

Jamaican Ladies and Tropical Charms

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In her novel *Voyage in the Dark*, Jean Rhys' West Indian protagonist Anna Morgan reflects on the hallucinogenic distance between her Dominican home and the England to which she has been transplanted: "Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, *but I could never fit them together*" (8; my emphasis). This lack of coherence registers the colonial relation between England and the Caribbean as an enjambed structure of competing realities. The disorienting shifts between the reality and unreality of England and the West Indies, between the thing itself and the dream fantasy of something else, is figured as a condition of colonial consciousness that also affects the characters in Rhys' later novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. There these competing realities repeat in debate between Antoinette and her husband: "'is it true,'" Antoinette asks, 'that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so'; he answers, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream'" (80). The difference between England and the West Indies, between the English and the Creole, frequently figures as an epistemological and metaphysical rupture across which each side is unrecognizable by, and unreal to, the other. In the colonial consciousness this perplexing difference may be redoubled, as is the case with Anna Morgan and Antoinette Cosway. Here, the subject regards herself alternately in the frames of England and the West Indies. Thus the Creole experiences a self-alienation that leaves her always only partially, potentially real. For the white Creole, as we see so emphatically in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the frame that might identify the "West Indian" is itself fractured along black/coloured/white, slave/servant/master, and African-Creole/Anglo-Creole lines.

Looking at representations of the sea in three texts—the anonymously authored 1720 *The Jamaica Lady, or, The Life of Bavia*, Herbert de Lisser's

1929 *The White Witch of Rosehall*, and Jean Rhys' 1965 *Wide Sargasso Sea*—I examine in this article this perilous distance, this “wide Sargasso Sea” that lies between England and her West Indian colonies, and that appears in the gap between the words “Jamaican” and “lady,” making an oxymoron out of the term “Jamaican lady” as well as a bitter irony of the epithet “White Witch” in de Lisser’s title. From the early eighteenth century and well into the twentieth century this gap has frequently acted as a space for the contemplation of how the colonial condition speaks to the way that fears about colonial degeneracy and the production of fraudulent value typically merge with misogynist fears of feminine capriciousness and sexual/reproductive illegitimacy.¹ Specifically, my interest here is how this gap between “Jamaican” and “lady” is perceived and constructed, as well as how this rupture across which England and the West Indies confront and contest one another comes to be filled with occult content: witchcraft, obeah, voodoo. This evocation of the occult, I will argue, attempts to control, traverse, and exorcise the highly charged differences that create it. In Rhys’ mid-twentieth-century re-writing of Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Mason as Antoinette Cosway, in de Lisser’s early twentieth-century sensationalist depiction of the infamous Annie Palmer, the (ethnically) white witch of Rosehall killed in the 1831 pre-emancipation uprisings, and in the early eighteenth-century burlesque anti-colonial narrative *The Jamaica Lady, or, The Life of Bavia*, the white West Indian woman’s distance from the socially legitimating status of “lady” is filled and confirmed by her proximity to the occult.² Charges of witchcraft, whether of the European or African-Caribbean variety, are brought against these women in efforts to explain and counteract their charms.

While all three women, Antoinette, Annie Palmer, and Bavia, are subjected to specifically colonial and male policing in order to expose and to nullify their allegedly magical powers, the relationship of each character to her so-called powers varies in ways that reveal historical differences in the interactions between England and the West Indies, the African-Caribbean and the Anglo-Caribbean. I would suggest that the divisive relationship between England and the West Indies is triangulated through Africa, and that this is seen most readily in *Wide*

Sargasso Sea. What makes the (white) Jamaican alien to the English almost always is represented in some relation to African-Caribbean ethnicity and culture. So the British Bavia is described with African features; Annie Palmer, the white witch of Rosehall, practices voodoo and obeah; and Antoinette Cosway also uses obeah, which was made available to her by the black Christophine. Historically, as African culture is more and more heavily creolized in the West Indies, the nature of this relation of conflation becomes increasingly explicit and direct.³ Indeed, Antoinette's inability to situate herself involves her estrangement from both English and African-Caribbean culture. As Christophine says to Rochester, "She [Antoinette] is not beke like you, but she is beke, and not like us either" (155). Yet in all three narratives the violent ruptures of colonialism—between England and the West Indies, between master and slave, between the African-Creole and the "beke"—are so darkly fraught with oppression and mystification that they conjure up charms of "black" magic, figured as specifically tropical and feminine charms, which both compete with, and provide alibis for, white colonial domination. In relation to the history of belief in witchcraft, these texts show how just as such belief was being relegated to the realms of folklore and children's tales in Britain, both belief and legal persecution were renewed in the West Indies where they focused on African-Caribbean practices.⁴ Despite their historical and ideological differences, all three texts vividly lay out the failures of England's West Indian colonial enterprise, and all three texts articulate these failures, in part, through female black magic, which in West Indian colonial discourse becomes inseparable from black female magic.

Figuring difference through occult practice, these texts show how, as Abdul R. JanMohamed observes, colonial discourse transforms "racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference" (80). Such transformations work both ways. Racial difference such as obeah and voodoo becomes metaphysical and moral; equally, the metaphysically and morally "black" practices of voodoo and obeah are in turn fixed as racial difference. This conflation is demonstrated in *Wide Sargasso Sea* when Christophine warns Antoinette that obeah does not work for *beke*, for white people, for it is immutably a black practice (112). A similar

inversion can also be found in *The White Witch of Rosehall* where Annie Palmer's bookkeepers speculate about her origins and the provenance of her occult practices, both of which they trace to Haiti: "I hear' says Burbridge, 'there is a lot of mixture of blood in Haiti; and she may have some. That might account for her witcheries'" (127).

Cultural ethnographers and historians have recognized the ways in which African-Creole practices such as voodoo and obeah often—though not always—respond in preservative and redemptive ways, to the pressures of colonial and neo-colonial oppression.⁵ In contrast, the texts under discussion here show how these practices are instead enlisted on behalf of English, white, and, in de Lisser's case, anti-nationalist interests. It must be noted, however, that *Wide Sargasso Sea* differs from the two earlier texts in its critical, postcolonial, representation of how these interests operate and oppress. *The Jamaica Lady*, fuelled by anti-colonialist panic, xenophobia, and misogyny, embodies its fears in Bavia, the monstrous female conjureess, and in Holmesia, the quadroon Creole, both of whom are safely ejected from England by the end of the narrative. De Lisser's Annie Palmer, her whiteness complicated by her mastery of voodoo, also functions as a scapegoat, in this case for all the excesses, crimes, and sins of pre-emancipation white domination. While Annie Palmer's involvement in voodoo seems to make her more "black" and savage, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette uses (ethnically) "black" magic in a misguided attempt to become more white, more English. Giving a postcolonial twist to colonialist discourse of obeah/voodoo, Rhys' narrative draws a parallel between African-Caribbean obeah and forms of occult transformation and possession practiced by Rochester, the white English husband. This juxtaposition both criticizes colonial domination, and affirms the operation of both (ethnically) "black" and (ethnically) "white" magic. Thus Antoinette rebukes her husband when he tries to rename her, "'Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too'" (147).

