**Recrossing the Wide Sargasso Sea: Trauma, Brathwaite, and his Critics**

**Abstract**

In an oft-cited passage in his 1974 monograph *Contradictory Omens*, Kamau Brathwaite declared that white creoles had forfeited their claim to the spiritual life of the Caribbean. Whether intended or not, his pronouncement had the effect of raising doubts about the standing of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) in the Caribbean canon. In the ensuing debate, Brathwaite brought discomfiting attention to his own “received identity” as he termed it, as well as to that of the novel’s author and several prominent scholars who had written about it. The dialogs of misrecognition that have characterized several of the more notable exchanges between Brathwaite and his principal critic, Peter Hulme, illustrate the need for a reading practice for Caribbean trauma texts that recognizes, drawing on Cathy Caruth’s work, that authors and critics are implicated in each other’s histories. This recognition is particularly urgent in the case of critics that see themselves as connected to the historical traumas staged in a text that they are investigating. Rather than following the model of canonical European trauma texts, especially those set in the Holocaust, in which perpetrators and victims are opposed in both individual and collective binaries, Caribbean texts offer more complex sites for the study of trauma literature. Victims may be identified with groups that have perpetrated pervasive cultural trauma; and perpetrators of psychological trauma may belong to groups of the dispossessed. These crosscurrents provide highly productive grounds for deepening our understanding of the responses of readers and critics to trauma texts—and to each other.

**Keywords**

Trauma literature, Brathwaite, Rhys, Wide Sargasso Sea, Cultural trauma, Ethics of reading, Reading practices

**Introduction**

In his oft-cited and most controversial judgment in *Contradictory Omens* (1974), Edward Kamau Brathwaite asserts that white creoles have forfeited their place in the cultural life of the Caribbean and therefore, critics inferred, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) ought not to have a place in the Caribbean literary canon:

White creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify or be identified, with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea. (38)

Brathwaite’s seemingly harsh criticism of the novel is rooted in a profound discomfort with Rhys’s personal identity as a descendant of the white creoles that perpetrated vast abuses in the colonial era in which her novel is set. In turn, Brathwaite’s commentary, which includes references to certain literary critics’ ethnicities, has discomfited scholars who would prefer that he bracket his own position as a victim of cultural trauma and, especially, the racial identities of those whom he opposes, and stick to the texts at issue. In the ensuing debate, Brathwaite’s notorious comment has been reified and deployed repeatedly with respect neither for the specific context in which it appears nor for the pronounced, subsequent evolution of his views.

I propose in this essay to revisit what is by now an old debate for two reasons. Brathwaite’s encounter with Rhys’s text is a moment of considerable interest in Caribbean letters; and it has been misunderstood. Not only did his contemporaneous critics fail to recognize Brathwaite’s writings in the context of his professed personal intellectual itinerary or, as he put it, “where l'm 'coming from, as they say, & where I goin” (“A Post‐crutionary Tale of the Helen of Our Wars” 70); but later critics failed to notice that his views had changed markedly from his well-known enunciation of them in *Contradictory Omens*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In addition and perhaps more saliently, the terms of the debate are altered when they are considered in light of the evolving field of cultural trauma, which posits that traumas experienced by a collectivity mold its members’ senses of their identities and affect their experiences of the present, even in the case of individuals that have no personal connection to the traumatic events. Ron Eyerman has emphasized the manner in which “collective memory provides the individual with a cognitive map within which to orient present behavior” (65).[[2]](#footnote-2) In *Contradictory Omens*, as I will discuss, Brathwaite describes the Caribbean subject’s imperative to situate himself with respect to the region’s plural histories. The individual “negotiates” his relationship to the collective identity of the group with which he identifies himself. Neither is presumed to be stable, but rather results from a continuous process of interpretation and understanding.

Jeffrey C. Alexander writes that collective memory is a “sociological process” affecting members of a “collectivity” that look back to a profound historical injury and in doing so recognize “ideal and material consequences” that result in an “identity revision” (22). Alexander describes the process as dynamic:

This identity revision means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self. Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity's earlier life. (22)

Indeed, Brathwaite’s relationship to his own cultural history has evolved continuously throughout his long career, from its origins in his studies in a prestigious grammar school in Barbados and then at Pembroke College in Cambridge. Conceiving of cultural trauma as involving a continuous process of constructing identities that are shaped by a collective memory of the past offers a sharp and perhaps welcome departure from the genealogy of trauma that traces its origins to Freud[[3]](#footnote-3) in that the subconscious, which inherently resists investigation, cedes its pride of place to an accessible, if somewhat vague conception of collective memory or identity.

Literary theorists concerned with complex texts set in one period composed by authors writing in another and critiqued, in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in a third, at least, may find it difficult, at times, to rely on conceptions of undiffentiated collectivities in either period that are presumed to have coalesced around an “identity.” However, when the object of investigation shifts from a collectivity to a particular individual’s relationship to his community, a reader may be better able to evaluate the influence that an individual of his affiliations on his writings.

Brathwaite’s frequent invocations of identity in *Contradictory Omens* arise from his personal negotiation with the hybrid identities of a variegated Caribbean. He seeks to articulate “my own idea of creolization,” in which identity is not received, but asserted by the individual. He writes, “Although there is white/brown/black, there are infinite possibilities within these distinctions and many ways of asserting identity. A common colonial and creole experience is shared among the various divisions, even if that experience is variously interpreted” (25). For Brathwaite, identity was not to be assumed (for there were infinite possibilities), but rather to be interrogated continuously by an individual with a stake in the region.

Thus, Brathwaite disclaimed objectivity in his own writing on *Wide Sargasso* Sea and he foresaw that other Caribbean critics of *Wide Sargasso Sea* would be subject to the same effect. If their identities were plural, then so would be their readings of the text. He contrasted the diverse readings of Caribbean critics with those of “metropolitan critics who were impressed with its **fin-de-siecle** quality” (34, emphasis in the original). These critics were, in his view, indifferent to the historical context of the colonial era in which the novel is set, but rather shared a certain nostalgia for *Jane Eyre*.

Among West Indian critics, on the other band, there was no such unanimity [of opinion on *Wide Sargasso Sea*], because here one's sympathies became engaged, one's cultural orientations were involved; one's perception of one's personal experience in its relationship to what one conceived to be one's history. It is dishonest, I think, to try to hold that it is possible to be an impartial critic in cases where one's historical and historically received image of oneself is under discussion. (34)

Certainly, non-Caribbean critics have produced diverse readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the years since *Contradictory Omens* appeared in 1974. However, Brathwaite’s insight into the effect of cultural trauma on critical writing remains fresh. When Brathwaite argues that it would be dishonest to insist on holding Caribbean critics to an inherently unattainable standard of impartiality, he disrupts a convention of scholarly discourse that rules out critics’ personal histories as a legitimate topic of critical discussion.

