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# Rum Histories: Decolonizing the Narratives of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Flint Anchor*

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Rum is an intoxicant, but not just any intoxicant: its historical and cultural affiliations trope colonialism as a force that perpetuates itself through economic institutions and internalized beliefs. In Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Flint Anchor* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, scenes of intoxication image the subjection of characters to gender ideologies that support colonialism. A brief example from an early novel by Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), illustrates rum's potential to infuse distant events with the operations of colonization. In this scene, the protagonist Anna Morgan, a young white Creole<sup>1</sup> woman who is attempting to support herself independently as a chorus girl in England, establishes the parameters of her relationship with Walter, the man who will be her first lover and source of income:

"You're a rum little devil, aren't you?" Walter said.

"Oh, I always was rum," I said. "When I was a kid I wanted to be black, and they used to say, 'Your poor grandfather would turn in his grave if he heard you talking like that.'"

I finished the whisky. The paralysed feeling went and I was all right again. "Oh well," I thought, "I don't care. What's it matter?"

"I'm the fifth generation born out there, on my mother's side."<sup>2</sup>

Walter uses the adjective "rum," meaning "odd; strange" and perhaps "presenting danger or difficulty" to characterize Anna's apparently casual approach to ladylike behavior.<sup>3</sup> But the potential metonymic presence of rum, the noun, suggests the shaping force of colonialism in this relationship. In this exchange Walter is responding to Anna's admission that "All my family drink too much" (p. 31), and his use of the word *rum* may reflect an assumption about what her family is likely to drink. Anna's response implies that she has heard a different accusation about her ancestry. "I wanted to be black," she claims, and "I'm the fifth generation born out there." The first remark suggests, simultaneously, Anna's defiant identification with Afro-Caribbean influences in her culture and her belief that Walter has suggested that all white West Indians are "tainted" by miscegenation. Her second comment, also a claim and a denial, asserts her national identity and uses time to distance herself from a slave-owning past.<sup>4</sup> Given the variety of signals here, Anna's subsequent sexual exploitation can be seen as poetic justice for the

rape of female slaves, a deflection of sexual guilt by imagining Anna as black and therefore (un?)naturally promiscuous,<sup>5</sup> or a metaphor for the subjection of “a real West Indian” (p. 33) to the predatory will of the metropole.

The metonymic presence of rum, the noun, in the passage above intimates the importance of colonialism to Anna’s sexual subjection as a woman in England. Why do Anna and Walter infuse the gendered nature of this economic transaction—virtue for cash—with a different story? What desires are met by these shifts? Both Anna and Walter seem to deny the gendering of white economic power, preferring to explain Anna’s loss of status as resulting from racial degradation rather than gendered economic disempowerment. When material conditions flout the iconography of white feminine purity, another story is told to legitimate, even enable, the outcome. Walter escapes censure, and Anna becomes, by the end of the novel, a stock character, one of those “girls” “ready to start all over again” after an abortion (pp. 114-15). This, I argue, is not simply something Anna and Walter do to each other and to others, but what colonialism, imaged as an intoxicant—that is, rum—desires from its subjects.

This essay extends the implications of the reading above for two novels published during the period of decolonization, Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Warner’s *The Flint Anchor* (1954).<sup>6</sup> Both are set in the wake of emancipation in the British colonies, a time of social upheaval that parallels the upheavals decolonization caused during the 1950s and 1960s, when these novels were published. In each period, legislative change augured greater freedom and self-determination for oppressed people in the colonies, but in practice that freedom was sharply curtailed by economic inequities left intact. Moreover, the British explained continuing economic inequities by referring to stereotyped “cultural” differences. In this essay, I will examine what rum can tell us about the situation of white women under these conditions. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Flint Anchor* consider the simultaneous oppression and privileging of white women in marriage though the figure of colonization, foregrounding the race and class advantages offered to white women in exchange for their economic subjugation to men.<sup>7</sup> Not unlike *Voyage in the Dark*, each novel associates the white woman’s sexual and economic subjection with the West Indies. Rhys’s novel is a prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*: it tells the unhappy story of Antoinette Cosway, Creole heiress and Edward Rochester’s first wife. In Warner’s *The Flint Anchor*, a family saga, the long-suffering wife and mother Julia Barnard begins her hard drinking with rum sent by her son Joseph from the West Indies. The two novels use racialized representations of the relationship of colony and metropole to show the wife’s subjection to the patriarchal male.

However, signifying gender oppression with race can unproblematically equate the two. By considering rum, a product nearly synonymous with colonialism’s worst economic and cultural sins, as a tenuous bridge between

external material conditions and internal understandings of the self, I shift from a comparative politics of race and gender into a more flexible deployment of these categories in service of imperialism. In an article that brought *Wide Sargasso Sea* to the center of feminist-postcolonial debates, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,”<sup>8</sup> Gayatri Spivak argues that “the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism” because it remains blind to its constitution within these axioms (p. 896). Thus, she claims, white feminists gain the status of speaking subject—of human being—by replicating their dehumanization as gendered others on racial (or racialized) others (p. 897). The elision of gender and race as equivalent oppressions is problematic because the categories are often dissociated from the historical context. For example, being a married white Englishwoman in the nineteenth century is not the same as being a female slave even though the doctrine of coverture eliminated the individual rights of most married women. So long as husbands did not brutally enforce their prerogatives, many nineteenth-century women found marriage a release from parental control. According to Joan Perkin, in her study *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England*, men could make their wives “little better than slaves” because the law granted them nearly absolute power.<sup>9</sup> Perkin’s comparison echoes the dehumanizing metaphors Spivak decries in her analysis, but instead of disallowing the comparison completely, I look elsewhere in the novels for a path that might lead toward economic coalitions among oppressed people without collapsing their historical differences. Thus I take as given Spivak’s claim, drawn from Rhys’s novel, that “so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism” (p. 901).

These readings, then, do not supercede Spivak’s argument that white female characters, novelists, and critics both comply with and resist imperialism, but they do suggest that alternate scripts embedded in the narrative emerge if we consume a product of imperialism—rum—attentively rather than by rote. As such, the readings put Spivak’s analysis into conversation with Anne McClintock’s essay “The Angel of Progress,” which asserts that the “post” in postcolonial masks uneven and partial progress toward actual decolonization, and Ngugi Wa Thiong’s book *Decolonizing the Mind*, which analyzes the persistence of colonizing ideologies in the institutions of a “post” colonial world.<sup>10</sup> Both McClintock and Ngugi argue, in essence, that the idea of being “post” encourages the belief that colonization and imperialism are over, thus preventing clear thinking about actual, specific conditions in the world and discouraging social change. At the end of her essay, McClintock calls for “a *proliferation* of historically nuanced theories and strategies . . . which may enable us to engage more effectively in the politics of affiliation” (p. 303, emphasis in original). This essay presents

one such strategy by arguing that rum signals points at which economic decisions are recast as cultural or psychological ones, or vice-versa. These substitutions obscure motivations and work ultimately to preserve predominantly white, predominantly male European power. Rum captures the mystifying link between the material and the cultural, tracing the absent presence of colonial economic relations in situations where the characters themselves may be more or less conscious of such forces in determining beliefs, actions, and feelings.