Historically, the discourse of witchcraft, especially here of the African-Caribbean practices of obeah and voodoo, has enabled ways both of understanding and resisting white colonialism, and ways for white co-

lonialism to invalidate this understanding and persecute this resistance. As scholars Alan Richardson and James Perkinson discuss, talk about obeah works very like obeah itself to exorcise oppositional powers and so “the very charge of ‘witchcraft practice’ can itself be understood as a form of witchcraft” (Richardson 173). Through its use of witchcraft as narrative event and as colonial discourse, to critique colonial relations, Rhys’ novel witnesses, as Perkinson puts it, how “witchcraft . . . can be ‘good to think with’ as a mode of communicative action, signifying with a kind of ‘boomerang effect’ in the intercultural space of rupture between the West and the rest” (606). Following Charles Long, a scholar of African-American religions, Perkinson sees colonialism as a “cosmic” upheaval for the colonized, a spiritual event: “unlike for the West, for the rest, the experience was irreducibly ‘religious’ . . . It required dealing with contingency and terror on a cosmic scale. The result was the Native American “Ghost Dance,” African millenarian prophetism, Caribbean *vodun*, Jamaican Rastafariansim, the black church in the United States, and the cargo cult in the South Pacific” (604). Perkinson reads the figures of African-based metaphysical systems against the colonialist, racist discourse that would dismiss them as mere primitive “superstition.” Hence, the “witchcraft” tropes of African belief systems understand slavery and colonialism in ways that accord well with Marxian critiques of consumption and exploitation. Figuring European domination as cannibalism, these tropes register the ways in which “European power, in effect, ‘ate’ African substance in the slave trade” (Perkinson 604). These tropes, then, are available in both European and African discourses as ways to talk about the world historical devastation effected by colonialism and the slave trade: “Whatever the discourse [African occult or Marxian European], the fact of the effect is clear. A ‘witchery’ of heretofore unimaginable potency ravaged African and aboriginal cultures” (612).

The rupture that troubles the relationship between African and Africa, master and slave, black Creole from white Creole, West Indian and Englishman, produces a metaphysical gap that, from its inception, then, is figured in terms of witchcraft and the occult, as these in turn are asserted and countered. Describing circuits of exploitation and resist-

ance, a discourse of witchcraft is useful insofar as postcolonial analysis accounts for both the practice of the occult and the colonialist indictment against such practice. This discourse, I would argue, is crucial to the postcolonial study of West Indian history and texts for through it the super-charged cosmic rupture of the Middle Passage and its aftermath are persistently and powerfully registered. So, in the three texts examined here, the African and the European, colonized and colonizer, slave and master, the West Indian and the English, confront each other across this metaphysical rupture of colonialism and seek to understand and control this confrontation through an occult discourse.

I. Only in Jamaica

Insofar as the early modern Protestant imagination was “as apt to see witchcraft in misfortune, as Providence in good tidings,” *Jamaica Lady* can be read as an antithesis to *Robinson Crusoe* (Bostridge 110). In Defoe’s novel Providence authorizes a vision of colonial success as peculiar as the spectacle of colonial failure told through the adventures of the diabolical and monstrous Bavia. *Robinson Crusoe* uses the Caribbean as a site for its romantic dreams of a reconciliation of capitalism, Christianity, and colonization; *The Jamaica Lady* brings the Caribbean home as a nightmare vision of the effective evacuation of all categories of value, secular and spiritual. Defoe’s text performs, or seeks to perform, the all-but-impossible suture of economic and moral value, of God’s plots and man’s experience, of autonomous individual and social subject, of subjection and free will, within the final term of a miraculous Providence that authorizes the profits accruing to Crusoe from the colonies. In contrast, *The Jamaica Lady* refuses, both sceptically and satirically, such mediation and insists, ultimately through the charge of Bavia’s witchcraft, that the production of value in the West Indies is at once diabolical and fraudulent, an empty, accursed promise.

It is in this reactionary and sceptical refusal of the value of British imperialist enterprise that this text is “anti-colonial.” Uniform in its censure of colonialist and colonized alike, such a stance is not critical of colonial imperialism’s effects on those it exploits, but rather is xenophobically protective of Old World interests and values and against New

World contamination. The early eighteenth-century anti-colonial position is politically “conservative,” yet often populist, in contrast to the more “progressive” expansionist position that led mercantile imperialism and colonialism. Whereas later in the century anti-colonialist sentiment is transformed by the anti-slavery cause, such noble motives are not in play here. The still inchoate European notion of ethnic difference—African, but also Scottish, Irish, French, and so forth—plays a part in this early brand of anti-colonialism, but only as a figure for the dangers of contamination and degradation that colonialism courts. At this early period, the labouring underclasses in the West Indies were comprised of a constellation of despised types—English, Irish, Scottish and French indentured servants, transported felons, and masterless men and women, as well as African slaves. Not surprisingly, the first concern of this anti-colonialism is for the British underclasses in the West Indies, and this concern aims not to ameliorate their condition but to insure their suppression and containment.

In the eighteenth century, as in the twentieth century, England has been all too ready to throw her social “garbage” into West Indian backwaters, via transportation and indenture. However, England was less sure of what to do when her colonial chickens came home to roost, as they are doing in *The Jamaica Lady*. In his anti-colonial tract, *A Trip to Jamaica* (1700), Edward Ward describes Jamaican women: they “are such who have been Scandalous in England to the utmost degree, either Transported by the State, or led by their Vicious Inclinations; where they may be Wicked without Shame, and Whore on without Punishment” (16). Exacting their satiric “punishment” with virulent attacks on these Jamaican women, both *A Trip to Jamaica* and *The Jamaica Lady* are narrations of a trans-Atlantic passage, and so echo the pattern of the Middle Passage trope that is so prevalent in African diasporic postcolonial representations of relations between the old and new worlds.

The African diasporic Middle Passage, both as a historical event and a trope, is appropriated to spiritual and cultural uses in the writing of a redemptive return to “Africa” as a resolution of the upheaval and restitution of the loss incurred by the cataclysmic trauma of the abduction from Africa.⁶ This redemptive rescripting, then, mimes the event of the

Middle Passage and places the two episodes in dialogic relation. There are now two crossings, the traumatic passage from Africa to the New World and the restorative spiritual journey back.⁷ In contrast, the trans-Atlantic crossing and recrossing in these early English anti-colonial texts describes a trajectory only of deterioration and contamination. They articulate the passage in a desperate attempt to maintain distance and police boundaries between the old and new worlds, not, as in the African diasporic trope in order to bring these worlds together in a revised trajectory where, within the transformative model of spiritual redemption, each might become the dialogic fulfilment of the other. Ward's *A Trip to Jamaica* recounts a descent into a feverish hell colonized by rogues and whores; the trip out of Jamaica in *The Jamaican Lady* follows the progress of this demonic populace from the hell of Jamaica back to the sanctity of England. *The Jamaican Lady*, then, is an early specimen of anti-immigration propaganda. Probably written by William Pittis, a friend of Ward's (McBurney 85n2), and certainly revealing a reactionary anti-colonialist perspective close to Ward's own, *The Jamaican Lady*, like *A Trip to Jamaica*, stands as a satiric counter-discourse to visions of the West Indies as Edenic sites of limitless resources and profit, of pure potential for the realization of commercial imperialism's highest hopes.