Expanding the study of “derivations,” as Brathwaite put it, perhaps infelicitously, is not without its perils, as he demonstrates when he attributes critical views with which he disagrees to the ethnicities of their authors (34). Yet here, too, there is an obvious distinction to be drawn between recognizing the importance of a critic’s own invocation of his identity as an influence on his writing, and speculating about the impact of unarticulated histories of others on their writings. In the end, authors, readers, and critics will respond to texts and to each other in modes that are inflected by their respective relationships to traumatic histories staged in texts that they write, read, and discuss. Critics should exercise ethical self-awareness of the influence that their own identities have on their responses to the texts that they critique; and at the same time they should recognize that their dialogic partners are also affected by their identities. This is particularly the case in the investigation of trauma texts. Cathy Caruth’s principle that "History is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24) is a call for dialog between individuals that recognize and respond to the traumatic histories of the other.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In order to appreciate the identification that Brathwaite makes of Jean Rhys with Antoinette, and of himself with the character of Tia, which I shall explore in this essay, it is useful to consider *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a trauma text, although one that does not follow the model of canonical European trauma texts, especially those set in the Holocaust, in which perpetrators and victims are opposed in both individual and collective binaries.[[5]](#footnote-5) Tia is a perpetrator of psychological trauma, but also a member of a group of victims, the impoverished ex-slaves on the Coulibri plantation. Antoinette is both a victim of psychological trauma and a member of a group of perpetrators, the white creole plantation owners. Thus, psychological trauma and cultural trauma operate in opposed directions in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as the victim comes from a group of perpetrators and the perpetrator from a group of victims. This opposition generates productive tensions as relationships between individuals and communities are revealed as more complex and more fully historicized than has been previously understood. Tia is not simply the instrumentality of Antoinette’s psychological and physical wounds, but a particular subject that must be studied in the context of her relationship to her own community’s historical circumstances.

## Crosscurrents of psychological and cultural trauma

In a pivotal moment early in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette rushes toward her friend Tia, a black girl of about her age, for shelter as her family’s estate, Coulibri, burns to the ground in a fire set by disgruntled ex-slaves. Tia responds by throwing a jagged stone at Antoinette’s head, wounding her grievously and setting off a decline in her mental health that progresses throughout the book, which ends just before her suicide. In relation to Antoinette, in the traumatic moment, Tia acts as a perpetrator. Through her willed act of violence, she transforms Antoinette into a victim who thereafter bears the psychological scars of her traumatization. However, as a member of a community that has suffered profoundly from slavery, racism, and economic exploitation, Tia is a victim of cultural trauma caused by the group to which Antoinette belongs. The traumatic moment in the narrative is precipitated by Antoinette’s failed attempt to renounce her membership in this group of victimizers to join Tia’s community of victims. The reciprocal and opposing positions of Tia and Antoinette in the traumatic moment condition both their responses to each other and the reader’s response to the text.

Readers that connect their own personal histories with the traumas staged in the narrative may find these instabilities in the positions of victim and victimizer particularly fraught. Antoinette first hears Tia singing “Go away white cockroach, go away, go away . . . Nobody want you. Go away” (13). Her portrayal as racist and classist (not to mention as manipulative and generally nasty) stands as a stunning reversal to the overwhelming reality of white-black relations in the colonial Caribbean. To gain some insight into Antoinette’s experience of her friend, we must see Tia, in all of her ambivalence, through Antoinette’s eyes in the traumatic moment.

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We started at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. [27]

In this moment, Antoinette and Tia each experience an overwhelming sense of the loss, with Antoinette’s blood and Tia’s tears making the psychic wounds of each visible to the other. In transforming Antoinette into a victim, Tia becomes a perpetrator, but she unavoidably wounds herself psychologically in so doing. Her act of violence disrupts the callous indifference she has developed toward all members of the group that has victimized her community. While Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s 1985 reading of the looking-glass in this scene as symbolic of Antoinette’s narcissistic mirroring of herself onto Tia is perceptive and productive,[[6]](#footnote-6) to see Tia only as a projection of Antoinette, that is to not see her at all, is to deny Tia agency in this moment as both perpetrator and victim and to rob her of her all too human capacity not only to experience suffering but also to inflict it.

Antoinette’s traumatic memories retain excessive agency in her subconscious. In the dream narrative in the penultimate paragraph of the novel, Antoinette, renamed Bertha by her husband in a stunning exercise of patriarchal domination, assumes the identity of the madwoman in the attic of Thornfield Hall in England in *Jane Eyre*. She revisits the site of her original trauma in a dream just before she sets the hall alight with a candle and jumps to her death from its burning ramparts:

The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought Why did I scream? I called "Tia!" and jumped and woke. (112)[[7]](#footnote-7)

Tia’s irruption into Antoinette’s nightmare is recognizable as the manifestation of Antoinette’s unassimilated memories of her traumatic past experience in the present. They are consistent with Caruth’s characterization of “unclaimed experience,” the term she coined to describe the manner in which traces of a victim’s traumatic experience lie inaccessibly in her subconscious, manifesting themselves periodically in nightmares, flashbacks, and repetition compulsions (59, 62).[[8]](#footnote-8)

My concern here, though, is less with the nature of the representation of trauma than with its reception. Trauma readings must remain alert to the manner in which the ideological biases of the narrative may inhibit the reader’s capacity to respond to complexities and instabilities in the protagonists’ positions. Antoinette narrates the first part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* from the standpoint of a young girl who is unaware of the larger context of race relations on her plantation. The reader knows that Coulibri is falling into decline and can infer that the ex-slaves are suffering from their loss of employment on the plantation; but the text itself is not concerned with the general condition of the ex-slaves in Jamaica, for whom the promise of the Emancipation Act of 1833 had been betrayed.

