Jamaica's Difficult Subjects

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“WHO WORKED THIS EVIL, BROUGHT THIS DISTANCE BETWEEN US?”

SEX AND SOVEREIGNTY IN SYLVIA WYNTER’S THE HILLS OF HEBRON

For the first time in his life he created consciously, trying to embody in his carving his new awareness of himself and of Hebron... For, in carving the doll, Obadiah had stumbled on God.

—*The Hills of Hebron*²

To be aware of the unreality of the unauthenticity[sic] of the so-called real, is to *reinterpret* this reality. To *reinterpret* this reality is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it. For me then, the play, the novel, the poem, the critical essay, are means to this end—not ends in themselves. Yet they are means, which are at one and the same time, self-contained cells, and part of a dynamic living process. This process marks the path for the West Indian from acquiescent bondage to the painful beginning of freedom.

—“We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk a Little Culture”³

1. An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *Modern Fiction Studies* 59.1 (2013): 156–74, as “‘Who worked this evil, brought distance between us?’: The Politics of Sexual Interaction in Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron*.”


The more urgent question for Caribbean man, a man at the crossroads of almost all the world’s cultures, is not to find a new identity, but to formulate, articulate that which he was, is, and is in the process of becoming.

—“Creole Criticism: A Critique”

Introduction

*The Hills of Hebron* was published in 1962, a watershed moment in West Indian history when nationalist struggles began to bear fruit with wide-scale independence celebrations across the region. In keeping with the shifts in regional politics, the 1960s also marked a prolific and definitive period in the development of postcolonial West Indian literary and critical traditions. We can also think about the literary boom in this period as constituting the first wave of canonical Caribbean literature. Wynter’s contemporaries included writers whose work we now consider as seminal texts in West Indian literature, such as George Lamming’s *The Season of Adventure* (1960), V. S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), and C. L. R. James’s *Beyond A Boundary* (1963). Though Wynter’s critical theories garnered most of her acclaim, *The Hills of Hebron* appeared before any of the theory, as one of her first forays into the relationship between West Indian literature and the diverse societies it depicts. One could argue that it is the unfavorable critical reception of *The Hills of Hebron* and other novels like it, on the basis of a putatively undue sociopolitical focus to the detriment of “proper” aesthetic development, that in part motivated Wynter’s forays into literary criticism. What is clear, however, is that Wynter’s novel emerged at a conflicted moment in canon formation, in which critics of Caribbean literature were theorizing on what the region’s literature should look like aesthetically in relation to its English progenitor and counterpart, and what its relationship to the sovereign societies and people it depicts should be.

The novel is set in Jamaica during the 1920s and 1930s amidst regional labor uprisings among the working poor. It is a roman à clef loosely based on the establishment of a utopian and isolationist religious community in the hills of Kingston by the charismatic early twentieth-century preacher and

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5. Roger Mais’s *Brother Man* (Halley Court: Heinemann, 1974) and *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (Halley Court: Heinemann, 1953) are two of the more iconic examples of novels whose literary merit was hotly contested in the 1960s and 1970s, because of their representation of a narrative aesthetic that privileged sociopolitical and economic concerns.
prophet Alexander Bedward. The narrative circulates around the mysterious pregnancy of the Elder Obadiah’s wife, Rose, while her husband observed a vow of celibacy. It chronicles the founding of Hebron, the crucifixion of its eccentric founder Moses, and its struggles for survival in a depressed economic and politically disenfranchised environment, against the backdrop of Obadiah coming to terms with what he sees as his wife’s betrayal.