Centering its repudiation of the West Indian project on the adventures of the conjurers and con artist Bavia, *The Jamaican Lady* follows the gendered commonplaces of eighteenth-century discourses of value, especially those concerned with the reproduction of value, which frequently take form in fantastic female figures with uncanny, capricious, and sometimes-demonic powers. So Defoe's and Addison's marvelously mercurial Lady Credit and so Swift's lady investors swept along in the deluge of the South Sea project: "Undone at Play, the Female Troops/Come here their Losses to retrieve/Ride o'er the Waves in spacious Hoops/Like Lapland Witches in a Sieve" (ll. 89–92). In a figure that combines the stereotypical desperate West Indian adventurer with the witch, Swift creates an emblem of falsely inflated value, such as the hoops as bubbles on the South Seas that indicts these investors as both victims and perpetrators of fraud. Again and again, from the late seventeenth century well into the twentieth century, the figure of the

bewitching and beguiling female stands at the centre of critiques that speculate about the very potential of the West Indies to produce any reliable value, financial or sociocultural. Such female figures become emblems and scapegoats of England's failure to retrieve her losses in the West Indies and therefore of the futility and peril of the efforts to forge circuits of exchange between England and the Caribbean.

The perils of traversing this distance between England and Jamaica is thematically rendered in *The Jamaica Lady*, which chronicles the sexual and social disruptions that take place on a ship travelling from Jamaica back to England with the recall of the navy immediately following the negotiation of the Peace of Utrecht in 1713. The narrative takes place, then, at a time when English commitment to and complicity with slave trade and plantation economies was intensifying; it was published somewhat later, however, in 1720, at the height of speculation about the South Sea scheme.⁸ So, as Melissa Downes points out, this novel registers its apprehensions about the circuits of exchange between England and her colonies specifically in the context of the South Sea Company boom (32). As an anti-colonial text, *The Jamaica Lady*, catalogues fears centring on fraud and colonial corruption that are activated both by the post-1714 intensification of British activity in the South Seas and, in 1720, by the spectacular rise of investment in the South Sea company. Both sets of anxieties involve problems of return, returns from investment in the South Seas Company and the return of a populace from the South Seas who have been contaminated by residence there. This contamination is typically figured as sexual and female. As Pharmaceuticus, the ship's surgeon, remarks of his wife's compromised virtue: "It's true, he had caught her tripping at Jamaica, but . . . [that place] so changes the constitution of its inhabitants that if a woman land there chaste as a vestal, she becomes in forty-eight hours a perfect Messalina" (110).⁹

Presenting the Jamaican lady as monstrous misfit, both *The Jamaica Lady* and Ward's *A Trip to Jamaica* work to foreclose any attempt to "fit together" England and the West Indies. The colonial woman is pilloried on the charges of meretriciousness, demonic depravity, and monstrosity that England needs to purge from an accounting of its colonial enterprise. With all the conventionality of colonial discourse, *The Jamaica*

Lady reads as a kind of transcript of the bad dream of England's guilty and paranoid colonial conscience. These fears take shape in the deep divide that separates what is Jamaican from what is a "lady," a discrepancy which here, as in the other texts, is figured in terms of witchcraft and conjuration, and which marks not only Bavia, but also her shipmate, the Creole quadroon concubine, Holmesia. The articulation of these fears provides a defence against them since the charge of witchcraft offers a legitimate provocation for persecution either against witchcraft per se, or against malicious fraud. For at this time in England witchcraft, as historian Ian Bostridge puts it, was an "amphibian denizen of the secular and sacred jurisdiction" (101). After the repeal in 1736 of all statutes against it, witchcraft in England was still actionable as a species of fraud (Bostridge 3; Sanders 190). Reflecting the ambiguity of belief that this repeal legally resolves sixteen years after the publication of *The Jamaica Lady*, Bavia's conjuring is variously condemned as a confidence game and as actual witchcraft. But, as I discuss below, the narrative offers something of its own resolution by locating Bavia as con-artist in England and Bavia as conjureess in Jamaica and so expelling from English shores both the more potent danger of witchcraft and the backwardness of superstition.

In ways that define both terms in fixed opposition, the text splits "Jamaican" from "lady" in the two deeply conflicting accounts given of Bavia's background: one narrative styles her as the English lady, the virtuous heroine of a tragic romance, the other as the fallen Scots-English woman gone Jamaican, a vicious con-artist and conjureess. Before Bavia actually appears on board the ship, the man she sends to secure her passage relates the first, favourable, and fantastic, account of her life and character. This tale is pure romance, and she a charming young noblewoman, beautiful, wealthy, and perfidiously betrayed by a false husband. Sold into white slavery to a Turkish harem, she is rescued from this fate by a bribe, her virtue, and the kindness of strangers. Told at length with much flourish of heroic and pathetic detail, the tale is only met with skepticism by the captain who, suspecting fraud, "really imagined she had been no better than a domestic servant . . . and was inquisitive to know how he should be paid for her passage" (101). Still, for all

his skepticism, Captain Fustian is ill prepared for the appearance Bavia makes immediately after her story has been told. The romantic sketch of the damsel in distress that precedes Bavia jars dramatically with the picture of the crippled “piece of deformity” that limps onto the deck, “one of her legs . . . much shorter than the other.” She astounds the captain with her “dead wainscot complexion,” “large pobble walleyes, bottle-nose, very wide mouth with great blubber-lips,” and her broad yellow teeth (102). The gap between the idealized lady of romance and the female “piece of deformity” from Jamaica could hardly be established more dramatically. Translating Bavia’s frightful appearance into a frightening talisman, Captain Fustian thinks Bavia “the picture of ill luck” and, although not a religious man, he confirms her malevolent power by “blessing himself” against its force. Although actually an English woman born to a Scottish father and an English mother, Bavia’s vicious nature is written on her body with signs that render her ethnically suspect in distinctly West Indian terms: her “dead wainscot” complexion recalls the stereotypes of febrile and meager white Creoles, while her “great blubber-lips” suggest, within the racist discourse emerging from this West Indian context, an African type.¹⁰ And like the Africans enslaved in Jamaica, Bavia is characterized as a sub-human primate; her name, Low German “bavian,” means baboon or ape. The features that announce Bavia’s diabolic nature are composed into a “picture of ill luck” drawn specifically from West Indian types and redolent, in their juxtaposition, of its monstrous hybridity.

After a series of intrigues that articulate Bavia’s malevolence and deformity in social and moral terms, the second “true” biography is given, one that establishes the opposition between “Jamaica” and “lady” around the charge that Bavia is a witch, a conjureess. Giving the lie to the earlier romantic biography of Bavia as the unfortunate Jamaica lady, this narrative styles her as a sexually insatiable con artist, procuress, and sorceress (122–35). Told by a second mate, it follows on the heels of the determination by the ship’s surgeon that Bavia is a witch. It is given as evidence to confirm the captain, and the reader, in the surgeon’s opinion.