### *Rum Histories: The Old Story*

The story of rum's connotations in the Caribbean is an old one, the contours of which were largely in place by 1800 and consolidated by the time of emancipation.<sup>11</sup> The prototype for the West Indian drunk appears early in colonial history. Alcohol was a pervasive feature of life in the West Indies, although this was not unusual at a time when water safety was not guaranteed. Europeans and Africans in the West Indies drank rum for medicinal or nutritional benefit as well as for the other well-established reasons, including tradition, celebration, ritual, and solace. However, according to Frederick Smith's excellent study *Caribbean Rum: A Social and Economic History*, early accounts from travelers and planters established the drinking patterns among planters, poor whites, and slaves to be excessive according to European norms of alcohol consumption. These accounts may be biased by ignorance of African drinking customs (p. 109), or of the ways European drinking patterns shifted to accommodate conditions in the West Indies; however, they create a pattern that persisted as a stereotype. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century temperance efforts also emphasized the degradation wrought by alcohol, and thus, according to Smith, "helped magnify the evils of the slave trade" (p. 97).

Stereotypes notwithstanding, rum played an integral role in the West Indian colonies, both internally and externally. It deserves its iconic status as a motor for the plantation system. Slaves worked the stills on plantations, planters distributed rum to pacify slaves and to reward them for hard tasks, and ship captains traded rum for slaves. In *The Notorious Triangle*, Jay Coughtry explains that Rhode Island rum-men traded rum for slaves in Africa, and then slaves for molasses in the West Indies. "Frequently," he states, "molasses served as a partial payment for the slaves, thereby making the circle of Caribbean involvement complete. Viewed from this perspective, the slave trade was simply the most profitable method of selling rum, Rhode Island's most important export."<sup>12</sup> Thus, as Ian Williams states in *Rum: A Social and Sociable History of the Real Spirit of 1776*, "rum soon became a double enslaver, both depending on the toil of slaves to

make and being the main trade item to buy slaves in West Africa.”<sup>13</sup> It is little wonder that, as Clare Midgley has pointed out, British abolitionists protested slavery by boycotting sugar and rum.<sup>14</sup> Smith points out that rum was also important to the internal economy of the plantation. Before emancipation, planters supplemented the slave diet with rum, and afterwards wages were often partially paid in rum (pp. 103-04, 175-76). Even when the rum trade declined, the association of rum with the economic prosperity of the West Indies remained.<sup>15</sup> It had become “a cultural symbol” (Smith, p. 246) for the spirit of the Caribbean as well as a material condition for that symbol.<sup>16</sup>

By the time Rhys’s and Warner’s novels appeared, rum had consolidated a range of stereotypes about tropical corruption and temptation, the effect of which was exacerbated when combined with stereotypes of female corruption. Rum’s significance is thus, apparently, completely overdetermined. It appears part of the scenery, easily explained by routine plot events. Certainly Antoinette’s husband, accusing Christophine of making Antoinette “dead drunk on bad rum” (p. 155), indulges in an easy explanation of her plight. The fact that Julia Barnard drinks rum seems a matter of convenience rather than significance. The historical and cultural affiliations of rum, so available within the historical time frame of the novels, render it comfortably transparent set dressing. When Warner shows John Barnard fulminating about the disastrous effects of drink—“*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging*. . . . So Solomon testified, though John Barnard had never found it so; but because he was immune to that temptation, he was not justified in putting it in the way of others” (p. 93)—she draws on a long history of temperance melodrama, complete with biblical references.<sup>17</sup> Focusing on the effect of “Joseph’s rum,” Warner activates the long association between English dissipation and tropical climates.<sup>18</sup> For her part, Rhys draws on these *idées reçues* as well when she rewrites *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Rochester’s first wife. A drunken Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* plays out the scenes nineteenth-century readers might have imagined based on Rochester’s testimony that his first wife is “at once intemperate and unchaste.”<sup>19</sup>

However, this transparency is deceptive, for rum’s evocation of stereotype is too easy. Reading rum attentively can demonstrate how items of everyday use continue to activate old oppressions in new ways, thus complicating contemporary efforts to undo or ameliorate those inequities. Rum can also induce revelation, one of rum’s long-standing spiritual functions, as it opens new paths to understanding.<sup>20</sup> Instead of viewing rum’s stereotypes as the end of the story, a rereading discloses previously overlooked opportunities to begin a new one.

“Good Shot of White Rum in That”: Rum in Wide Sargasso Sea

Jean Rhys accomplishes the dehumanization of her protagonists/narrators, Antoinette and her husband,<sup>21</sup> under the sign of rum, which transforms them into the madwoman and the romantic hero of *Jane Eyre*. Looking at what characters do with rum, and what is done to them by rum, marks what Spivak calls the “imperialist narrativization of history” (p. 897) as it plays out in terms of character development in this novel. Antoinette and the other characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* lose their claims to rational individualism when their decisions are revealed to be as much a product of imperialism as rum is.

Late in Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette tries twice to exceed the role established for her in *Jane Eyre* by discussing the role of economic necessity in her story. She seeks to recognize her husband as someone other than a nameless English patriarch, and she seeks to be recognized as someone other than a tainted Creole wife. Her failed efforts are framed, even undermined, by the apparently unavoidable presence of rum. Antoinette seems to understand the danger presented by the drink, just as her husband perceives the advantages it may confer. He has replenished their rum—“The decanter of rum was nearly empty so I . . . brought out another bottle,” we are told by him—but Antoinette refuses to drink. To tell her story, “she poured herself a drink, touched it with her lips then put it down again” (p. 130). The “touch” of rum prompts a narrative that prioritizes financial insecurity rather than a melodrama of threatened white femininity. For example, the husband suggests that Antoinette’s mother was “lonely and unhappy,” but she amends his explanation with “and very poor” (p. 130). Her attempt to address material conditions fails when her husband offers her a glass of rum, and she “push[es] the glass away so roughly that it spill[s] over her dress” (p. 132). As the rum soaks in, the husband rejects Antoinette’s story: “I began to wonder how much of all this was true, how much imagined, distorted” (p. 133). The rum that stains her dress stains her story, foreshadowing the futility of Antoinette’s effort to explain how her mother’s poverty led to perceived madness and promiscuity. At the end of the scene, Antoinette gives up trying “to make [him] understand” (p. 135), and he has begun shaping her into *Jane Eyre*’s madwoman: he calls her Bertha for the first time. Under the sign of rum, Antoinette’s alternative narrative cannot be carried forward.