Indeed, apart from her mother’s apprehension that Mason’s plan to import coolie labor may provoke a violent reaction among the ex-slaves, the historical circumstances of the ex-slaves in the novel is of scant concern to any of the white creoles. The white creoles’ concern for their own travails, in contrast to their disregard for the ex-slaves’ history of profound abuse and exploitation, is illustrated by Annette’s appropriation of the word “marooned” (10, 15), which she reorients from a symbol of courageous black resistance to slavery to a metaphor for her family’s condition of social and physical isolation from the local white plantocracy. The reader’s only glimpse of the general condition of slaves comes in a remark by Christophine, her mother’s longtime black servant, who expresses her disdain for neighbors that have managed to perpetuate the cruel abuses of slave owners in the post-slavery era: “They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people’s feet. New ones worse than old ones—more cunning that’s all” (15).

## Brathwaite and his critics

Ironically, although Brathwaite disdained scholarly convention, as I will discuss, it is precisely his standing as a preeminent Caribbean intellectual that has been unsettling. For the West Indian scholar, Frances O’Connell, Brathwaite’s judgment on *Wide Sargasso Sea* was particularly consternating. “Imagine my alarm then when, researching the work of Jean Rhys, I read Edward Kamau Brathwaite's statement [produced above] … Did this mean that I had to ditch Rhys from my project? Which writers could I legitimately include? Had I any right to my own opinion?” (34). Elaine Savory, whose doctorate is from the University of the West Indies and has worked on Rhys and Brathwaite over many years, is discomfited by Brathwaite’s references to the race of scholars he critiques, but wishes to put his debate with Peter Hulme in a more positive light.

“Hulme's original essay and his reply (*Wasafiri* 20 & 23) both indicate his desire to circumvent race, as when he prefers Wilson Harris to Brathwaite on the grounds that Hulme reads Harris as being indifferent to the colour of the writer as long as the text is a Caribbean text.”

Savory is here defending Hulme’s position that it is desirable to “circumvent race,” agreeing with him that all that counts is whether the text is Caribbean. Nonetheless, she gestures to Brathwaite’s stature when she writes at the end of her article that, “the Hulme-Brathwaite exchange will open the door to a more direct discussion of race in our work and in our times” (34). Since, as we shall see, the Hulme-Brathwaite debate ended with each critic professing to be completely misunderstood by the other, while essentially denying the validity of the other’s views, it is difficult to see how their debate would lead to more constructive discussions of race. As Savory herself gives no basis for her optimism, her view may be summarized to hold that critics of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (and, by extension, other works of Caribbean literature written by white creoles) should stick to the text, rather than bring Rhys’s or other critics’ races into the discussion, *but* Brathwaite must nonetheless be accorded the respect he is due for his contributions to Caribbean letters.

In order to begin making sense of Brathwaite’s critique, it is necessary to recognize that his reception of the text is affected by his own identity as a victim of the traumatic history that is staged in the text. He is not constructing an argument about *Wide Sargasso Sea per se*; but rather he is playing out his theorizing in *Contradictory Omens* of what he calls “acculturation.” Perhaps in part because *Contradictory Omens*, a slim volume published in Jamaica, exists in relatively few libraries, critics fail to notice, first of all, that the well-known last line of the quotation with which I began that refers to the Caribbean as a “side of the Sargasso Sea” is not Brathwaite’s own language as he acknowledges implicitly by quoting him, but that of Walton Look Lai,[[9]](#footnote-9) a historian at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. Look Lai writes,

[Antoinette/Bertha’s] own final realization that personal salvation, if it is to come at all, will come, not from the destructive alien embrace of Thornfield Hall, but only from a return—however difficult—to the spiritual world on the other side of the Wide Sargasso Sea. (52, quoted in *Contradictory Omens* 38)

Brathwaite’s slightly alters the last line, but he is drawn to Look Lai’s imagery even as he opposes his interpretation of Antoinette’s suicide as an attempt to rejoin Tia in her spiritual home in the Caribbean. In Look Lai’s reading, Antoinette’s jump is an affirmative and redemptive act.[[10]](#footnote-10) Brathwaite writes, justly in my view, that Look Lai’s reading “is hopeful and optimistic, but totally lacking in recognition of the realities of the situation” (*Contradictory Omens* 38).

Brathwaite’s reference to “the realities of the situation” is not grounded in his textual interpretation of the novel and he does not therefore propose a more realistic reading of the friendship between the girls or of the dream sequence at the end of the novel. Rather, he dismisses the premise of any fictional representation of friendship between two girls on opposite sides of the racial and ideological divide in the period in which the novel is set and in so doing negates it as a legitimate object of scholarly investigation. For Brathwaite to engage with Rhys’s text on its own terms by entering into a debate about whether the friendship is portrayed credibly, or whether it is plausible that the two girls would ever have met, would have been, at least from the stance Brathwaite adopts in *Contradictory Omens*, to legitimize Rhys’s undertaking. His position is that white creoles have forfeited their access to the world of Caribbean spirituality not only by declining to participate in it but also by attempting to dominate it and replace it with their own culture. (Later, he would modify considerably his position, as it related to Jean Rhys.)

Brathwaite’s resistance in *Contradictory Omens* to the cultural products of white creoles extends to the writings of non-Afro-Caribbean scholars. Brathwaite disparages Walton Look Lai as “a West Indian of Chinese derivation [who] is anxious to take the novel out of the boudoirs of the English critics and place it firmly in the West Indies where he maintains it belongs” (34). Brathwaite is suspicious of Look Lai’s attempt, in his view, to solidify *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s place in the Caribbean canon, suggesting that it is little more than a romance for Europeans that remain captivated by *Jane Eyre*. Similarly, he casts Kenneth Ramchand, who was born in Trinidad, served in the Trinidadian government, and spent a large part of his career at the University of the West Indies, as “a critic of East Indian derivation, whose orientation is 'West Indian'”(34).

Brathwaite’s references to Look Lai’s and Ramchand’s racial identities have been the subject of endless protestations, notably by Peter Hulme, who argues that Brathwaite is nullifying aspects of their critiques of *Wide Sargasso Sea* on purely racial grounds.[[11]](#footnote-11) However when read in the context in which they appear in *Contradictory Omens*, Brathwaite’s provocations are best read as performances of his own outrage at the history of white creole involvement in the Caribbean. They illustrate his central point that critics’ understandings of a particular text arise in a specific cultural context. He is advancing the inoffensive proposition that critics, he included, read texts in which their own racial identities are implicated through the lens of their own “historical and historically received” images of themselves.