Going down to his cabin after his habitual dram of rum, Captain Fustian “cast a malicious look towards Bavia” who “sat fronting the

gangway" (121, 120). Thus distracted he misses his footing and tumbles down the ladder (121). The ship's surgeon is summoned and he tells the captain that "it was looking on that ill-favoured carrion was the cause" of his accident and that "he [the surgeon] really believed she was a witch," so suggesting that Bavia had caused the captain's fall by hexing him (121). Yet it is *Captain Fustian* who gives *Bavia* the evil eye—"it was his looking on [her] that was the cause [of his injury]" (121). The surgeon's reading, then, projects the captain's malice onto Bavia and, charging it with supernatural forces, redirects it from her as *maleficium*. In support of his charge, the surgeon summons the second mate who delivers up the rogue's tale that is the (second) story of Bavia's life. After hearing this, Captain Fustian "really believed . . . that she was a sorceress" (135).

From here on, the antagonism between the captain and Bavia is organized as a witch-hunt. Understanding Bavia's sorcery in the age-old terms of maritime folklore where witches are feared as conjurers of storms, the captain has her confined because "he had heard that when witches were imprisoned, they lost their diabolical power" (137).¹¹ But when a storm blows up immediately afterward, the captain becomes convinced that Bavia, balking at her confinement, summoned the storm, and so he releases her. The storm blows over and the ship arrives safely. In England Bavia gets up to her old tricks again and is transported to Ireland, and so Bavia as England's worst nightmare completes her phantasmagoric colonial course.¹²

Bavia is not, strictly speaking, Jamaican, but once she has been in Jamaica that character is fixed in oxymoronic negation of her status as an English lady. Yet as an embodiment of the stereotypical unruly, depraved female adventuress who goes to Jamaica where she might dodge creditors and the law and pursue her nefarious career with little impediment, Bavia is quite amply qualified for the ironic title "Jamaica Lady." Further, as we have seen in the physician's apology for his own wife caught "tripping," the moral miasma of Jamaican anti-society takes no more than forty-eight hours to infect and transform its inhabitants. Certainly Bavia, arriving in Jamaica utterly disgraced, is soon acclimatized.

Most importantly, her criminal depravity flourishes most vividly in Jamaica where it is represented as witchcraft and conjuration, unlike in England where it is simply fraud. It is not only that Bavia is by innate ill nature and criminal history “Jamaican” and so not a “lady,” but also that in Jamaica this failure of feminine virtue is infused with the tropical charms of black magic. The discourse of witchcraft in this text is liminal, positioned at a juncture between witchcraft understood in European terms and, as it is coming to be understood in West Indian colonial discourse, in African-Caribbean terms as obeah and voodoo. Bavia’s career in Jamaica hints at an overlap between these two, somewhat entangled, discourses of witchcraft: what she does in Jamaica can be understood, as it is expressed in the text, as the work of a European conjure; yet it resonates with and at points mirrors the activities of the African-Caribbean obeah woman. That is, the more typically European focus on the witch’s performance of the devil’s Sabbath is completely absent in accounts of Bavia’s career; rather, her supernatural powers, like those African-Caribbean practitioners of obeah such as Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are used to predict and influence personal, often romantic, matters.¹³ While in England Bavia makes a career out of defrauding couples through sham matchmaking deals, in Jamaica she works through “geomancy” and, in typical West Indian fashion builds up a profitable business for her “charms and incantations” (129, 132–33). Although geomancy is a thoroughly Western European practice of divination through scattering pebbles or stones, it has an analogue in the Yoruba divination scheme called *Ifá*, which uses palm nuts or cowrie shells. Likewise, there are both European and African forms of “charms and incantations.” Finally, however, what is most West Indian about Bavia’s conjuring is that it occurs only in Jamaica.

Bavia shares the title “Jamaican Lady” with another character, Holmesia, a quadroon born and raised in Jamaica who might seem to have an even stronger claim on it. Not only is she actually a Creole, but also, as a prostitute and adventuress, Holmesia is just as un-lady-like as Bavia. In a pattern that chiasmatically mirrors that of Bavia’s career, charges against Holmesia as a conjure do not emerge until she leaves Jamaica and lands on English soil. Along with her slave Quomina, Holmesia

tries to find her way from Deal to London, and so asks a peddler for the road. She addresses him in patois: “You Baccaraman, which is dey way to grandee town?” (142). Not understanding her nor even recognizing her appearance or speech as West Indian, the peddler assumes she is a gypsy fortune teller. Significantly, the English peddler not only fails to recognize Holmesia’s ethnicity, but also at the same time fails to recognize his own as a “Baccaraman” or white man. For indeed, in England “whiteness” is an exotic ethnic category imported from the West Indies; appropriately, it is announced in a foreign “Negroish” tongue.¹⁴ Here the distance between Jamaica and England is registered at once in ethnic and linguistic terms, and the epistemological gap of this distance is filled by the peddler with suspicions of necromancy and fraud.

This scene bears witness to the often class-based variations in witchcraft belief available in the early eighteenth century. While the peddler at first ignores the quadroon Holmesia, thinking her a mere gypsy, he becomes genuinely frightened with the appearance of the very black African Quomina (142). Her attendance by Quomina confirms the peddler’s estimation of Holmesia’s black arts: “he thought certainly the gypsy [Holmesia] had sent the Devil [Quomina] for him” (142).¹⁵ He cries out for help and is answered by “two countrymen” passing by. These men do not seem to be under any apprehension about actual witchcraft, but take Holmesia and Quomina off to be tried for vagrancy and fraud: “We know you are a pack of counterfeits and stroll about only to cheat the country under pretence of telling fortunes” (143). The quadroon Creole and her maid are rescued by Holmesia’s lover Galenicus who happens by at an opportune moment and clears up the whole misunderstanding with a rational explanation and a full payment of her ransom (143). In this brief incident, Holmesia is understood, like Bavia in the larger narrative, alternately as a fraud or a witch, depending on the beliefs held by the accuser, and, apparently, depending on the site of the activity. The situation patently registers the misapprehension of the peddler in a kind of reverse encounter scenario. So, in a way that, again, reverses the pattern of association between Bavia, Jamaica, and witchcraft; what is most un-English about Holmesia’s witchcraft is that it cannot be sustained in England. Her sorcery is foreign to an over-determined

degree: it is attached to West Indian, to African, and to gypsy bodies. Further, while belief in witchcraft is briefly entertained by the underclass peddler, it is immediately dismissed twice over, first by the two men who charge Holmesia with fraud and then by Galenicus who explains the Creole's actual circumstance.

II. White Witch of the West Indies

During the eighteenth century belief in witchcraft may be fading in England, yet the secular aspect of its jurisdiction (which is never completely secular) is still abundantly available for mobilization against stigmatized groups—gypsies, other foreign or disruptive women, and so on. We have just seen how through conventional discourses against gypsies, West Indian and African women may be pulled into this list of the stigmatized. Moreover, such a belief is revitalized in the West Indies as African-Caribbean occult practices come to the awareness of colonialists who rightly fear themselves to be targets. In the next two examples of infamously unladylike Jamaicans, the failure of conventional English femininity that is at once a consistent feature of colonial (anti)socialization, and a constant object of colonial castigation, is charged with the forces of magic which is black both culturally and morally.