Critics of Caribbean literature, for the most part, unfavorably received *The Hills of Hebron* in the 1960s. Atop the list of critiques is that all the themes and issues Wynter works with overburden the novel. According to Victor Chang, “it can be said that her concerns as a critic, a West Indian writer, and a female writer are all reflected in her novel” (500). Chang’s delineation among the concerns of the West Indian critic, the West Indian writer, and the female writer is significant to this first-wave moment, in that it describes some of the early separatist priorities of postcolonial writing and criticism in the region. Chang’s gendered distinction conveys the sense that at the time, the writer and the critic had a separate set of concerns and that critical and gendered concerns are too much to grapple with in a work of fiction. In comments that reflect similar generic concerns, Karl Sealy criticizes the novel for an “abundance of political, racial and other abstractions, sometimes provocative, sometimes ill sorted,” and Wynter for being “first a thinker and then a story-teller” (292). Kenneth Ramchand, with whom Wynter engaged in one of the more spirited arguments over the function of race in literature and criticism, also comments on the novel’s density negatively: “*The Hills of Hebron* is clogged-up by the author’s wish to handle too many West Indian issues in the one work” (24). Even Wynter sees Ramchand’s criticism of her novel’s handling of Caribbean cult religions as indicative of “the total failure of [her] one and only novel” (Wynter, “Creole Criticism” 31). She also makes negative remarks on the novel’s structural integrity in her own criticism on numerous occasions, describing it as “inept,” “confused,” and “ill-made” (“Creole Criticism” 31 and “Little Culture II” 29).

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6. For further information on Alexander Bedward and the Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church, see A. A. Brook’s *History of Bedwardism*; Marta Beckwith’s “The Revivalists,” in *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life*; and Roscoe M. Pierson’s “Alexander Bedward and the Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church,” in *Black Apostles: Afro-American Clergy Confront the Twentieth Century*.


The novel’s thematic concentration is undoubtedly copious and may seem more concerned with presenting issues rather than aesthetically packaging them. Instead of a celebratory defense of the novel’s structural integrity, though, I find it more productive to explore how critiques of Wynter’s only novel inform the oppositional priorities in first- and third-wave literary discourses. I am interested in how the raced and gendered binaries reflected in the criticism of Wynter’s novel define the priorities of canon formation during the 1960s, when black nationalist priorities were predominant, and in the 1990s, when Wynter’s novel was recovered in efforts to inaugurate a Caribbean women’s writing tradition. Black nationalist and feminist priorities at each of these junctures, I argue, facilitate practices of canon formation that impede the ability to properly analyze the visions of postcolonial sovereignty presented in Rose’s and Obadiah’s resolution and also problematically occlude figures like the rapist Isaac, despite his centrality to the narrative.

**Caribbean Criticism**

“THE ACQUIESCENT” AND “THE CHALLENGING”

Considering *The Hills of Hebron*’s critical reception at the historical and political conjunctures of the first and third waves of writing provides the opportunity to think about how specific subjects arenaturalized in Caribbean discourses as ideal representatives of postcolonial Caribbean subjectivity and how this naturalization in turn renders other subjects as illegible or difficult to reconcile with contemporary politics. Wynter is among the cohort of first-wave writers and theorists that includes Kamau Brathwaite, Roger Mais, and Orlando Patterson, whose work promotes the development of indigenous literary aesthetics as a pivotal facet of decolonization processes. In her two-part essay, “Little Culture,” Wynter critiques an early trend in West Indian criticism that unfavorably received representations of local culture and politics in West Indian writing, framing the resulting contemporary binary in Caribbean critical discourses in terms of “acquiescent” and “challenging” critics. We can begin to interpret the novel’s symbolic critiques of postcolonial nation building in the middle to late twentieth century through this binary. For Wynter, acquiescent critics pretend objectivity regarding the overwhelmingly inequitable historical context that molded their critical points of view and urge West Indian writers and critics to hone their respective crafts from a perceived objective stance outside of this context. Challenging critics, on the other hand, exhibit an awareness of all the processes that inform their criti-
cal point of view, how those processes are under- or overlaid in the literature they critique, and how these processes positively shape literature and criticism. Within the symbolic framework of *The Hills of Hebron*, Isaac and other educated black men (the barristers at Moses’s trial and Isaac’s schoolmates) satirically resemble Wynter’s acquiescent critics. Allegorically, Isaac and his schoolmates also symbolize future leaders of the soon-to-be-independent Jamaica.

In this way, Wynter’s novel provides an allegory of cultural politics underlying first-wave writing. Isaac and his schoolmates’ ignorance of their own intellectual emasculation by a larger colonial system is no more evident to them than it is to the barristers who appear in court for Moses’s trial a few years earlier. Like their actual counterparts in Jamaican history, Isaac’s colleagues see teaching as a “stepping stone to law and then politics” (Wynter, *Hebron* 260). Their political aspirations are in large part honorable, but in keeping with colonial indoctrination, their goals reflect extreme shortsightedness. Thus, these aspiring politicians “never discussed how they would grapple with the problems of the future. How they would feed the hungry, provide jobs for the jobless, wipe out three hundred years of malnutrition and mental atrophy that was the legacy of colonial rule” (260).