## Creolization, acculturation, and interculturation

Brathwaite’s discussion, in 1974, of “orientations” and “derivations” in relation to Look Lai and Ramchand may be understood not as an essentializing move, but rather as a product of his model of “creolization” in which he offers a taxonomy of different cultural heritages, each grounded in a racial/ethnic identification:

My own idea of creolization is based on the notion of an historically affected socio-cultural continuum, within which (as in the case of Jamaica), there are four inter-related and sometimes overlapping orientations.[[12]](#footnote-12) (25)

For Brathwaite, derivation refers to race/ethnicity and is fixed; while orientation is a matter of culture that, although linked to race, is mutable. When Brathwaite refers to Look Lai as “a West Indian of Chinese derivation” (34) and Ramchand as “a critic of East Indian derivation, whose orientation is ‘West Indian'” (34), he is not saying, as Hulme suggests, that their writings must be discounted purely because of their races. Rather, he is accounting for their ethnicities in a monograph largely dedicated to exploring plural cultures. In fact, Brathwaite credits Ramchand with assuming a West Indian orientation even though his derivation is East Indian.

Although Brathwaite clearly connects race to culture, he does so primarily in his historicization of an individual’s understandings of his own identity, or, as he puts it, “one's historical and historically received image of oneself.” He states his “conviction that we cannot begin to understand statements about ‘West Indian culture,’ . . . unless we know something about the speaker/writer’s own socio cultural background and orientation” (33). To interpret a particular statement about textual representation of “West Indian culture,” the reader must be alert to the speaker’s cultural history and his orientation (his “directions, positions, assumptions and ideals”). However, although Brathwaite extols the intermixing of races, he does not include white creoles in the admixture, as he believes that they arrived in the Caribbean bent on dominating and enslaving it rather than entering into relationship with it. He sees no positive outcome, at least in the post-Emancipation era in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set, of countenancing representations of that world that are authored by white creoles.

When critics cite Brathwaite’s comments on white creoles as evidence of his racism, they duplicate the attitudes of the white creoles in *Wide Sargasso Sea* who see themselves as victims of racism and racially motivated violence rather than as perpetrators of them, as history would have it. In *Contradictory Omens*, Brathwaite seeks to find a pathway out of the patterns of interracial animosity and black alienation that plague the Anglophone Caribbean.[[13]](#footnote-13) He does so by diagnosing two alternative modes of creolization: acculturation, which operates by the imposition of European cultures onto indigenous Afro-Caribbean peoples and constitutes a form of epistemic violence; and interculturation, which conceives of a dynamic and reciprocal mode of absorption of European cultural norms into a cultural intermixing that recognizes cultural hierarchies even as it undermines them.[[14]](#footnote-14) Brathwaite blames acculturation, which he identifies with white creoles, for turning racial groups living side by side into enemies, fighting with each other for superior positions as imitators of white Europeans. In contrast, he imagines that interculturation will result in groups of different races opening themselves to horizontal influences as they resist European cultural products together.[[15]](#footnote-15) Thus, Brathwaite declines to separate *Wide Sargasso Sea* from its status as a product of a white creole culture that created the Afro-Caribbean folk through captivity, transportation, and enslavement and then eradicated their culture and spiritual foundation through acculturation.

Having set forth these patterns of creolization, Brathwaite applies them to his reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

With this in mind, we may now turn to the passage quoted above [a longer excerpt of the traumatic moment that is quoted at the outset of this chapter] by a white creole expatriate West Indian-born novelist, which purports to describe the feelings of a very sensitive white creole girl just after emancipation. (34)

Brathwaite’s disdain for Rhys betrays the psychic scars he carries from his personal identification with the Afro-Caribbean people victimized by white creoles. His apparent lack of empathy for the position of “very sensitive white creole girls” like Antoinette must be understood in light of Rhys’s own seeming indifference to the incomparably greater suffering of innumerable black children.

If we understand Brathwaite in this way, we are more likely to make sense of his widely cited remark that “Tia was not and never could have been her [Antoinette’s] friend (36).” If we remain mindful that Brathwaite’s claim is based in ideology, not on a close reading of the text, we may avoid interpreting it as a problem of realism, as Victoria Gregg does when she immediately follows Brathwaite’s quotation on the impossibility of the friendship with an archival letter from Rhys in which she suggests that she should have put Tia’s aggression into a dream rather than in the straight narrative:

ln a letter to Francis Wyndham on 22 August 1962, Rhys says, “A lot that seems incredible is true, the obeah for example, the black girl's attack. I've stuck because it should have been a dream and I've tried to make it a realistic truth (*Letters*, 214).” (96)

The problem that Rhys is posing to herself in this letter to her friend is that her readers might find certain of her representations to be implausible. She suggests that they might have been better incorporated into a dream sequence rather than into straight narrative (which she terms “realistic truth”). Gregg, however, uses this quotation from Rhys’s letter to reconcile Brathwaite’s discounting of the relationship between the girls with Rhys’s authorial choices:

It is possible to argue that Rhys's comments and the textual and structural operations of *Wide Sargasso Sea* are not that far removed from Braithwaite’s central assertion. Both writers and Rhys's text show that the relationship between the two functions as a dream truth, a kind of death, because a "real" relationship would have been impossible.” (96)

In fact, however, as a textual matter, obeah was real and Tia did attack Antoinette—these passages may seem “incredible” to Rhys’s readers, but they are integral to the narrative as it was written.

Gregg bases her argument on a fundamentally different mode of analysis than Brathwaite’s, presupposing his complaint is with the realism of the relationship. For Brathwaite, friendship was not an available form of relationship between any members of two groups that were historically separated in a hierarchy of domination and cultural suppression, and it would be irrelevant whether the friendship was represented in straight or dream narrative. While we might sympathize with Gregg’s motivation in wishing to show how her analysis of the frontiers between straight and dream narrative sequences in the text might explain Brathwaite’s discrediting of the premise of the relationship, the thrust of her argument domesticates and diminishes the point of Brathwaite’s analysis of acculturation in *Contradictory Omens*.   
**Cultural trauma and *Marly, the Planter***

The strikingly categorical nature of Brathwaite’s views on race in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is best understood by reading them in their context in *Contradictory Omens*, where they are immediately followed by an extended quotation from *Marly, or, The Life of a Planter in Jamaica Comprehending Characteristic Sketches of the Present State of Society and Manners in the British West Indies and an Impartial Review of the Leading Questions Relative to Colonial Policy*. Published in 1828, approximately a decade before the period in which *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set, this novel is so virulent in its racist treatment of blacks that, if Brathwaite held it to be generally accurate in its representation of white creole culture in that era, then his resistance to representations of the interracial friendship between Antoinette and Tia in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is easily explained.