Antoinette’s second attempt to humanize her marriage is both a greater success and a grander failure with rum monitoring the border at which colonial power, vested in the white Englishman, is reasserted. Antoinette and her husband argue violently after he retaliates for her supposed use of an *obeah* love potion by sleeping with the mulatto servant Amélie. The husband again tries to use rum to his advantage because it affirms his self-image as English male husband/father/colonizer. “It was rum I chose to drink,” he says, and

then remarks on the transformative power of the alcohol: "I waited a second for the explosion of heat and light in my chest, the strength and warmth running through my body" (p. 144, emphasis added). He perceives the rum as invigorating, as something that makes him more himself, but his power results from external conditions imaged by rum rather than from the alcohol itself. Under these conditions, he puts Antoinette in her place and reminds the servants of theirs by countermanning Antoinette's demand for a drink with the order to "mix me a good strong one" (p. 145) before attending to his wife's earlier request. No longer masking power with chivalry, the husband asserts his place in the household hierarchy.

In the standoff that ensues, Antoinette gains the power to narrate when she gains control of the rum bottle and forces an economic history lesson into her husband's ears. When "she dart[s] to the table and seize[s] the bottle of rum" (p. 146), she can mockingly intervene in her husband's version of events. Antoinette eviscerates his claim to be more humane than the original, slave-owning planters he despises. "You abused the planters and made up stories about them, but you do the same thing," she tells the husband, referring to his relationship with Amélie. "You send the girl away quicker, and with no money or less money, and that's all the difference" (p. 146). He avoids the subject of money, shifting instead to a moral argument about abolition as a "question of justice" rather than addressing Antoinette's charge of sexual exploitation. Antoinette explains, after another shot of rum, that "justice" had been denied to her mother. She also has the strength to challenge the name "Bertha" as an attempt to dehumanize her. "You are trying to make me into someone else . . . that's obeh too" (p. 147), she says, laying bare the false binary between "black magic" and the "white magic" of colonialism.

Although this scene shows the potential to use a product of imperialism to critique imperial ideology, neither Antoinette nor her husband can ultimately overcome the script established by history. Under rum's influence, neither can maintain a critical stance that might forestall the imposition of the *Jane Eyre* plot excoriated by Spivak. Antoinette bites her husband as he attempts to wrest the bottle from her control, the bottle breaks, and "the smell [fills] the room" (p. 148), overpowering both Antoinette and her husband. Antoinette is reduced to curses and sobs as she yields to the narrative *Jane Eyre* created for her. Wielding a smashed rum bottle with "murder in her eyes" (p. 148), Antoinette has become Bertha Mason Rochester, madwoman.<sup>22</sup> When both characters lose control of the rum bottle as a site of negotiation, their destinies as colonizing and colonized subject are confirmed.

Antoinette's ultimate reduction to the Gothic figure she becomes in *Jane Eyre* results from her denial of her real economic subjection in favor of the privileges of white femininity. Rum both stands for and assists in this

process. She sidelines herself in her narrative under the influence of rum, blinding herself to her economic interests by substituting cultural or moral imperatives that serve colonizing interests. As Judith Raiskin points out in *Snow on the Cane Fields*, Antoinette “has been educated, trained, and bribed not only to serve but to identify with colonial and patriarchal interests.”<sup>23</sup> Psychologically, she invests in her status as a privileged white woman and resists understanding the economics of her position. For example, when Antoinette complains about her marital woes, Christophine proposes an economic solution, suggesting that Antoinette, “a rich white girl,” can exploit her privileged position and “walk out” (p. 110). Confronted with these economic questions, Antoinette uses racism to avoid acknowledging that her supposed privilege rests on economic disempowerment. She capitalizes on Christophine’s belief that “England” may not exist to label her nurse an “ignorant, obstinate old negro” and dismisses her arguments as a failure to understand English customs (pp. 111-12). Even after Christophine reminds Antoinette of her Aunt Cora’s fury that no legal settlement “protected” Antoinette financially in her marriage,<sup>24</sup> Antoinette remains allied to her privilege as a white wife. After she drinks a rum-laced cup of coffee she loses any ability to think critically about what her memory of Aunt Cora means: “When I had drunk the coffee I began to laugh. ‘I have been so unhappy for nothing, nothing’” (p. 116). This effect is repeated later in the novel when Christophine reports, “As soon as she has the rum she starts raving that she must go back to you” (p. 155). Rum lulls Antoinette’s sensitivity to material conditions, and she not only acquiesces to her dehumanization but also enforces Christophine’s.

Ironically, the husband also follows the script to become the stock English gentleman, recognizing that his self-image depends on strategically maintaining and denying his reliance on economic power. Initially, he appears as overwhelmed by rum as Antoinette, having “stumbled back into the big candlelit room which still smelt strongly of rum” (p. 150). Although he tries to maintain the pose of an English gentleman with Christophine, she too forces a narrative into his drink-befuddled ears. Under the influence, the husband acknowledges the economic self-interest at the root of his actions, admitting Christophine’s charge that he married Antoinette “for her money and . . . take[s] it all” (p. 152) to sustain his social position in England. He balks, however, at recognizing that his economic motivations subject him as they do Christophine and Antoinette. When Christophine suggests that they negotiate a financial settlement that distributes financial control equitably, he “no longer felt dazed, tired, half hypnotized, but alert and wary, ready to defend [him]self” (p. 158).<sup>25</sup> Here, the husband is shocked out of his physical intoxication by clinging to the very subject position made possible by his financial dependence on a rum-based economy. No longer feeling intoxicated, he reasserts his economic interest through a combination of race and

class norms. “Of course, that is what all the rigmarole is about” (p. 158), he thinks when Christophine mentions money, accusing her of the economic pettiness characteristic of a wily servant. The “rigamarole” is, of course, the rhetoric he uses to mask his own economic commitments. The possibility of another, more ethical narrative based on shared economic conditions is laid out, but rum marks the easy redirection of this potential through the imposition of racial stereotype.

In rum, Rhys embodies the long history that shapes the immediate situation and responses of the characters. To Baptiste, a black male servant, the husband intimates that he now realizes how to manipulate the paradox represented by the rum bottle. The husband contemplates the rum that filled him with “strength and warmth” earlier, seeing it as a tool for maintaining his sense of self:

Baptiste appeared, looking towards Antoinette’s silent room.

“Have you got much more of this famous rum?”

“Plenty rum,” he said.

“Is it really a hundred years old?”