Their inattention to how they would address the problems of hunger, malnutrition, joblessness, and poverty also reflects a troubling lack of awareness of the ways colonial hierarchies set these problems in motion in the first place. Successfully grappling with the problems of the future is to tackle head-on the problems that have persisted for three hundred years among the majority of the population. Thus, the influence of a colonially organized education system that ultimately privileges an English cultural hegemony inevitably orients their visions of sovereign nationhood. As the novel suggests, this privileging undermines not only the work of critical theory in reading sovereign subjectivities but also the national identity that early nationalists attempted to build. This kind of cultural privileging produced and sustained these problems, offering no tools for sorting through them once political power shifted from colonized to independent governments. Through Isaac’s classmates and the barristers at Moses’s trial, Wynter illustrates the irony of emulating colonial frameworks in politically sovereign ventures. The national unity the first postcolonial generation sought was not sufficiently critical of their inherited cultural identity. Moreover, the confusion this emulation produces in Wynter’s young men renders them threatening to the populace whose future they aspire to secure.

In Jamaica, nationalist struggles inauguted under the labor and political leadership of Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley ushered in a
two-party democracy in 1943, which privileged “selected Afro-Jamaican practices—those religious and secular rituals, speech patterns, food, musical forms, and dances associated with the rural peasantry,” which in turn “came to enjoy some measure of legitimacy by the state” (Thomas 4–5). This cultural policy of selected privilege conveyed a vision of progress, development, and respectability. Nevertheless, the attempt at selective inclusion combines with a reconstitution of British colonial values governing respectability. While pro-independence leaders sought to politically mobilize the mass of the Jamaican population, their vision of a Jamaican nation was preoccupied with the construction of a political community in the image of the mother country. African elements received selective cultural privilege, but Eurocentric values authorized through legislation, the Christian church, and the education system shaped how finances, governance, familial order, and gender relationships should be structured. The paradoxical reconstitution of imperialist values and priorities implied within the nationalist project reflects an epistemic ambivalence or even unawareness that is as evident in these future politicians, as it is in Moses’s court scene in the novel. The novel therefore depicts educated characters who aspire to economic and political sovereignty for themselves and their community, but who see themselves as separate from the masses and also ignore their internalization of alienating and emasculating perceptions of their selves that rely on the colonial construction of British/European superiority and dominance.

Moses’s court scene illustrates how crucial consideration of the crippling effect of colonial ideology on the construction of self is to the development of sovereignty, especially among the colonially educated. After his failed attempts to fly to heaven, Moses goes to court, where he faces a white bewigged Judge, and a bevy of brown and black barristers with snowy wigs. The senior Council for the Prosecution and the Counsel for the Defense asked Moses questions loaded with an oblique contempt. When he refused to answer, they smiled first at each other, and after wittily at the judge. With their smiles they were pleading their own case, absolving themselves:

“Look, we are different. Don’t associate us with this savage, this lunatic. All we have in common with him is the color of our skins. We are civilized!”

The Judge’s eyes of Arctic ice looked with equal indifference at the barrister and the prisoner. They were all black clowns striking postures in a circus of civilization. And both barristers worked out their frustrations on the prisoner, attacking him for being black and stupid and not knowing the
white man’s ways, not talking like him, not hiding his black madness under a wig and gown, as they had done. (Wynter, Hebron 140)

The judge does not see any difference between the black and brown barristers in snowy wigs who mimic his notions of civility (like the ability to reason as lawyers) and the black lunatic who jumped from a tree in an attempted invasion of heaven. In his eyes they are all clowns, on the one side for costuming themselves with the trappings of civility (the wigs and the law) and on the other side for believing in a black God. Moses’s “madness,” however, pales when one considers the barristers’ desire to be recognized as humans in a system that defines humanity through designating them as native others. On trial here is lunacy—Moses’s literal lunacy and the barristers’ inability to recognize the lunacy in their own assimilationist endeavors.