Tia was not and never could have been her friend. No matter what Jean Rhys might have made Antoinette think, Tia was historically separated from her by this kind of paralogue: [Quoting *Marly*] “There is, I must confess, an involuntary feeling apparently implanted in the breasts of white men by nature herself, that black men are a race distinct and inferior [to them] . . . This distinction of colour forms, indeed, such an impassable boundary between these two races of mankind [that it would seem to result from] the general supposition that Providence [has decreed it] in the wise dispensation of earthly affairs.” (*Contradictory Omens* 36)

Thus the historical separation that Brathwaite saw as nullifying the pretext of the friendship between the girls was a reflection of white, not black ideology of the period that posited explicitly, in the case of *Marly*, an “impassable boundary between these two races.” In using the term “paralogue” (biologically equivalent), Brathwaite lets his readers know that he considers the virulent racism of that era to be universal and indelible. Brathwaite’s curious formulation, “No matter what Jean Rhys might have made Antoinette think” (of course authors make their characters think various things), suggests the racism of white creole society is so deeply ingrained that it trumps any other mode of thought Rhys may have intended for her character.

In Brathwaite’s reading of *Marly*, race and culture are synonymous in the Caribbean plantations of that period. Thus, he does not interrogate the validity of the implied claim in *Marly* that all members of the plantocracy subscribe to a white supremacist ideology; nor does he contemplate the possibility that their racism could be, for some at least, a matter of degree. He relies on *Marly* to support his position that white creoles in that era, considered as a group, were irredeemably and absolutely racist.

The relationship of *Wide Sargasso Sea* to history is both fraught and complex. Few critics hold Rhys to the highly debatable standards Brathwaite applies to the text, which asks it to disallow a friendship that is indispensable to the narrative on ideological grounds. It is quite unlikely other critics would introduce an extended quotation from *Marly* to illuminate any aspect of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In fact, critics that engage Rhys’s personal history in relation to the text note its complexity. Hulme reads *Wide Sargasso Sea* “as a ‘compensation’ for the ruin of [Rhys’s] family[[16]](#footnote-16) at the time of Emancipation, a compensation though, which serves to occlude the actual relationship between that family history and the larger history of the English colony of Dominica” (“The Locked Heart: Wide Sargasso Sea” 76).[[17]](#footnote-17) Historicizing the text is further complicated by its relationship to passages on colonial life in *Jane Eyre*, which is set in the decades before Emancipation (a temporal disjuncture of more than a decade exists between the settings of the two novels). From the standpoint of purely textual interpretation, most critics take for granted that Rhys’s text should not be held to any standard of historical accuracy other than that which it claims on its own terms; and, indeed, she consciously takes artistic license in all her historical representations.[[18]](#footnote-18)

For these reasons, reading Brathwaite empathetically does not entail accepting the logic of his argument. His position as a victim of cultural trauma does not entitle him to arbitrate which representations by which authors are permissible. However, the passages at issue must be read in the context in which they appear in *Contradictory Omens* so that a crucial distinction may be made: Brathwaite’s purpose is not to break new interpretive ground in reading the novel. Rather, it is to illustrate his theory of acculturation. Within the context of the colonial ideology described in *Marly*, which Brathwaite considers absolute, the only conceivable relationship between two individuals on opposite sides of the black/white color divide is one of exploiter-exploited or racist and victim of racism. In his response to Look Lai in *Contradictory Omens*, Brathwaite refers to “the deep subtle hopeless black/white ‘West Indian’ relationships” (35). For his purposes in that moment, narratives of friendship across the divide falsify the conditions of the ideology of the era, even if they are credibly portrayed within the context of a given text.

## Dialogues of misrecognition

In defending his writing on Wide Sargasso Sea, Brathwaite is motivated less by differences of interpretation than by feelings of being misunderstood and disrespected by his scholarly antagonists. In response to Hulme’s critique of his use of “derivations” in relation to Look Lai and Ramchand, Brathwaite writes that Hulme’s characterization of his writing is

*an utter travesty of what I say in* ***CO*** *[Contradictory Omens] & what I represent - where l'm 'coming from, as they say, & where I goin. But this ‘case' has been repeated so many times against me as if 'true', that I suppose it has now become part of 'post-colonial' folk culture! & I guess that I'll always be attacked on this by those who don't want a blk norm for the Caribb ['norm' carefully defined in CO + Hoetink 1967 see also Nigel Boland (in 1992) on my ideas on creolization (1971, 1974); Michael Craton (1983) on my position on slave resistance culture, (1983); most lit critics (esp of the West lndian Lit Academic Estab) on my poetry; and now by a normally - normatively - brilliant much admired & enrichening scholar like Peter Hulme & many of those on his List (above) who want to set themselves up as (XPAT) authorities on the Caribbean & its literature & who continue to nuse Rhys as their jaguar & paradigm*

[xcuse my **DUMBness** here but whenever p step into my sunlight I speak out… despite all the theory & bell-curve (perhaps because of it?) dem still behaving like Christofer Columbus & Prospero. Anyway is time for not only a clearing but a SHARING of the air & I hope this is the beginning of interchange]

*Hulme clearly has not ready my work – certaintly none of it since the parts on WSS he quotes.* ("A Post-Crutinary Tale of the Helen of Our Wars," 70) *[[19]](#footnote-19)*

Both the informality and the outrageousness of his attack on Hulme are striking in this passage. Brathwaite accuses Hulme of being motivated by a desire to denormalize black Caribbean culture and by an assumption that blacks are unintelligent. He then links Hulme and other critics to the arch perpetrators of cultural trauma, Columbus and Prospero. By essentially equating opposition to his writing to a manifestation of racism, Brathwaite closes off dialog, even as he simultaneously voices a plaintive hope that his invective will clear the air and set the stage for dialog. He thus reveals acute sensitivities that may only be understood as the result of longstanding patterns of racism and colonialism. He experiences criticism as an assault that he quickly links to his and his opponent’s respective positions: he becomes an exemplary victim; his opponents become exemplary perpetrators.

Hulme declines to engage Brathwaite in dialog, drily replying that “Brathwaite's descriptions of Look Lai and Ramchand as of Chinese and East Indian 'derivation' clearly touched a raw nerve. There's not much I can say in response to the pyrotechnics that follow, since few of the fireworks relate to anything in my article” (49). He adds that these “‘derivations' don't make their readings of say, the Antoinette - Tia relationship either more or less convincing: they are irrelevant to such readings” (49). Hulme completely fails to consider to whom these questions are “irrelevant.” They are obviously not irrelevant to Brathwaite, nor should they be to critics that wish to engage with him.