He nodded indifferently. A hundred years, a thousand all the same to *le bon Dieu* and Baptiste too. (p. 163)

The husband first redirects Baptiste’s concerned gaze away from Antoinette and toward himself, establishing that he is the rightful master. The husband claims the asset with a question that is really a command: “Have you got much more of this famous rum?” Baptiste responds succinctly, as if he prefers not to answer, but the husband forces a further admission about the age of the bottles. Baptiste’s apparent indifference belies the importance of this exchange as an acknowledgement that the hundred-year-old bottle, and the husband’s consumption of the rum, rely on both the enslavement of Baptiste and others and the systematic denial of the worth of that labor in producing the product he controls.<sup>26</sup> It is unlikely that Baptiste is indifferent to historical time, which recently transformed slavery into emancipation, but the husband’s assertion that “a hundred years, a thousand all the same” to Baptiste dismisses any claim to agency Baptiste gained from emancipation. The husband wants the rum to be “a hundred years old”—in other words, produced during the time of slavery, a time when the husband imagines the English enjoyed complete control. But he also wants all time to be “the same” under the sign of rum. Paradoxically, he uses the power of history to dehistoricize the material conditions that grant him power and thus rationalize the subjection of all those not like him to England’s—his—time and history.<sup>27</sup> The presence of rum monitors the strategic denial and acknowledgement of material conditions to continue Englishmen’s dominance.

Rum is both the means and the end of enforcement for the husband. Drinking, he composes a disingenuous letter, all innuendo and suspicion,

to his father about his marriage. Rum also helps him reorganize relationships to maintain his position at the expense of Antoinette's. He reports, "I drank some more rum and, drinking, I drew a house surrounded by trees. . . . I divided the third floor into rooms and in one room I drew a standing woman—a child's scribble, a dot for a head, a larger one for the body, a triangle for a skirt, slanting lines for arms and feet" (p. 163).<sup>28</sup> The limited characterization offered to Antoinette through this system appears in the schematic drawing; her only distinguishing feature is the "triangle for a skirt," which subjects her additionally to the limitations of femininity. That the husband depends upon exercising his legal authority is clear from an exchange as the couple leaves Coulibri for England. Antoinette explains that she had promised a young black servant that "we . . . you—would take him with you when we left." Her shifting pronouns show her struggle to adapt to the position she has been assigned. "I certainly will not," her husband responds. "And looking at her stiff white face my fury grew. 'What right have you to make promises in my name? Or to speak for me at all?'" (p. 171). The connection of "fury" to Antoinette's mask-like "white face" reflects the husband's determination not to recognize his own mask and role. Antoinette's response is a reassuring catalogue of "not-like" statements: "No, I had no right, I am sorry. I don't understand you. I know nothing about you, and I cannot speak for you. . . ." (p. 171, ellipses in original). In addition, the choppy sentences verbally resemble the husband's stick-drawing: simple lines from a character without depth, feeling, or any humanity that need be recognized by the emerging protagonist of *Jane Eyre*.

Although the main plot of *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not offer a way out, linking rum to two other beverages in the novel, the *obeah* love potion and gin, suggests an alternate reading based on joint recognition of economic subjection and a new understanding of self-interest. Superficially, both the potion and gin signify the debased otherness of, respectively, black people and working-class people. They are inappropriate for white, wealthy women like Antoinette. Antoinette's decision to use *obeah* on her husband appears, first, as race betrayal and, second, as treasonous native resistance to British authority. However, as Carine Mardorossian's "Shutting Up the Subaltern" and Sue Thomas's *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* demonstrate, this interpretation of *obeah* reflects the power of colonizers to read black Creole culture as corrupt and illegitimate; it is not a disinterested representation of African-based spirituality.<sup>29</sup> Further, such an interpretation refuses to historicize *obeah* as a spiritual practice that developed in slave communities, communities that existed because Europeans wanted a cheap labor source for the plantations. Like rum, the *obeah* potion is a product of imperialism. Reading the potion in the context of other products of imperialism diffuses its exotic otherness but not its significance. Rather, the potion and rum similarly represent colonialism's power to shape subjectivity by shifting between material relations

and cultural representations. The potion is not a singular sign of betraying otherness, but part of a larger strategy of justifying, through stereotypes about race, the continued exploitation of black labor.

Gin offers a third coordinate in this analysis, one that connects the economic oppression of Antoinette and black people in the West Indies with that of the working classes of England. From William Hogarth forward, gin has been a favorite sign of the degradation of the working classes.<sup>30</sup> Grace Poole, Antoinette/Bertha's keeper at Thornfield Hall, drinks gin and loves gold. In *Jane Eyre*, Grace's liking for gin resembles the West Indian liking for rum; she indulges to forget "the coercive exploitation of labor . . . set within a highly contentious social hierarchy" (Smith, p. 126) in which she has little or no power. Rochester claims her alcoholism is "owing partly to a fault of her own, of which it appears nothing can cure her, and which is incident to her harassing profession" (Brontë, p. 326). Rochester illogically melds character and employment into a tautology in which Grace's "fault of her own" is a product of nursing and vice-versa. Rochester also considers Grace, like Christophine, to be degraded by her interest in money: "Grace will do much for money," he says dismissively (Brontë, p. 317).

In Rhys's text, Antoinette initially shares Rochester's disgust. She puzzles over Grace's seemingly obsessive behavior, remarking on the way she "holds a gold piece in her hand and smiles. Then she puts it all into a little canvas bag with a drawstring and hangs the bag round her neck so that it is hidden in her dress" (p. 179). But Grace's actions parallel Aunt Cora's attempt to secure Antoinette a minimal degree of economic independence in her marriage. Aunt Cora gives the new bride "a little silk bag" containing her rings and tells Antoinette, "Two are valuable. Don't show it to him. Hide it away" (p. 115). One of the rings is gold, consolidating the link between the two valuable bags.

Antoinette is able to reread Grace's obsession with money once she shares her gin. In the final section of Rhys's novel, a stolen sip from Grace Poole's glass of gin allows Antoinette to rethink her cultural disgust as economic coalition: "When she is snoring I get up and I have tasted the drink without colour in the bottle. The first time I did this I wanted to spit it out but managed to swallow it. When I got back into bed I could remember more and think again. I was not so cold" (p. 179). If Antoinette "wanted to spit it [the gin] out," this visceral response may be her last unconscious effort to retain her privileged status as a white, colonizing, female subject. This desire can now be seen as insane given the economics of character development in the novel. When Antoinette manages to swallow this "truth," she finds that sharing Grace's drink clears her confusion, allowing her to "remember more and think again" about her relationships with Christophine, Aunt Cora, and Tia. Moreover, she recognizes that "gold" has significantly shaped her experience: "I heard a clock ticking and it was made of gold. Gold is the idol

they worship" (p. 188). Antoinette retrieves the story of her incapacitation and thus learns "why I was brought here and what I have to do" (p. 190). For Antoinette, gin proves rum's undoing.