Ironically, it is the lunatic on trial who appears more lucid. He exhibits an awareness of subordinating forces that perpetuate subjugation and attempts to revise the raced epistemologies that perpetuate the othering of himself, his congregation, and the barristers by creating a new religion. The black barristers’ disparaging response to Moses, as well as their pleading with placating smiles to the judge, illustrates a pandering desire to separate themselves from Moses and betrays a conflicted understanding of themselves as men. This tactic exposes the colonially imposed dichotomy of civilized versus primitive and man versus native, which causes individuals to become detached from themselves and their racial community. Despite the barristers’ masquerade of English notions of civility, the distinctions they wish to draw between themselves and the “savage” and “lunatic” remain unseen to the white judge. He looks coldly at what he imagines as the mimicry of civility by black men who are destined to primitivism, regardless of their educational status. The barristers betray their own mental colonization with their aspirations towards English notions of civility, dependent on a separation from the black uneducated masses—specifically, in this case, from an “insane” black preacher.

Much like a flashback to these barristers’ pasts, however, Wynter depicts the students at Isaac’s college as also “spiritually and emotionally emasculated” (Wynter, Hebron 260). Their education is described as the cause of this emasculation: “In exploring the symbols of power that their rulers had trapped in books, they had become enmeshed in their complexities” (260). Unlike the masses they wish to save, these men “had fallen victims to a servitude more absolute than the one imposed by guns, whips, chains, and hunger.” For these young men, “politics was a game with a set of rules codified by their adversaries. They would play the game brilliantly without ever questioning the rules” (260). Isaac gains a deeper understanding of the flaws in
his father’s religious subversion by watching his classmates’ interactions with the symbols of power. They envisioned the headmaster’s wife (a white English woman) as “the biggest symbol of all, the token that one day, too, they could have all the appanage of power that surrounded their rulers” (261). These young men covet the symbols of power of their colonial rulers: “their women, their cars, big houses and rituals of behavior, servants in starched and ironed uniforms” (261). Lasciviousness, materiality, rituality, subjugation of others—with the attendant symbolism of “starched and ironed uniforms”—are all elements of these future leaders’ inherited ideas of the symbolic accouterment of power. Power is imagined as a series of symbols that also reflects maintenance of colonial values, dependent on stratification and subjugation, rather than real strategies for confronting issues like poverty, hunger, and unemployment and the ideologies of inequality that belie them. Moses’s own predilections for religious symbols and women’s bodies illustrate a similar neglect in the founding of Hebron, despite his powerful racial subversion of the concept of the Christian deity. His vision for Hebron fatally does not contain any practical plans for the community’s economic sustainability and viability. Isaac realizes his classmates and his father “always . . . would exchange the substance for the shadow” (261).

In the case of the barristers, Isaac’s classmates, and even Moses, apprehending the substantive behind sovereignty would entail engaging directly with the ways colonial ideologies are reconstituted in their vision of sovereignty. Racing a Christian concept of God as black doesn’t get at the specific ways Christian ideologies inform colonial domination. The blackness of God is merely a shadow in comparison to the substance of the relationship between religion and colonial subjugation, but Moses emphasizes the former. Conflating his father’s understanding of power with his classmates’ also invests one project with the perceived lunacy of the other. This investment presents a critique of how politically sovereign realities have yet to confront the ontological challenges to sovereignty that the barristers, Isaac’s classmates, and even Moses fail to address. I would argue that ontological sovereignty is definitively “the substance” that gets replaced by “the shadow,” that is, cultural nationalism, as it was deployed in postcolonial West Indian states.