To some degree, the gulf between the two scholars arises from their respective attitudes toward the conventions of academic discourse. Brathwaite’s hybrid texts incorporate informal and poetic language in articles that take the form of scholarly writing or, at least, appear in scholarly journals. Hulme derides Brathwaite’s impassioned argument as “pyrotechnics” and “fireworks” that are nonresponsive to the substance of his own article. Brathwaite accuses Hulme of not reading *Contradictory Omens* in its entirety. At the heart of their reciprocal complaints of being misunderstood is their lack of sympathy for the reading practice of the other. Brathwaite considers the ethnic and racial identities of authors, critics, and himself not only as fair game, but also as essential to situating himself with respect to their writings; Hulme does not.

Brathwaite’s response highlights the problem he faces in entering into a dialog with a western academic establishment that insists any discourse, even on a Caribbean text, may only take place on its own terms. Thus, Brathwaite, through his direct address to the reader (“xcuse my **DUMBness**”) and his reference to the infamous bell curve, calls attention to attitudes of racial superiority he believes are harbored by white “XPAT” academics. Brathwaite is nothing if not fearless as he engages a topic that most consider taboo: the attitudes of white scholars toward black Caribbean academics. He mocks scholarly conventions, particularly the use of citations as sources of authority, through his playful use of elaborate citations to support his definition of the term “norm.” He engages in consciously ungrammatical word play to mock Hulme’s position as an authority on the Caribbean (“*normally - normatively - brilliant much admired & enrichening scholar like Peter Hulme*”). He seeks to reverse Hulme’s disapproval of Brathwaite’s invocation of racial identity in relation to Rhys, Look Lai, and Ramchand by suggesting that critiques directed against him are motivated by racist attitudes. (“I’ll always be attacked on this by those who don’t want a blk norm for the Caribb,”) In passionate defense of himself, Brathwaite appears to assume a “blk norm” for Caribbean culture in contrast to his nuanced consideration of race and culture in *Contradictory Omens* that would seemingly reject any norm other than one based on the creolization of plural racial groups.

To begin altering the dynamics of this exchange from one of mutual recrimination to one of dialog, western critics should grant Brathwaite the recognition he craves, at this point in his career, as a scholar and as a victim. When he says that it is “dishonest . . . to be an impartial critic in cases where one's historical and historically received image of oneself is under discussion,” he makes the case that it is not only acceptable for him to invoke his own identity as an Afro Caribbean in his criticism but also that it is ethically necessary. However, Brathwaite should consider limiting his invocation of ethnicity to himself. Just as he has a right to insist that his critics recognize the traumatic history he evokes as conditioning his partiality to certain points of view, he should recognize that invoking the ethnicities of critics is appropriate only to the extent that they have done so themselves.

## The evolution of Brathwaite’s relationship to *Wide Sargasso Sea*

When later critics cite Brathwaite’s challenge to the legitimacy of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a Caribbean text, they typically fail to note that his views had long since changed. Perhaps ironically, by the time he wrote “A Post-crutionary Tale of the Helen of Our Wars,” in 1995, two decades after *Contradictory Omens*, Brathwaite had developed a considerable affection for Rhys and her novel, referring in the first sentence to “Jean Rhys' great Caribbeannovel, **Wide Sargasso Sea”** (69), surely a graceful retraction of his notorious stance in *Contradictory Omens*. In the rather obscure title of his article, he goes so far as to identify Rhys with Helen of Troy, an object of desire in whose name men fight each other.

In one remarkable passage, Brathwaite reveals the importance of the figure of Tia to his own thinking in relation both to Antoinette *and to himself*, despite his earlier rejection of the creation of any black character by a white creole. In the following passage, Brathwaite responds to what he believes is Hulme’s willful misreading of Brathwaite’s commentary on the Antoinette-Tia relationship:

This is unfair. My point has always been THAT WE DON'T KNOW **WHAT**

MIRANDA/Antoinette/Miss Ann IS FEELING AT ANY STAGE OF THE

SLAVE/ PLANTATION CONTINUUM because Prospero never wrote about

her & is only now in the 1990s[[20]](#footnote-20) that she's beginning to write about herself

(Kosage, Elaine Savory, Michelle Cliff, Marina Warner) in the tradition of Rhys of course & her cousin Phyllis Shand Allfrey

What l'm saying is that is good to have Rhys' version **BUT THAT**

**VERSION/VISION IN RELATION TO TIA** (who we know something about as STARK - my blk Caliban sister) may be guilt or wishful thinking on JR 's part & can be used by certain critics to create a sense of guilt in 'Tia '. But this is certainly not consonant w / the historical record (& I quote Long, **Marly** & other contemp source(s)… our postemancipation experience from 1834 to the PRESENT both here & say in S Africa where the Tia/Antionette relationship has not essentially changed … since the post-colonialists – another Prosperean invention/interrogation/intervention want to operate in the Caribbean from … false, liard & hypo (also hyper) critical stance that things now OK & can therefore be written about from the point of view of neo-appropriation masked as (pseudo)-familial cultural equality & understanding – the **Tia = Antoinette syndrome** . which is what the whole wash of books on Rhys at least in Hulme’s reading appears to thrive on – a false or NO knowledge of Caribb (or ‘creole’) ‘reality.’

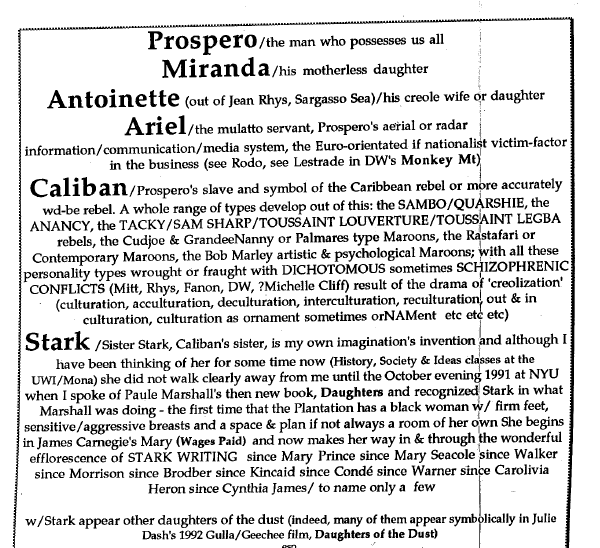
In a manner consonant with the spirit of the Caribbean Arts Movement of which he was a founder, Brathwaite reaches for a performance of his critical position that captures some of the syntax of informal Jamaican dialect. He pathologizes as a “syndrome” the attitudes of western critics who practice a “(pseudo)-familial cultural equality & understanding” based on “a false or NO knowledge of Caribb (or ‘creole’) ‘reality.’”