Rum's "Mocking Rejoinders" in *The Flint Anchor*

In Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Flint Anchor*, rum appears at strategic moments to index the events of a provincial domestic plot to the concerns of empire. Under the sign of rum, two classic Victorian characters, the *pater familias* (John Barnard) and the angel in the house (Mary Barnard), become avatars of imperial selfishness. Warner formally announces the West Indian context for *The Flint Anchor* when, early in the novel, the eldest son Joseph becomes a plantation manager in the Indies rather than joining the family business, Barnard and Sons. This event is more than a violation of paternal dictates regarding career choice; Joseph also flouts John Barnard's abolitionist beliefs by participating in an economy his father believes to be corrupt. Joseph's decision forces his father to choose between maintaining a claim to moral superiority or to economic control; John chooses economic control, at some cost to his reputation as a just and moral Englishman. "For all that talk about sugar and slavery," the townspeople claim, Joseph "was whipping the blacks on an island in the West Indies" (p. 38). The reference to "sugar and slavery" implies that John had actively supported the abolitionists' sugar boycotts for humanitarian reasons.<sup>31</sup> This possibility is confirmed in the name of John's youngest son, Wilberforce, born about 1830, who was probably named for the prominent abolitionist. Thus, Joseph's economic independence, "a salary and a house of his own" (p. 32), leaves his father "mortified" rather than grateful (p. 33). To hide the fact that his son has flouted his economic authority by choosing not to follow him into the business, John lets his reputation as an abolitionist suffer rather than admit his son's disobedience.

In violating John's careful barrier between morality and economics, Joseph sets a narrative of beset English manhood in motion. John consistently deflects knowledge of his excessive economic power into beliefs about the depraved appetites of raced and gendered others. By naturalizing economic disempowerment as a matter of race, class, and gender, John avoids confronting how financial self-interest promotes his sense of self at the expense of others. This strategy is apparent from his reaction to the "consignments of delicious West-Indian produce" (p. 44) Joseph sends home as peace offerings. To John, these foods have already "imperilled [sic] Joseph's salvation" (p. 45), and he will not endanger his own by consuming products from such an economic system. However, the produce represents an economic threat because Joseph is pursuing wealth independently of his father. The Barnard women are practical: since it is available, they accept and enjoy the West

Indian produce without, apparently, a qualm. In John's mind, their behavior signifies their innate moral, physical, and intellectual weakness; it is also possible, though not directly stated in the text, that John associates their condition with that of blacks. Judging the women as morally weak prevents him from acknowledging that women's dependence on men may not offer them the luxury to discriminate among resource providers. John's discomfort with the "delicious," then, masks an anxiety that his character relies more on the ability to provide resources than on any innate superiority.

Into this general context, Warner introduces the Demon Rum, a product commonly decried in temperance and abolitionist literature.<sup>32</sup> The rum shakes John's self-image temporarily, but he easily rereads rum's significance to bolster his position as patriarch. Surveying the contents of his wine cellar in preparation for an important dinner party, John is confronted by empty rum bottles, "a ranked assembly of bottle rumps, and another beyond it, and beyond that another" (p. 93). The whiff of the scatological—"ranked" and "rumps"—in the prose carries his earlier discomfort with the "delicious West Indian produce" squarely into the realm of saturnalia, an *a priori* "mooning" of John's explanation of their meaning. Reasoning through and dismissing the proper modes of rum consumption—rum punch and Julia's "medicinal" dosage—John stops short of following the drain on his resources to its actual source, his wife's alcoholism. He substitutes another explanation:

*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging. . . .* So Solomon testified, though John Barnard had never found it so; but because he was immune to that temptation, he was not justified in putting it in the way of others. The Madeira might be medicinal, but rum, rum in such quantities! . . . Joseph's regular consignments now seemed direct interventions of Satan, mocking rejoinders to the tracts and baby clothes sent out so regularly to the labourers on the sugar-cane plantations. He should never have allowed Joseph's rum to enter the house. Better still, he should have closed the cellar when he became a family man. If he had done so he might by now have set up the Temperance Union which was so badly needed in Loseby. . . . God had not prospered Anchor House with a wine cellar in its foundations. Could it be that Ellen's port-wine stain was an indication, a writing on the wall? (pp. 93-94)

Attributing the effects of rum to "Satan," John employs the standard tropes of temperance rhetoric, but the narrative tracks his strategic denial that this unsanctioned use of resources represents the agency of others. John infantilizes women, black people, and children (separately and collectively), making them his moral responsibility and thus justifying his control of resources. The empty bottles are a judgment on him as a patriarchal subject because he has failed to protect the welfare of various, less responsible "others." Thus, Julia's alcoholism is a result of her husband's failure to shield her feminine weakness rather than a response to being objectified as "a model wife and mother" (p. 239). Ellen's birthmark is a sign of his moral failure rather than a

problem for *her*. Even the “tracts and baby clothes” are evidence of his failure to enlighten the West Indians.

The rum bottles are “an indication, a writing on the wall” but not always or necessarily as John thinks they are. By pursuing the links between the passage above and other parts of the novel, we can find an alternative script functioning under this overpowering narrative. The “mocking rejoinders” of rum for “tracts and baby clothes” assert an alternate economy in which groups of relatively disempowered characters barter symbols of their oppression. First, the baby clothes link Julia to West Indian women as reproductive workers with little control over their output. Julia has borne eleven children, and she seems resigned to the knowledge that her years of service earn her not conjugal devotion but a life that is “in its way, no worse than a nun’s” (p. 27). However, John’s failure to capitalize on these reproductive assets infuriates her. Most of her children, she later asserts, have been “snubbed and ignored and *mismanaged*” (p. 240; italics added) because John sinks all his resources into one daughter, Mary. Mary, whom Julia characterizes as “a creditable little Miss Barnard” (p. 25) at birth, becomes a selfish drain on family resources rather than a “credit.” What John explains as a moral desire to preserve Mary, his “angel,” from contamination and consumption by “worms” (p. 25) actually works out as a poor economic choice, a nearly incestuous desire not to trade on Mary’s value in the marriage market. Sending rum in reply to baby clothes links child-rearing symbolically to the ruthless commodification entailed in transatlantic trade; it ups the ante on Julia’s claim to oppression by reminding us that the children of slaves were saleable property. Slavery alienated two kinds of labor from West Indian black people. In the exchange of rum and baby clothes, there is both acknowledgement of connection between English and West Indian mothers and a definition of boundaries between these peoples.