Herbert de Lisser's 1929 sensationalist historical novel, *The White Witch of Rosehall*, relates the story of Annie Palmer, who was a legendary plantation owner, a sadist, and a witch, from an anti-nationalist perspective. According to the legend, which is solidified by de Lisser's novel, Annie Palmer was born of Irish parents and raised in Haiti as the protégé of a highly ranked voodoo priestess.¹⁶ A Jamaican lady of Irish extraction brought up in post-revolutionary Haiti, Annie Palmer embodies connections the between a type of bad (colonial) whiteness first formulated as "Irish" and then exported to England's West Indian colonies, where it combines with stereotypically African-Caribbean traits to produce the Creole type (Allen 22; Mackie 264). Palmer's connection to an occult genealogy from a specifically Haitian source reinforces the dual association to which the novel is devoted: illegitimate female power and African-Caribbean culture. In voodoo, as one of the Rosehall bookkeepers comments, "the priestesses of Haiti are quite as powerful, in

every way as influential, as their male colleagues. Given a woman of that description thrown into contact with Annie Palmer. . . . and anything might happen” (129). What does happen confirms the blackness of Palmer’s diabolical career. She acquires the Rosehall and Palmyra plantations through one husband, and then marries two others, all of whom die under more than dubious circumstances. Armed with the power of her erotic allure and her witchcraft, Palmer pursues a career of illicit gain, voodoo, seduction, and murder that is checked only when she is herself murdered in the 1831 uprising.

Just as Bavia’s narrative occupies two moments, that of the 1714 Peace of Utrecht and of the 1720 South Sea Scheme, and works to dispel a set of fears connected to each, so de Lisser’s narrative of Annie Palmer has a doubled timeframe. De Lisser’s narrative occupies 1831 Jamaica, poised for emancipation and social upheaval, as well as that of early twentieth-century Jamaica, which was divided along pro- and anti-nationalist lines when de Lisser writes and publishes his novel. The book, then, simultaneously addresses the historical problem of plantation society and the more immediate issue of Jamaican independence, and it does so in ways that locate the corruption and failure of the plantation, not in English imperialism, but in an illegitimate exercise of power by the Irish-Haitian-Jamaican, and most importantly, female, Palmer. Thus, the text exculpates British colonialism from historical guilt in a way that supports de Lisser’s own anti-nationalist Anglophilic position.

Quite simply, then, the novel is premised on a vision of colonial corruption that identifies and disowns corruption as foreign (Irish, Haitian, female) to the very English colonial powers culpable for it. “*The White Witch of Rosehall*,” comments Paravisini-Gebert, “is a tale of colonial decline whose moral arguments centre on the contrast between Jamaica as a place which by its very nature incites corruption and sin, and England as the repository of strong and lasting moral values” (“White Witch” 28).¹⁷ Standing in a long line of white Creole females renowned for their imperious sadism, Annie Palmer’s sexual indulgences, and practice of voodoo colours the evils of the plantation system and depicts them as both feminine and black.¹⁸

So, in de Lisser's text, as in conventional colonial discourse, Jamaica's "nature" is feminine and England's masculine. So the sole *gentleman* in the text is the young, virtuous *Englishman* George Rutherford who goes to Rosehall as a bookkeeper to gain firsthand experience of the workings of a sugar plantation in order better to manage his inherited Barbados estate. The narrative opens with Rutherford's arrival at Rosehall and proceeds with its gothic tale of his seduction by Palmer, her conjuration of demons, her vicious voodoo curse on the free coloured girl Millicent, who is also in love with Rutherford, and, finally, closes with Palmer's death at the hands of a group of outraged blacks led by Millicent's grandfather, Takoo. Importantly, he is an African obeah man, and "chief and leader of the people of St. James" (243). The erotic enchantment of Rutherford, a red-blooded English man, well-educated and wealthy, with Annie Palmer is soon soured by his repulsion at her cruelty and its effects, which he spends the rest of the novel attempting in vain to counteract. After Millicent's tragic death and the purging execution of the white witch Annie Palmer, Rutherford, exhausted by the horror he has witnessed, sails for England, vowing never again to return to the West Indies. So evolves another absentee landlord. Fortunately for his protagonist and tellingly for his readers, de Lisser does not allow Rutherford to make the same near-fatal mistake of carrying the taint of the tropics back with him with a West Indian wife, as Brontë's Rochester did. Colonial corruption and failure is figured as purely West Indian and emphatically feminine and black; the (white male) English colonialist can neither tolerate it, nor be held responsible for it. De Lisser's novel, then, like *The Jamaican Lady*, is anxious to contain the threat of colonial contamination and keep it out of the colonial motherland, Britain.

The characters in de Lisser's novel respond in a variety of ways to Palmer's voodoo: some rationalize it as a kind of vicious psychological manipulation; others understand it more literally as magic pure and simple. De Lisser's overall representation of voodoo/obeah operates much as it does in the English Romantic texts that Richardson discusses, where the representation of obeah is invoked in order to exorcise anxieties about power, and so "functions rather like the practice of

Obeah itself" (173). These anxieties become political and national for they emerge from an awareness of the central role that creolized African practices such as voodoo and obeah took in slave uprisings, especially in the Haitian revolution.¹⁹ However, as "primitive superstition," obeah and voodoo are invoked to discount and dismiss the rational political content of black agents and activism: "It is not Toussaint [the leader of the late eighteenth-century Haitian revolution] but the Obeah-man who is made to embody British colonial anxiety in the critical decade of 1797–1807" (Richardson 178). Yet in de Lisser's case, it is not Takoo the obeah man who is made to embody Creole colonial anxiety about the horrific legacy of the plantation system, but rather Annie Palmer the voodoo woman. For, writing in early twentieth-century Jamaica, de Lisser's immediate concerns are not as primarily centred on slave rebellion and emancipation as they were for writers in the Romantic period (though these concerns do figure in the content of his narrative). Rather, de Lisser focuses on the historical legacy and validity of British colonialism in the West Indies.

Representing Palmer as a corrupt and lascivious female who amasses wealth through murderous and occult means, de Lisser's narrative strips her of her social and economic powers and ultimately destroys her. Likewise, when pitted against Takoo's obeah, Palmer's occult powers are discountenanced and overcome. This Jamaican lady must be subdued by masculine force and so removed both from the white realm of imperial power and from the black realm of occult power. De Lisser's novel suggests that in the past Palmer, with her African voodoo, and Takoo, with his African obeah, have been allies. As events unfold, however, Palmer and Takoo are represented as competitors, and her female black magic pitted against his male black magic. One of Palmer's slaves ruminates, "he was afraid of this woman, who was hand in glove with Takoo, with Takoo who was dreaded by every man and woman on Palmyra and Rosehall. As dreaded as Mrs. Palmer, and even more in a peculiar sort of way . . . though she was dangerous she was less so, to them, than the gaunt negro [Takoo] of whom even some white men stood in awe" (140). While Takoo's superior power is affirmed, his practice of obeah is simultaneously distinguished morally from Palmer's. Palmer

uses her occult powers to intimidate and finally kill her sexual rival—and Takoo’s granddaughter—Millicent, whereas Takoo uses his to try to save his beloved Millie. Although he fails to save his granddaughter, Takoo resists Palmer’s charms and strangles her in her bed. Yet, even as he commits murder, the novel affirms his sense of moral justice. Having killed Palmer while his co-conspirators hold back Rutherford and the other white bookkeeper, Takoo turns to them, “We could kill both of you Squire, if we want. . . . But both of you are kind. We may have to fight you tomorrow, but for Millie’s sake you can go tonight” (246). And so the rebellion of 1831 commences with the murder of the white witch and the African’s pardon of the white Englishmen. This pardon has two effects. By identifying Palmer as author of the horrors of the plantation, Takoo excuses the Englishmen, and, targets *feminine* black arts above all else, and in so doing de Lisser apologizes for the violence of the *male* African rebel and sorcerer.