His attention to the underlying ethics of subaltern representations is reminiscent of Spivak’s, although he locates the problem in the neo-colonialist’s “point of view of neo-appropriation masked as (pseudo)-familial cultural equality & understanding.” His concern is that western texts set in the Caribbean normalize a version of their culture in an environment they deem post-racial. For Brathwaite, the central dynamic of colonial appropriation is one of acculturation, the process of cultural domination for its own sake. In contrast, Spivak is concerned with the way in which cultural domination reinforces the construction of Englishness. Brathwaite is less interested with the internal dynamics of Englishness than with simply keeping it out of the Caribbean, except to the extent that it coexists in a relationship of mutual influence with Afro Caribbean and other cultures, a proposition that he views as unrealistic given the history of English involvement in the region.

Thus, Brathwaite more or less condemns the entirety of western criticism on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which he sees as emanating from a post-colonialist mentality. He invokes South Africa under Apartheid as an analogue to post-emancipation Jamaica to generalize his proposition that representations of friendship between races are inherently false and hypocritical in environments of pervasive institutionalized racism and discrimination. At stake is not simply unequal treatment or modern racism but histories of slavery and Apartheid that represent paradigmatic cultural traumas. Thus, western critics that fail to historicize the text within the “historical record” are complicit in the injustices of the era in which the text is set. His connection of Antoinette to Miss Ann makes clear his view of the inherent falsity of representations of friendly conduct by members of slaveholders’ families toward black subjects. Thus in his view, critics who take such representations at face value are hopelessly, if not willfully, ignorant of the historical realities of white-black relations in Jamaica.

Brathwaite insists that Antoinette can only be written about from the slave master/victimizer’s point of view (Prospero’s), and he refigures Antoinette from her position as a victim (in the context of patriarchy, but also of racist ex-slaves) to, on the one hand, Miranda, the daughter whom Prospero would impose on the unnamed island on which they are shipwrecked, and, on the other, to the false Miss Ann. Brathwaite provocatively, but not ungenerously, credits Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey as inspiring a tradition of white creole writers that explore their own histories. His view is that the “feelings” of the figure of Antoinette, as a white creole, will be revealed as these authors write about themselves—but that action will not disclose anything real about Tia or about any hypothetical friendship between the two. He emphatically rejects critics’ reading into Tia any sense of guilt when he writes that Rhys’s “version/vision in relation to Tia … can be used by certain critics to create a sense of guilt in 'Tia'”. He appears to be referring to Tia’s tears after she has wounded Antoinette, but Brathwaite’s use of quotation marks around Tia in this context moots this question by rejecting the reality of any conception by Rhys or white critics of the character of Tia. Clearly Brathwaite is happiest when the works of white creole writers are interpreted only insofar as they elaborate the identities of white creoles; but his invocation of the names of prominent Anglophone women writers nonetheless suggests genuine respect for their work.

Perhaps most stunning in this article is Brathwaite’s revelation of his personal investment in the character of Tia that, perhaps in a lifetime of thinking about *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he has come to regard as a spiritual sister. When he writes that “we know something about [Tia] as STARK - my blk Caliban sister” he identifies her with Stark, the sister he invented for Caliban in his too-little-studied *Barbajan Poems 1492–1992*. In this extravagant volume, Brathwaite lays out his own relationship to the long history of *The Tempest* in Caribbean literature as follows:



(*Barbajan Poems 1492–1992* 316)

It is quite extraordinary that in this autobiographical *tour d’horizon* of his personal archive, intellectual itinerary, and pantheon of authors from whom he has drawn inspiration, Brathwaite should promote Antoinette, Rhys’s creation, to the third place in his personal *Tempest*’s hierarchy.[[21]](#footnote-21) She is fully transformed from her position in Rhys’s text as a victim of patriarchal oppression, to a realignment with the colonial master and perpetrator of cultural trauma, Prospero (“the man who possesses us all”), either as his wife (which would make her Miranda’s mother), or daughter (in that case, Miranda’s sister).

In all events, his is a gesture of solidarity with the enslaved and victimized in the person of Stark (his creation) whom he identifies with Tia. Although Tia is Rhys’s creation, and he might be thought to be appropriating her by adopting her as a sister, Brathwaite is clearly positioning himself as able to understand her as her creator could not, because both he and Stark/Tia are identified with Caliban, the dominated and enslaved. While he depends on Rhys to create Tia, and for that he credits Rhys as having written “a great Caribbean novel,” his underlying claim is that only he and those who have suffered like Caliban/Stark/Tia from Miranda/Anoinette/Miss Ann may claim spiritual kinship with her and represent her creatively.

More is at stake in this debate than the validity of particular representations in *Wide Sargasso Sea* or its inclusion in the Caribbean literary canon, a matter long since settled in the novel’s favor in any event. For European or American critics to engage fully with Brathwaite’s writings or those of other Afro Caribbean critics concerning *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they must acknowledge the cultural trauma that inevitably affects the outlook of Afro-Caribbean critics. They must scrutinize whether they are prone to identify, perhaps unconsciously, more with the position of the white creole losing some part of her privilege in that historical period than with the Afro-Caribbean subjects that have been sacrificed to achieve it. Thus, although critical readers should not avoid empathizing with the character on which the narrative is focused, they should bring a heightened awareness to the historical cultural positions of all involved, including the author, themselves, and other critics.