Secondly, the “tracts” exchanged for rum similarly correlate, without collapsing, working-class oppression and racial oppression. The conditions under which the tracts are produced link slavery in the colonies to work-house exploitation in England. The tracts are:

done by pauper children, who also coloured the illustrations to the Moral Tales. They were learning habits of industry and forwarding the Lord’s work by working unpaid, but many of them were too young to be neat, and by the end of a day they lost interest and painted blue maws on crocodiles and rosy faces on Negroes singing hymns under the lash. (p. 51)

The tracts carry messages beyond those of Christian charity and endurance formally announced by their narratives. Through their inattentive painting, the children ironically reveal the oppression of workers exploited in the name of England’s civilizing mission. The transposition of skin color links the working class poor, child laborers, and black West Indians in a global pattern

of exploitation. The situation of neither “unpaid” group is particularly “rosy.” The children create a phantasmagoric worldview in which they are metaphorically “Negroes” singing under the lash of Christian charity. Yet the presumed inability of young children to articulate this metaphor deliberately robs the image of easy equivalence. Instead, the image remains suspended, critically balanced between the pathetic and the ridiculous, allowing the real possibility of connection between “pauper children” and “Negroes” without assimilating them.

These incidents, dispersed through the early parts of *The Flint Anchor*, coalesce in the latter half of the novel, when John discovers that Darwell, a servant and Julia’s drinking companion, is an alcoholic. The Darwell incident is a classic Victorian set piece featuring a stock character, the servant who drinks, in which one might expect the expulsion of the guilty party by an outraged patrician family. After the doctor departs, having treated Darwell’s *delirium tremens*, John starts the expected scene: “Did no one suspect this?” Instead of dutiful expressions of denial, “He saw that everyone but Mary knew or suspected that Darwell drank” (p. 236). John is prepared for his role as moral father figure, but only Mary joins the cast of the melodrama. “Papa! You must send her away,” she tells her father, “I can never be easy while she is in the house. I think she ought to go to prison” (p. 236). No one else plays along with the script that will consolidate the power of these two figures at the expense, literally, of Darwell’s financial security. Later, Julia—unlike Antoinette—will identify with Darwell rather than perpetuate the class-based moral distinctions that invite her to protect her own character by condemning Darwell’s. She tells her husband flatly, “I drink. I am a drunkard. I have been a drunkard for the last twenty years” (p. 239), and, refusing every excuse he makes for her, she forces John to take responsibility for the double standards that maintain his power. Moreover, this avowal allies Julia not only with Darwell but also with the West Indian population: as Darwell’s drinking companion, Julia must share “the spicy breath of Joe’s plantations” with her servant (p. 232). Like the smell that fills the rooms in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the “spicy breath” of rum momentarily settles over the Barnard home, revealing the sanctity of the Victorian family to be a drug-laced product of imperialism.

Mary is the only character who does not share this revelatory moment; she remains an uncritical consumer of both the resources and the stereotypes that maintain her privilege. In the fallout from Darwell’s illness, the text offers a physical parallel to Mary’s statement of moral outrage: “She was rosy with excitement and ate enormously at dinner” (p. 236). Mary’s “rosy” complexion and large appetite figure her rapacious subjectivity: her character feeds on others. If John felt her birth was “free of tax or charges against deterioration” (p. 24), her cost is exacted now. In the description

above, John Barnard's disgust is as palpable as the husband's in *Wide Sargasso Sea*; one might almost feel sorry for Mary as she is finally subjected to her father's judging gaze. However, his disgust is temporary. John deflects the uncomfortable knowledge of what we might call the economics of Mary's character by focusing directly on business. His son Wilberforce, who thoroughly understands his father's psychology, is not fooled when John begins complaining of poverty. An inquiry to his cousin reveals that "the business was doing very well; Uncle John's income had almost doubled in the last ten years," confirming Wilberforce's intuition that the money is "a safety valve" that prevents his father from facing the cost of Mary's, and thus his own, character (p. 290).

As the only unredeemed character in *The Flint Anchor*, Mary provides a cautionary tale. Within the novel she lives on, happy in and oblivious to her implication in the economics of imperialism, playing her part as loving wife and dutiful daughter to the hilt. Even John falls victim to her script. He can admit that he is "a bad father" (p. 305), but his request for a simple gravestone—only his "name, and after that, 'Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner'" (p. 314)—is overwritten by Mary, who replaces his text with a fulsome tribute to "a devoted Husband and Father, an example of industry, enterprise, and benevolence to his native town" (p. 3). Mary might, in her role as indiscriminate consumer, be my worst nightmare of what it means in Spivak's terms to reproduce the scripts of imperialism: she makes the most of the limited role assigned her and then is made to take much of the blame.

In the "three maiden sisters, reputed to be horribly learned" (p. 308) who rent Anchor House at the end of the novel, there is another script to follow, one that echoes the analysis of rum I have conducted above. One of these sisters is a painter who chooses as her subject "everyday objects," but she paints them "exactly and as though no one had ever set eyes on them before" (p. 309). Her subjects are curious: a crab, "a tangle of rusty ships' chains," and "an old net, thrown over the arm of the lay figure" (p. 309). These images suggest backwardness, confusion, and capture, much as rum can suggest the ways the legacy of colonialism drags and entangles the "post" colonial world. However, as a crab moves backward to go forward, careful attention may reveal missed opportunities to move forward without forgetting or ignoring the past. An intensive focus on rum in *The Flint Anchor* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not release the novels from their conditions of production so much as encourage us to use what we have to create an alternative story.

### *Rum Histories: Another Story*

An accomplished historical novelist, Warner once offered advice to aspiring writers: "after you have gathered your material, use a fruit-press. It's the juices you want."<sup>33</sup> Both she and Rhys accomplish this task. *The Flint Anchor*

and *Wide Sargasso Sea* partake of their historical context in the era of decolonization, reflecting contemporary efforts to decolonize through “juicings” of the period following emancipation.<sup>34</sup> At both times, new freedoms and independence were possible, but long histories of economic, social, and political disempowerment made these goals illusory for ex-slaves and ex-colonials. As Christophine remarks in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, “No more slavery! She had to laugh! ‘These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang’” (p. 26). Decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s reduced direct governmental control of former colonies, but economic disparities allowed Europe to continue to exercise control over the former colonies. This was the case with sugar and rum, the main products of the British West Indies. According to contemporary evidence from Kathleen M. Stahl’s study *The Metropolitan Organization of British Colonial Trade* (1951), the sugar industry was still headquartered in England, dominated by “family businesses, handed down in the same family for several generations, sometimes from their foundations up to the present day.”<sup>35</sup> In general, Europeans controlled industry, shipping, banking, and insurance; they did not generally hand over these resources along with the keys to legislative offices. Such inequities, built up over time, guaranteed an imperial hangover, but just how long would it last and what form would it take?