This gesture of distancing the evils of colonialism from all things English, a move that characterizes colonial discourse from the seventeenth century on, continues, then, in de Lisser’s novel in ways that are deeply and bitterly ironic. The irony of Palmer’s epithet, “white witch,” depends on this distance between England and the West Indies, between the lady and the Jamaican, between what is white and good, and what is black and diabolical. It invokes our understanding that rather, than a white witch (as in Glinda the good witch of the South), Palmer, *despite* her whiteness, has become culturally and morally “black” by practising “all the old African sorcery” available in the West Indies (128). De Lisser’s white witch of Rosehall embodies the cruelty, exploitation, and corruption against which African-Caribbean culture fought for its life in ways that trace the source of these evils right back to that culture itself. Annie Palmer’s savage propensity for cruelty and her uncanny mastery of the psychological and corporeal techniques for inflicting it are identified as voodoo, and so assigned not to the English plantation system but to the newly independent African-Caribbean nation, Haiti. In a perversely twisted fashion, the novel reflects, in ways that ascribe blame rather than affirm liberation, the role that black magic—voodoo—played in the downfall of white colonial rule in Haiti by making Annie Palmer,

white witch, Irish mambo, the scapegoat for the cruelty and corruption that brought the downfall of white colonial rule in Jamaica.

III. Coda: Reversing the Charges

Wide Sargasso Sea, like *The Jamaica Lady*, figures the divide between England and the West Indies as two competing biographical narratives. However, here Rhys turns the tale against the Jamaican lady in order to reverse the charges, tallied across the centuries. Richardson notes how Rhys juxtaposes “the standard Eurocentric approaches to Obeah . . . against the narrator’s refusal to depict it at all” and so “effectively subverts the colonialist construction of Obeah” (189). The role of obeah, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and more generally of African-Caribbean culture per se, has been an object of considerable critical attention.²⁰ Two critics in particular, Sandra Drake and Elaine Savory, structure their analyses of the novel around Rhys’ use of obeah and African-Caribbean spirituality. Savory argues that for Rhys writing-as-conjuration works in personally protective and transformative ways that are analogous to obeah. Drake’s work with the occult in Rhys’ novel is more elaborate and goes further to define her reading of it. Rather than understanding the narrative treatment of occult practices as a critical refusal of depiction and so a refusal of participation in colonialist talk about obeah, as Richardson does, Drake finds this depiction definitive to the novel. She argues that the African-Caribbean logic of zombification determines the novel’s overall structure and final significance. Further, Drake inscribes her reading of the novel into the doubled, redemptive logic of the Middle Passage. In this reading Antoinette, zombified by the white obeah of a demonic English husband, is spiritually awakened as she falls from the burning house into the welcoming arms of her childhood companion, the black Jamaican Tia. In death Antoinette returns home, and her alienation from what is black and Jamaican (Tia) is amended. Drake’s reading, then, exploits most fully the African diasporic spiritual context of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and offers the most utopian, optimistic analysis. Yet it threatens to take the edge off the novel’s postcolonial critique.

While my abbreviated and selective analysis here follows readings that affirm the positive presence of African-Caribbean practices in *Wide*

Sargasso Sea, and while I am deeply impressed by and sympathetic to interpretations, such as Drake's, that argue for the liberatory potential of this culture in the text, I think that Rhys is concerned with emphasizing the limits of obeah's powers to salvage the wreck of West Indian colonialism. Finally, my engagement with this amply studied text operates mostly as coda to the foregoing analyses of colonialist witchcraft discourse in those earlier depictions of Jamaica ladies. With Richardson, I believe that the obeah work Rhys does here is properly postcolonial and therefore aimed at the colonialist talk about obeah which, ironically, functions quite like obeah in order to render colonialism invulnerable to opposition.

From early on in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the presence of obeah marks the hostility aimed at Antoinette's family by both black and the white communities in Jamaica. Impoverished and left "marooned" in post-emancipation Jamaica, the Cosways struggle against colonial policy and black reaction to maintain their social position as landowners, as the Creole elite. Their horse—the one token of their status as proprietors—is poisoned. Antoinette's mother Annette blames the black servant Godfrey for not preventing his fellow blacks from killing her horse, and claims, "He knew what they were going to do" (18).²¹ White society launches its attack against the Cosways not in the form of obeah/poisoning, but as talk about obeah. When Annette makes her advantageous marriage gossiping neighbours surmise that it is only through the black arts of Christophine's obeah that she, an impoverished Creole, has attracted her respectable and wealthy English husband, Mr. Mason (30). This charge of obeah is levied to produce a distinction between these *soi disant* "Jamaican ladies" and the Martiniquan Annette. Jealous of her beauty—"because she pretty like pretty self"—and of her post-emancipation financial security, they never accept her (17, 30). The status and cultural gap between Mr. Mason and Annette Cosway, the Englishman and the West Indian, as their charges assert, can only be traversed by black magic, by charms the illegitimacy of which, then, are advanced to annul the match and to discount any claim Mrs. Mason might make to the title "lady." Such charges participate at once in both secular and supernatural epistemologies; they speak of fraud and deceit as much

as they speak of enchantment. Likewise, Antoinette's husband sees his marriage as a fraud imposed on him through deceitful negotiations that obscured the family history of madness and disgrace.

Antoinette understands the antagonism between the West Indian and the English as a competition between two contending forms of occult transformation, the West Indian as obeah and the English as *talk about obeah* that seeks to counter its charms with more-than-rhetorical forces of its own. Just as the neighbours attribute her mother's marriage and rise in fortunes to obeah, so Antoinette attributes the changed spirit of Coulibri to "their talk about Christophine and obeah" (31). Here, Antoinette shows her awareness that talk about obeah can act just like obeah itself. For Antoinette, a Creole raised by the black obeah woman Christophine, obeah is a primary term in a discourse of the world that is partially shaped within an African-Caribbean cultural matrix. Antoinette, then, sometimes uses the term in ways that operate outside of the limits of European reality and that comment critically on the colonial discourse, through which this reality has been extended around the West Indies.²² When her husband tries to rename her "Bertha," Antoinette protests: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too" (147). With its highly charged claim on her identity, this curse of becoming "Bertha" would rhetorically transform a Jamaican Creole, a "white cockroach," into an English lady just as Holmesia's "Baccaraman" recasts the English peddler as a white man. And, just as the term for "white man" is foreign in England, so the spell that would change Antoinette into a lady can only be enunciated in terms of an alien identity.