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1. As one example, in a chapter in the *Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (2011), Rebecca Ashworth reproduces Brathwaite’s notorious declaration and suggests that he has been influential in undermining Rhys’s “credentials” as a Caribbean writer. She then praises Ellen O’Callaghan for developing an “alternative model through which to read Caribbean women’s writing” that “allows ‘outsider’ Creole voices, such as Rhys’s, to be included within the canon” (210 quoting O’Callaghan 11-12). Arguably, in *Contradictory Omens*, Brathwaite was more interested in the manner in which Rhys’s position as a white creole played out in her wholly improbable, in his view, construction of Antoinette, “a very sensitive white creole girl just after emancipation” (30), than he was in contesting Rhys’s standing as a Caribbean writer. In all events, by 1996, Brathwaite himself had termed *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a “great Caribbean novel” (“A Post‐crutionary Tale of the Helen of Our Wars” 63). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Arthur G. Neal’s *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (1998) for an early and influential articulation of collective memory as the site in which “collective trauma” is registered. (7–8 *inter alia*). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The most comprehensive and provocative intellectual history of psychological trauma remains Ruth Leys’s *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It may help to think of one’s articulation of oneself as essential to the consitution of a reading moment. Derek Attridge writes of his reading practice: “I do not treat the text as an object whose significance has to be divined; I treat it as something that comes into being only in the process of understanding and responding that I, as an individual reader in a specific time and place, conditioned by a specific history, go through” (39–40). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Jeremy Metz, “Reading the victimizer: Toward an ethical practice of figuring the traumatic moment in Holocaust literature.” *Textual Practice* (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Spivak sees Tia as a *failed* mirroring by Antoinette, “the other that could not be selfed, because the fracture of imperialism rather than the Ovidian pool intervened” ( 250). Spivak acknowledges the point as “difficult” and returns to it; but in her reading, Tia has no more autonomy than Narcissus’s reflection in the myth that Spivak invokes. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This passage has been the focus of sustained scholarly investigation. Laura Niesen de Abruna, in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (1990), sees Bertha’s jump as liberatory and her apparent resolve to seek “connectedness with Tia” a successful act of revenge against Rochester, who had locked her in a “baronial cage” (96). Remarkably, for present purposes, Niesen de Abruna concludes her discussion by commenting, “Lest I end on a naively optimistic note, I should point out that there is a political problem in looking to Rhys, a white Creole writer, for a representation of successful syncretism between black and white Caribbean women. … Although Rhys cannot claim fully to understand the ‘otherness’ of most West Indian women, because most are African-Caribbean rather than white Creole, she does seem able to return to the West Indian Bertha Mason the dignity taken away by Charlotte Brontë” (ibid.). Niesen de Bruna, describing the problem as political rather than as literary, performs an assumption worth interrogating, that commonality of race connotes understanding (and collapses “otherness”) even when, in this case, the object of investigation is the fictional character of a girl living in a destitute community of ex-slaves on a plantation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Brathwaite’s claim is that he and others are affected in their readings by their “derivations,” not that these derivations imply a hierarchy of understanding of subjects, based on their races, in a distant past. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Caruthian paradigm has received its share of critiques, perhaps most notably by Ruth Leys who faults Caruth’s reading of the Tancred story in Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920). Leys is concerned that Caruth’s understanding of trauma as being “unlocatable” and transmissible destabilizes the position of the victim and opens the door to turning “perpetrators into victims too” (297). Caruth’s formulation indeed has the potential to decouple the condition of PTSD from any identifiable injury since she views trauma as a complex of symptoms that do not necessarily arise from an identifiable event. More recent critics have cast doubt on the doctrine of “unspeakability,” which arises from Caruth’s articulation of traumatic memory as fully interred in the subconscious, and therefore unavailable for representation. Still, the central insight of psychological trauma theory that victims bear unassimilated traumatic experiences in their subconscious, which disrupt their experiences of the present, remains secure. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a particularly valuable site for the study of psychological trauma as Rhys could not have constructed her characters to fit what has become a widely circulating knowledge of PTSD symptomology. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brathwaite refers to Look Lai both in his text and in his footnoted reference to his work, as Wally Look Lai, rather than Walton Look Lai, the name in which Look Lai publishes. It may well be that Brathwaite knows him and is using his accustomed informal form of address in *Contradictory Omens* simply because it is familiar to him. Critics all, to my knowledge, refer to Look Lai as Wally when they are discussing Brathwaite’s reference to his ethnicity, suggesting again that they are simply using widely circulated quotations from works whose contents and contexts they have not independently investigated in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As well as Niesen de Abruna’s later reading, *supra* n4. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a further account of Hulme’s argument on this point, see O’Callaghan 11–12. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These are, in the first instance, European, Euro-creole, Afro-creole (or folk), and creo-creole or West Indian. He notes two additional orientations: East Indians and Chinese “who came after the first main stage of creolization.” (25) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Essentializing in a manner that contemporary readers may find rather shocking, but that recalls Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), he writes, “The Negro has a deep contempt, as has been said, for all that is not white; his values are the values of white imperialism at its most bigoted. The Indian despises the Negro for not being an Indian; he has, in addition, taken over all the white prejudices against the Negro” (49). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The summary in this paragraph draws on Charles W. Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite* (2004), 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Brathwaite’s vision of interculturation was influenced by the Caribbean Arts Movement, with which he is associated (Walmsley). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Rhys’s own forbearers on her mother’s side, the Lockharts, owned the estate on which Coulibri is modeled, which was burned to the ground by arsonists. For Rhys’s own description of her family history and her childhood in Dominica, including her own experience of being hated by blacks, see Rhys's 1981 autobiography, 33–35 and elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hulme’s title, “The Locked Heart: Wide Sargasso Sea,” seems to be a play (in dubious taste in my view) on the Lockhart family name. This passage is quoted in Walmsley, whose own reading also discounts any presumption of historical specificity in the novel but instead prefers “an ideological rather than psychological basis for the post-Emancipation setting of the novel.” She writes, “*Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen to re-conceptualize the West Indian Emancipation of Slavery of the 1830s and, by implication, the West Indian decolonization of the 1960s, through a modified, high modernist lens that looks back to Nietzsche” (115). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Ghosh-Schellhorn 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. I have endeavored to reproduce Brathwaite’s typography as it appears in *Wasafiri*. I think it likely that most or all non-normative verbal forms are intended, except “nuse” in the last line of the main paragraph and a missing right bracket. The article includes an unsigned footnote, presumably from the editor of *Wasafiri* that reads, in part, “The format of this piece follows the authors [sic] wishes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In other words, only after he wrote *Contradictory Omens*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In his Stark paragraph, Brathwaite names a male Caribbean writer, the Jamaican James Carnegie, who depicted plantation life in *Wages Paid* (1976) but then links ten consecutive women writers in a category he names for his own creation, “STARK WRITING.” His grouping speaks to the flourishing of women’s writing in the Caribbean in the 1990s, but he is also self-identifying with the position of women. His tendency is likely linked to Shakespeare’s creation of a daughter for Prospero, rather than a son, but may also suggest an affinity for women’s double oppression. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)