Both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Flint Anchor* warn that, given the enforcement of material conditions with cultural explanations, the hangover can be long and vicious. These novels are both train wrecks predetermined by history: Rhys’s characters are headed for *Jane Eyre*; John Barnard’s gravestone text appears on the first page of *The Flint Anchor*. Like the rum that is so identified with the economics of colonialism, the past intoxicates the present, spreading its “spicy breath” into domestic relations seen as separate from larger historical concerns. Each plot defines marriage as an oppressive structure for women and aligns the English husband/father with a vaster network of exploitation. Both attempt to topple a domineering male figure, and the relative success of the women resides in their willingness to reinterpret the meaning of economic self-interest in the broader context of colonialism.

These readings have emphasized displaced economic connections among characters to note the potential for coalition rather than conflict. The possibilities offered by such readings may be enriched by placing these texts in dialogue with those of other writers coping with the conundrum of “post” coloniality. We could consider Lucy, in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* (1990), wondering about “all the people in the world I had known who went insane and died, and who drank too much rum and then died, and who were paupers and died, and I wondered if there were any artists among them.”<sup>36</sup> An earlier example comes from George Lamming’s *Water with*

Berries (1971), in which a vial of rum leads to an on-stage rape.<sup>37</sup> Jan van Wetering's detective novel *Tumbleweed* (1976) features a deconstruction of the sexual innuendo on rum bottle labels.<sup>38</sup>

Rum may indeed be rum. It may dissolve logic and crystallize reason, speak truth and lie to power, coerce and forge unions, encourage and quell resistance. It indexes the metamorphosis of economic self-interest into self-image to sustain colonialism far beyond the original conditions of production. Yet the results of the postcolonial "hangover" are not entirely predictable. New readings may establish tenuous points of coalition among divided subjects, states, and cultures. These coalitions rely on telling rum histories together rather than apart, recognizing both the limits and the limitations of privilege. The project may involve pursuing "odd, strange" paths and probably presents "danger or difficulty," but it will be worth the risk. Rum, then, is an object ripe for examination by critics and readers who desire to infuse texts with an inescapable material base in imperialism while preserving the potential of literature to reimagine the world.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In Jean Rhys's work, "Creole" refers to a white resident of the West Indies, a colonizer of European descent.

<sup>2</sup> Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), in *Jean Rhys: The Complete Novels* (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 32; subsequent references to this book will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> *American Heritage Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s. v. "Rum." Jane Nardin has recently discussed this remark in terms of female alcoholism, remarking that Anna "need[s] drink to play her scripted role with minimal conviction"; see her "'As Soon As I Sober Up I Start Again': Alcohol and the Will in Jean Rhys's Pre-War Novels," *Papers on Language and Literature*, 42, No. 1 (2006), 62.

<sup>4</sup> Anna's concern is clear from her memory of her stepmother, who claimed the "the sins of the fathers . . . are visited upon the children unto the *third and fourth* generation" (p. 32, emphasis added). Although Anna's father called this idea a "myth" (p. 32), Anna is anxious to exclude herself from the guilty category.

<sup>5</sup> Citing Sander Gilman within a larger discussion of sexuality, gender, and race in colonial discourse, Ania Loomba remarks that "nineteenth-century medical and popular discourses progressively intensified the linkages between 'blackness,' sexuality and femininity by using one to describe the other"; see her *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 154-65, esp. p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: Norton, 1966); subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Flint Anchor* (New York: Viking, 1954); subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>7</sup> The role of drinking in Rhys's prewar work has been discussed by both Jane Nardin and George Wedge. Nardin discusses *Voyage in the Dark*, chronicling how Anna Morgan's conflicted position as a Creole feeds her drinking but without particular reference to rum (see above). Wedge explores the benefits and drawbacks of

drinking for Rhys herself; see his "Alcohol as Symptom: The Life and Works of Jean Rhys," *Dionysos*, 8, No. 1 (1998), 23-33. Work on Warner is sparse, particularly for the later novels, but biographical sources detail the struggles of Valentine Ackland, Warner's partner, with alcoholism. It is possible that Julia Barnard owes something to Ackland's experience; see my "'Sharing a Worldliness of Austerity': Sylvia Townsend Warner and Jane Austen," *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* (Fall 2002), 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *Feminisms*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 896-912; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Spivak's reading, originally published in 1985, unleashed a broad reinterpretation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and many critics since then have explored the racial politics of Rhys's novel, usually by comparing Antoinette to Christophine, her black nurse. Carine M. Mardorossian summarizes this debate in her chapter on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, balancing Spivak's views with those of Benita Parry; see her *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), pp. 60-64. See, for example, Lucy Wilson, "'Women Must Have Spunks': Jean Rhys's West Indian Outcasts," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 32, No. 3 (1986), 439-48; Lee Erwin, "'Like in a Looking-Glass': History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Novel*, 22, No. 2 (1989), 143-58; Sandra Drake, "All That Foolishness/That All Foolishness: Race and Caribbean Culture as Thematics of Liberation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Critica*, 2, No. 2 (1990), 97-112; Hilda van Neck-Yoder, "Colonial Desires, Silence, and Metonymy: 'All Things Considered' in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 40, No. 2 (1998), 184-208; and Joya Uraizee, "'She Walked Away Without Looking Back': Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Clio*, 28, No. 3 (1999), 261-77. For an overview of the ways the sensitivity of Rhys criticism to postcolonial issues has paralleled the evolution of feminist criticism, see Mardorossian, "Double (De)colonization and the Feminist Criticism of *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *College Literature*, 26, No. 2 (1999), 79-95.

<sup>9</sup> Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Lyceum, 1989), p. 8. Perkin explains that "in the absence of valid agreements and actions to the contrary," English Common Law made wives economically and physically subject to their husbands (p. 16; italics omitted). Unless property were settled in trust for them—apparently not the case for Antoinette or Julia—women had no legal control over the assets they brought into the marriage. Husbands were also legal custodians for all children. Although agitation for change in the marriage laws began early in the nineteenth century, wives could not generally own, buy, and sell property in their own names until the Married Women's Property Act passed in 1882.

Although Perkin does not cover marriage law in the West Indies, Antoinette's marriage agreement reflects the conditions she describes in England. Antoinette's Aunt Cora is appalled that Richard Mason is "handing over everything the child [Antoinette] owns to a perfect stranger" (p. 114). She claims that Antoinette "should be protected, legally" because "a settlement can be arranged" (p. 114). Aunt Cora knows what is possible "legally," and she accuses Richard of negligence

in leaving Antoinette vulnerable to an agreement between “honorable” gentlemen (p. 114).

<sup>10</sup> Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-colonialism,’” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 291-304. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> This is the case despite significant changes in the location of rum production. See Frederick Smith, *Caribbean Rum* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 194-98; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Williams, *Rum: A Social and Sociable History of the Real Spirit of 1776* (New York: Nation Books, 2005), p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp. 35-40. See also Ian Williams, *Rum*, pp. 199-202.

