Jamaica where women accounted for only 40% of the white community up to 1780. In Barbados, in contrast, white women outnumbered men by 1% or 2% for most of the 1700s and therefore often remained unmarried and financially independent (Beckles, "White Women and Slavery", 662). The large number of white women in Barbados also meant "the size and growth rate of Barbados' mulatto group remained small during the 18th century." See Beckles, Hilary McD. *Natural Rebels: a Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers U P, 1989, 15.

^v According to Beckles, early travel narratives describe white Creole women as "loose wenches", "whores", "sluts" and "white niggers." See Beckles, Hilary. "Sex and Gender in the Historiography of Caribbean Slavery." Shepherd, Verene A., Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey, eds. *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1995, 132. His argument fails to distinguish the various classes of white women being described and the possibility of different definitions of sexuality.

^{vi} Beckles, *Natural Rebels*, 56.

^{vii} Beckles notes that slave owners adopted this "racially inspired labour policy" to further "establish the ideology of white racial superiority" and that this was "just the beginning of a long-term attempt to elevate white women and degrade black women" (*Natural Rebels*, 29).

^{viii} Beckles cites several examples of white female / black male coupling in a 1715 Barbados census record, ("Sex and Gender", 133).

^{ix} Beckles, "White Women and Slavery", 661. It is important to note that the simultaneous "topsy-turvy" situation of, on one hand, the "gentrification" of the white female, and on the other hand, her "creolisation", is being acknowledged as a metaphor for the complexity of white Creole female identity. In the case where the white female was the mistress of a large plantation with hundreds of slaves, her contact with slaves would have been limited to those in the home over whom

she ruled. There would have been more scope for social interaction between white women and the wider slave population on smaller estates.

^x Brereton in "Text, Testimony and Gender", 67.

^{xi} Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967, as quoted in Loomba 144. Loomba points out, however, that Fanon ignores gender difference and speaks only of the male subject.

^{xii} Here, Watson is apparently talking about a "physical" separation in a small geographic space. His use of the phrase "meaningful separation" must be contested since there were obviously many differences on a pragmatic and psychic level experienced by various members of the plantation society.

^{xiii} Watson uses the example of advertisements issued for runaway slaves that give details of physical features, residential location, and social relationships, as evidence of this close relationship. He does not mention here that blacks were also simultaneously creolised by their proximity to whites.

See also, Watson, *A Kind of Right to be Idle: Old Doll Matriarch of Newton Plantation*. Barbados: University of the West Indies, 2000, 17.

^{xiv} Watson, *A Kind of Right to be Idle*, 7.

^{xv} Anonymous. "Agostino Brunias: Precursor of Gauguin." *The Bajan*. Barbados. May 1997, 17.

^{xvi} Apart from his stay in Dominica, Brunias accompanied his patron, Sir William Young, to St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Grenada, and Barbados. In the tradition of the colonial travelogue, the subjects of his paintings are portrayed through "superior" European eyes.

^{xvii} Beckles, "White Women and Slavery", 662. As referred to earlier, Sánchez-Eppler explores the marriage/slavery parallels more fully in her essay "Bodily Bonds".

^{xviii} Laws were passed which punished black men with "castration, dismemberment, and execution for having sexual relations with white women, who in turn were socially disgraced and ostracized" (Beckles, "White Women and Slavery", 667).

^{xix} Beckles' discussion of the white woman's socio-economic independence as slave owner in her own right, *outside of marriage*, is beyond the scope of this paper. His 1995 essay concurs that the "superordinate position of the white male patriarch" in Creole society "[. . .] ensured the marginalization of all women" (Beckles "Sex and Gender", 131). However, by his 2000 essay, he has altered his viewpoint to suggest that white women could not be viewed as victims of patriarchy since they were "economic agents and positive participators in the formulation of pro-slavery values and institutions" (Beckles, "White Women and Slavery", 660).

^{xx} For example, see Watson, *A Kind of Right to be Idle* in which he outlines the social mobility achieved by a slave matriarch, Old Doll, and her slave family through sexual relationships with their white masters. See also, Waller, writing in 1820: "[...] the natives cohabit with people of colour at a very early age; and I have observed many instances of their being perfectly captivated by their mulatto mistresses, who thus obtain their freedom, and that of their children, from the master who cohabits with them" (19).

^{xxi} The play first appeared on the Barbados stage in 1832 and was dedicated to "the Ladies of Barbadoes, as an homage to their domestic virtues, amiable manners, personal attractions, and purity of heart". The novel was the first known to have been written by a Barbadian author.

^{xxii} It is in Mr. Fairfield's favour to note that he had not only looked after the welfare of his illegitimate daughter, but also had eventually ensured that his legitimate daughter should marry the man of her choice after discovering her original suitor's indiscretions.

^{xxiii} At the conclusion of the play, Judge Errington permits his daughter to marry the man that she loves (Captain Carlove). The Judge rejects Tom Applebury as a prospective husband because of his sexual indiscretions with slave women.