Yet, Antoinette charges her husband with this sort of sorcery only after she has herself used obeah to try to win back his affections. In doing this, she seems to take a hint from the suspicions the neighbours had murmured against her own mother and uses Christophine's potion in her attempt to close the gap between her self and her husband. By charming him into full erotic connection, she attempts to traverse the distance between her Jamaican identity and the role of his wife, his English lady. She, then, uses Christophine's black magic to make herself more white, more English, and more of a lady; by doing so, she aban-

dons herself to the spells of patriarchy and colonialism (Drake 105). Ironically, and in ways that confirm the novel's critique of colonialism, both Antoinette and her husband use obeah toward the same end, to make her "into someone else." The failure of any successful negotiation between West Indian and English, between Anglo-Creole and African-Creole, realities is affirmed in the gestures across cultural-ethnic lines that lead up to and then proceed from the "obeah night" Antoinette spends with her husband. The critique of colonialism becomes apparent as each gesture stumbles across the fault lines that structure the terrain of colonial social relations. Antoinette insists on obtaining the potion against Christophine's admonition that obeah is not for white people, and therefore commits a cultural trespass. This error immediately redoubles as Antoinette then uses the potion in her attempt to situate herself wholly within an English identity. By so forsaking her West Indian self she renders that self more vulnerable to English colonial misapprehension as "Bertha" Mason the mad, monstrous West Indian. Disgusted and vengeful, her husband sleeps with a black servant, an act that at once asserts his immunity to Antoinette's fraudulent, toxic charms and confirms his captivation within the easy web of adulterated and venal sexual mores that are stereotypical characteristics of the tropics.

Antoinette's obeah, then, evokes her husband's hatred, and she herself stumbles into an abysmal dissociation represented simultaneously as madness, and as Drake suggests, zombification (Drake 106–12). This dissociation figures within Antoinette's psyche as the colonial ruptures that prevent Jamaican and lady, West Indian and English from ever "fitting together." The categorical juxtaposition here of "zombification" versus "madness" itself emerges from the presence of two divergent discourses, one West Indian, the other English. Rochester violently rejects her tropical charms, and challenges her obeah with his own brand: "No more damned magic," he declares, and proceeds, vampire like, to drain her life away: "I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost . . . Blank lovely eyes. Mad eyes. A mad girl" (170). Just as the animosity of Captain Fustian's gaze renders Bavia into a witch and brings about a completely different narrative of her life, so here the husband's hatred

makes Antoinette into the mad girl and generates the different story of her life we read in *Jane Eyre*. Rochester's confinement of Antoinette as Bertha locates its justification in her "madness" which, within the obeah centred epistemology that the narrative shares with Antoinette, is itself the product of the voodoo work of white colonialism. As Antoinette observed earlier, "that's obeah too."

Pulling Antoinette fully under the sway of his legal and medical definition of pathology, her husband in a sense conquers and owns her, but the powers of this seemingly rational discourse are compromised by his recognition that the limits of that discourse mark the very source of both his attraction and his hatred. This recognition registers his vulnerability to Antoinette's tropical charms and so engenders his reaction against them. His associations with the islands and their people lock together the qualities of magic and fraud in a single term of disillusionment, the enchantment that attracts him and deception that repulses him: "I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place. . . . I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. . . . Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness" (172). His antagonism is generated by a frustration with a world he cannot know whose magic "secret" produces an exotic loveliness that is mystified in a way which enhances both its beauty and suspicions of its illusive and deceptive nature. Antoinette's tropical charm, here, is figured as an intimacy of hatred and beauty, and is finally dissolved in Rochester's verdict on her that exorcizes the magic, the hate, and the beauty: "a drunken lying lunatic—gone her mother's way" (164). But in its place all he is left with is "madness," here the name for how the Englishman controls what he does not understand, once he has emptied it of all promise that might tempt him.

Although witchcraft operates in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as it does in *The Jamaica Lady* and *The White Witch of Rosehall*, to configure a set of ontological and epistemological gaps that obstruct the reconciliation between the West Indies and England, between being a Jamaican and being a lady, Drake suggests that such occult powers in Rhys' novel finally register a conjunction rather than a rupture. This coming together

is articulated not on the personal level between Antoinette and her husband, nor on a national level, between England and Jamaica, but on cultural level between Anglo- and African-Creole, and on a textual level between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. For Rhys returns Antoinette as Bertha, the madwoman in the attic, to Brontë's text, and to the narrative that culminates in the mutual destruction of madwoman and her prison, Thornfield Hall. While within the terms of Brontë's novel and Antoinette's husband, this self-immolation is the act of a madwoman that retrospectively confirms the justice of her confinement even as it rids the narrative of the obstacle of her presence, within the voodoo epistemology that Drake claims for Rhys' text this act stands as affirmation of Antoinette's release from zombihood into the realm of autonomous being: "The zombi, awakened, takes revenge in flame. But in burning Antoinette-zombi, she also frees Antoinette for her real life—her reverse trip back across the wide Sargasso Sea—the slow road to Guinea, Death will take you there" (108–09). Figuring the death and disposal of Bertha as the awakening and return of Antoinette, Drake emphasizes the victory over death this reading awards Antoinette and the metaphysical triumph it grants African-Caribbean belief systems.

Yet while I, like Drake, note the zombi figure in the text, I think that it should be read as part of the texture of Antoinette's, and the novel's, West Indian consciousness. "Zombi" names a West Indian way of understanding the alienation of identity; it stands against the English understanding named by the term "madwoman." Zombification and madness, then, signal, as is characteristic of this text, the presence of two incongruent realities and so the epistemological and ontological gap between them. Rather than maintaining this tension, Drake's reading tends to close it. By following the notion of Antoinette's zombification through to a redemptive conclusion, Drake contravenes the irresolution of the novel's conclusion.

It seems clear from Rhys' confident handling of African diasporic beliefs and practices such as zombification and obeah, that, if she had meant to send Antoinette along "the slow road to Guinea," she would have done so. Instead, she sends her protagonist down a dark passage intent on doing some unnamed thing she was "brought here to do,"

that she “had to do” (190). Rhys’ text then stops, leaving the narrative to pick up from her intertext, *Jane Eyre*. The compulsion, the horrible necessity, here expressed by Rhys’ Antoinette can be read as a metatextual confrontation with the ending ineluctably scripted in the nineteenth-century novel. The “dark passage” named in the last two words of Rhys’ novel, accordingly, would refer to the space between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. More broadly, it might be read as that gap between English and West Indian realities that Rhys’ Antoinette never can traverse, not with marriage, not with Christophine’s obeah, not, I suggest, even with Drake’s triumph of zombification. Rhys’ Antoinette never does traverse this space; the ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* simply positions her at its edge, where, I believe, she has been throughout. Rhys uses the discourse of witchcraft to write about colonial power relations and, I think, what she finally conjures with this discourse is the rupture of colonialism, not its redemption. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then, witchcraft becomes part of a postcolonial discourse that goes far to account for the violence and waste brought in the wake of colonialism’s truly “cosmic upheaval.” And it is in this manner that I have endeavoured to use a postcolonial discourse of witchcraft here.