<sup>15</sup> R. W. Beachey’s study, *The British West Indies Sugar Industry in the Late 19th Century* (1957; rpt., Westport: Greenwood, 1978), pp. 73-77, contains a brief description of the late-century rum trade that indicates rum’s continuing importance as an export, particularly in Jamaica. In the nineteenth century, Parliament lowered duties on rum while simultaneously opening the British sugar market, which had previously been monopolized by West Indian sugar. According to Smith, Parliament may have tried to reduce the effects of equalizing sugar duties on planters’ profits by improving economic conditions for rum (p. 201).

<sup>16</sup> Those seeking further information about the role of rum in West Indian culture can consult Smith, *Caribbean Rum*. For popular renderings of the story, see Wayne Curtis, *And a Bottle of Rum: A History of the New World in Ten Cocktails* (New York: Crown, 2006); Ian Williams, *Rum*; or Charles A. Coulombe, *Rum: The Epic History of the Drink that Conquered the World* (New York: Citadel, 2004). In 1944, Eric Williams rooted the humanitarian impulse toward abolition in the declining economic importance of the West Indian colonies; see his *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; rpt., New York: Capricorn, 1966). For discussions of rum as a subsidiary of the sugar trade, see Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Barbados: Caribbean University Press, 1974); and Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (New York: Norton, 1972). Sidney Mintz opened sugar to cultural studies; see his *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985). See also Keith Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). For a recent popular study of sugar, see Peter MacInnis, *Bittersweet: The Story of Sugar* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> For a brief discussion of rum and temperance melodrama, see Ian Williams, *Rum*, pp. 187-199. There is a book to be written on Warner’s sardonic use of Biblical quotation and imagery.

<sup>18</sup> See Smith, pp. 131-32.

<sup>19</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847; rpt., New York: Oxford World Classics, 1980), p. 323. For the major descriptions of Rochester's mad first wife in *Jane Eyre*, consult vol. II, chapter 9, pp. 305-08; and vol. III, chapter 1, pp. 321-27; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. According to Smith, "white women in the Caribbean were more temperate" than their male partners (p. 133).

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the role of alcohol in African and Caribbean spirituality, see Smith, chapter 4. In Western traditions, the simultaneously threatening and inspirational role of alcohol can be traced back to Dionysus.

<sup>21</sup> In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the husband is never named as Edward Rochester, and the practice of critics referring to this character varies. I am going to call him "the husband" since I claim that that he does not become "Edward Rochester" until the end of the novel.

<sup>22</sup> In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, rum likewise positions other characters in roles established by colonialism. For example, Christophine plies Jo-Jo, another native servant, with a glass of rum before he takes Antoinette back to her husband. Christophine characterizes Jo-Jo as a "leaky calabash" (p. 116) who will inappropriately carry tales of his white mistress's unseemly appearance ("your eyes red like *soucriant*," he tells Antoinette, p. 116), but a shot of rum enables him to perform his role as a submissive black servant blamelessly. Daniel Cosway prepares to recount his version of Antoinette's ancestry by "tak[ing] a good shot of rum" (p. 121). The narrative here offers exploits the husband's deepest psychological suspicions about Creole sexual behavior by claiming Antoinette as his sister, "not yellow. . . . But [his] sister just the same . . ." (p. 126).

<sup>23</sup> Judith L. Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> Rhys, p. 114. See n. 11.

<sup>25</sup> See also Spivak, "Three Women's Texts," p. 904.

<sup>26</sup> Dramatizing this process, however, cracks open the smooth surfaces of colonial power. As Mardorossian has claimed in reference to this novel, "the premises of colonialist discourse do not falter and lose ground when the black subalterns speak but paradoxically when they are silenced and stereotyped"; see her "Shutting Up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Callaloo*, 22, No. 4 (1999), 1072.

<sup>27</sup> See Kathy Mezei, "'And It Kept Its Secret': Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Critique*, 28, No. 4 (1987), 195-209. Mezei discusses the importance of historical time in the novel, claiming that "as long as Antoinette can remember and order the events of her memories into a temporal or causal sequence . . . then she can hold her life and self together" (p. 197). Mezei later notes that the husband dismisses Antoinette's attempts to hold onto time as a symptom of madness (p. 201); yet another way he dismisses her claim to empathy and ethical treatment.

<sup>28</sup> Huggan furthers this point when he argues that the husband's drawing writes Antoinette into the position of her literary ancestor, Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre*; see his "A Tale of Two Parrots: Walcott, Rhys, and the Uses of Colonial Mimicry," *Contemporary Literature*, 35, No. 4 (1994), 653. See also Mezei, "'And It Kept Its

Secret,” p. 205.

<sup>29</sup> For historical analyses of Christophine’s *obeah*, see Sue Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport: Greenwood, 1999), pp. 158-66; and Mardorossian, “Shutting Up,” pp. 1077-1080. Mardorossian provides a discursive analysis of *obeah*’s presence in *Reclaiming Difference*, a reworking of her earlier essay. Mardorossian adds, “Rochester capitalizes on the love drink he was given (despite its failure at achieving any effect) because he needs to rationalize his overwhelming sexual desire for Antoinette and to displace its source on [sic] an external agent. He genuinely believes that only foul play and an intoxicating drug could possibly drive a respectable Victorian gentleman like him to feel love and sexual desire for a woman whose mixed blood (which the ‘disturbing letters’ have exposed) mark her as belonging to an inferior species” (pp. 76-77).

<sup>30</sup> See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp. 153-63. Schivelbusch summarizes the ruinous effects of gin-drinking on working-class social organization and the horrified response of the British authorities. He connects the rise in inebriation to dislocation and alienation as industrialism reshaped English work patterns and locations. See also Smith, *Caribbean Rum*, pp. 73-78.

<sup>31</sup> For further information on boycotts, see Midgeley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 35-40, and Ian Williams, *Rum*, pp. 199-202.

<sup>32</sup> See n. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Qtd. in Donald Ogden Stewart, “Military Strategy,” in *Fighting Words* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940), p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> To my knowledge, only Jessica Maynard has linked specific historical events—the housing riots of the 1960s—to particular features of *Wide Sargasso Sea*; see her “‘Too Much Blue, Too Much Purple, Too Much Green’: Reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the Sixties,” *Jean Rhys Review*, 11, No. 2 (2001), 71-90. Veronica Gregg summarizes midcentury debates about Rhys’s place in a West Indian “national” literature; see her *Jean Rhys’s Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 33-43.

<sup>35</sup> Kathleen M. Stahl, *The Metropolitan Organization of British Colonial Trade: Four Regional Studies* (London: Faber, 1951), p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990), p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> George Lamming, *Water with Berries* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 235-42.

<sup>38</sup> Janwillem van de Wetering, *Tumbleweed* (New York: Soho, 1976), p. 152.