Notes

- 1 See Downes, who examines this nexus of femininity, value, and bad magic in relation to *The Jamaica Lady*.
- 2 In the context of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, conservative, even reactionary critics who opposed the Whig-led expansionist program of mercantile imperialism usually took this “anti-colonialist” position. See below pages 7–8.
- 3 See Mackie: “In earlier seventeenth-century descriptions, stereotypes of the white West Indian drew not so much on analogies with the black population, as on existent types of ‘bad whiteness’ formulated by the English to vilify the Irish, the French, and members of their own criminal and underclasses. Later, as the labor force shifted away from the white, mostly Scottish and Irish, population of bonded servants and transported felons to slaves, and as the white Creole population advanced their own interests and legitimacy, the threats that the tropics presented to British cultural identity were more explicitly traced to the influence of the African-Caribbean inhabitants” (255).
- 4 For the history of English witchcraft belief in this period, see Bostridge and Porter. While there is a whole industry built around the witch trials in Salem,

much less attention has been given by historians to other, more African-inflected, forms of witch belief in the colonies. Noting the presence of African-derived forms of occult practice in the colonies and the paucity of discussion about these, Behringer observes that this “chapter of colonial witchcraft has not yet been written” (146).

- 5 See, for example, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions and Sacred Possessions*. For a classic study of African religious culture in the New World, see Bastide.
- 6 This trope occurs frequently in contemporary African diasporic writing; it structures a wide variety of cultural forms, such as dance, and shapes the cosmography and spirituality of African diasporic religions. For an overview of the historical and cultural origins of this trope and a variety of discussions of its operations, see Diedrich, Gates, Jr. and Pedersen. As the editors of that collection write in their Introduction: “The Middle Passage . . . emerges not as a clean break between past and present but as a spatial continuum between African and the Americas” (8). When I speak of the redemptive uses of this trope I have in mind most generally the African diasporic notion of a “return to Africa,” especially as it is understood in spiritual and, as Gilroy has explained, in culturally symbolic terms. More specifically, I think, for example, of the movement from abjection to salvation, from captivity to liberation in African diasporic music described by Gilroy as “the slave sublime” (187–224). This musical movement, its accompanying kinetic forms, and the basis of both in the Middle Passage, are the material for Brathwaite’s “Caliban.” The logic and narrative of redemptive return, a sort of retracing of the Middle Passage, informs any number of well-known contemporary literary works such as Robert Hayden’s poem, “Middle Passage,” Charles Johnson’s *Middle Passage: A Novel*, and Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*.
- 7 Whereas our habitual secularism might tempt us to see the first voyage out of Africa as the “actual” event and the second, supplementary, passage back as a “merely spiritual” or “merely figurative” imaginative construction, as Perkinson reminds, us the first passage, no less than the voyage back, would necessarily have been experienced by those who suffered it as an “irreducibly ‘religious’ event” (604).
- 8 The terms of the Peace of Utrecht that ended the War of the Spanish Succession granted England the Asiento, the monopoly on the slave trade to the Spanish American colonies. More generally, England’s success consolidated her Atlantic/Caribbean domination. The South Sea scheme was a huge speculative venture, which crashed in 1722.
- 9 “Tripping” is a metaphor for sexual misconduct; it denotes the shaky morality of a woman perhaps not utterly “fallen,” but certainly compromised. Note that the more completely corrupt Bavia is crippled from her early “fall” (into sin).
- 10 For the features and genealogy of white Creole stereotype, see Mackie.
- 11 See Booth: “One of the most universally accepted notions concerned the power of witches to raise storms and control the natural elements at sea” (54).

- 12 See Barash: "Bavia is thus the archetypal English colonial subject. . . . The story of Bavia's Irish origins [sic] and her return to Ireland at the novel's end reinforce the extent to which her story figuratively reconstitutes the historical origins of English slave culture, and her punishment the desire to root out the sexual and linguistic ambiguities of colonization by forcibly returning her to her place of cultural origin and marking her as indisputably female" (418). Although Barash's reference to Bavia's "Irish" origins is based on a misreading (Bavia is half Scottish not half Irish), her point about the colonial circuit of Bavia's career is illuminating.
- 13 Properly speaking, the typically more personal, more exclusively "magical" practices of obeah differ from voodoo that names an elaborate religious system of beliefs and practices. However, like voodoo, obeah could be and was used in aid of political and social cohesion and liberation. Identified with an autonomous African-derived belief system and set of practices frequently employed to inoculate the individual against harm and, conversely, to harm one's enemies, obeah is part of the culture of slave resistance. Obeah, then, has both a personal and a public face. Savory makes this distinction: "The person working Obeah is in the world of magic when using the powers privately. If an Obeah practitioner works in public—for example, in a cult such as Jamaican Cumina—then Obeah usually becomes part of a religious ritual" (218). But Obeah, per se, is not in itself a religious cult as is Cumina and as are vodou, santeria, and candomble.
- 14 For contemporary eighteenth-century notions of and names for ethnic difference, see Wheeler. For the concept of "whiteness" see Allen and Mackie.
- 15 The peddler's response to Quomina echoes that of Captain Fustian who reprimands a sentinel on board whom he believes had sex with Quomina: "Don't make a cuckold of the Devil, you dog" (111). Downes observes, "An African slave, the object of trade that lies at the heart of the South Sea Bubble and a domestic economy based on empire, is also at the heart of images of absolute fetish and absolute transgressive sexuality" (39).
- 16 Although Annie Palmer is elsewhere associated with the practice of black magic, usually obeah, this Haitian connection is de Lisser's own invention. For other accounts of Palmer, see *Black and Shore*. For an analytic unraveling of the various accounts of Palmer's life, see Lomas.
- 17 As Paravisini-Gebert notes, Palmer "became, by virtue of her being female and thus not naturally entitled to a commanding position, emblematic of the debasing domination of the plantation system" ("White Witch," 26).
- 18 The cruelty of Creole women to their slaves is stereotypical by the time of *The Jamaica Lady*, where Quomina is routinely beaten by Holmesia and Captain Fustian comments: "a Negro had better live in Hell than with a Jamaica termagant" (112). See Bush.
- 19 See, for example, James, Dayan, Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions*; for an analysis of how voodoo works in twentieth-century contemporary Haitian socio-cultural discourses, see Browning.

- 20 See Spivak, Perry, Savory and Drake.
- 21 African-Caribbean practices such as obeah and voodoo preserved and developed esoteric herbal and medicinal knowledge that could be used in poisoning, as they are here with Annette's horse and as they were widely employed against the master class in plantation society.
- 22 This is not to say that Antoinette uniformly speaks from some kind of stable and "pure" African-Caribbean cultural position. Her inability to find a place in the worlds that have shaped her is a major theme of the text. So she certainly does, as Richardson claims, sometimes respond to obeah and to other elements of African-Caribbean culture in colonialist, racist ways (189). Her appropriation of obeah against Christophine's warnings is an instance of Antoinette's misapprehension of that culture.

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