Likewise, acquiescent critics’ preference for an objective stance also hinders their ability to confront the challenges to sovereignty that remain in postcolonial contexts, and as such, their approach is limited in its capacity to negotiate and articulate what the West Indies “was, is, and is in the process of becoming” (Wynter, “Creole Criticism” 22–23). Wynter aggressively criticizes this “acquiescent criticism,” and alongside her, critics like Kamau Brathwaite wrote favorably about the West Indian novel in English, articulating alternate
priorities for critical evaluation. For example, in 1977, Brathwaite observes that Wynter fifteen years earlier "had also, as early as this first phase, already formulated a model of the ideal West Indian literary prose-form: a kind of picaresque prose-poem, rooted in the "physicality" of the West Indian dialect" ("The Love Axe/L Part Two" 100). Brathwaite sees The Hills of Hebron as demonstrating what the West Indian writer should be concerned with: "the anonymous mass of our people—those who have 'absolutely no documented history at all'" ("The Love Axe/L Part Two" 100). For these challenging critics, the epistemological possibilities for articulating the emancipated West Indian subject made available through literary craft were invaluable to twentieth-century negotiations of self and sovereignty in West Indian discourse. Brathwaite especially looked for alternative aesthetic models beyond Eurocentric traditions to use as critical tools in evaluating the region's literary output, which was emerging from a context that straddled colonial and postcolonial periods. Though at the time critics like Ramchand balked at the necessity, validity, and even utility of a theory of "aesthetic pluralism," such plural approaches to literature laid the foundation for what we now have as a tradition of West Indian literary criticism ("Concern for Criticism" 54).

Wynter, Mais, and others were classified as prioritizing social, political, and historical concerns to the detriment of successful aesthetic development. In the mid-twentieth century, however, the West Indian writer's intention in writing is not solely beholden to preexisting, aesthetic concerns, nor does it require translation into established models. A part of the writer's work is inventing his or her own models from within systems of domination. For Wynter, "the dangers of acquiescent criticism spring not only from a lack of awareness" of the ways it confuses the intensions of West Indian writing, "but from the deliberate rejection of such an awareness" ("Little Culture I" 32).

GENDER IN CARIBBEAN LITERARY CRITICISM

If a lack of adherence to Leavisian aesthetic preferences in the 1960s explains in part why The Hills of Hebron is not ranked among early canonical West Indian fiction, the inauguration of a Caribbean feminist tradition in the 1990s—as marked by critical anthologies like Out of the Kumbla Caribbean Women and Literature—recognizes Wynter and the novel as progenitive. The

10. Donette Francis identifies Wynter as "the progenitor of a 'gendered feminist' critique"
critical reincarnation of this novel in particular reflects how across the historical landscape of Caribbean literary criticism, conversations about emancipation, empowerment, and sovereignty continue to circulate around terms of identity. If the 1960s and 1970s mark a moment when the more traditional critics of West Indian literature unfavorably received the novel, the inauguration during the late 1980s into the 1990s of Caribbean feminist discourse marked a new conflicted moment of critical reception for the novel, this time with gender at its center. Leota Lawrence’s “Paradigm and Paradox in *The Hills of Hebron*” sees the novel as initiating a Caribbean feminist paradigm. Lawrence also observes that “when Wynter’s novel was published, instead of being hailed as a literary milestone, as the significant achievement that it was, its alleged flaws instead of its strengths were highlighted” (Lawrence 88). She even suggests that this reception was too much for Wynter and caused her to “never publish another novel” (88). Nonetheless, in defense of Wynter’s groundbreaking novel, Lawrence proposes “that this work serves as a literary paradigm by giving birth to an African Caribbean female literary tradition which gives voice to the voiceless” (88). Lawrence’s observation that Wynter inaugurates a paradigm for representing Afro-Caribbean women carries much weight; however, the description of this paradigm as inaugurating Caribbean feminism is problematic. As we have learned from Evelyn O’Callaghan’s *Woman Version* and Alison Donnell’s *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* in particular, wholly celebratory feminist perspectives, without careful attention to possible variations and nuances (in class, race, gender, or sexuality, for example), prove to be problematic. This is inherent in Lawrence’s observation that “on the Caribbean literary landscape in the 1960’s, the absence of women was blinding; their silence deafening” (Lawrence 88). Here, the conflation of women with African Caribbean feminism elides nonblack ethnicities and claims of voicelessness, silence, and absence and also problematically omits the possibility of a prehistory of Caribbean women’s writing prior to the 1970s.

The foundational discourses of Caribbean feminism replicate racial and ethnic slippages that are reliant on constructing Caribbean women writers as lacking pre-1970s literary progenitors. Caribbean feminist historiographies almost requisitely begin with some pronouncement of Caribbean women’s writing emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, spontaneously, from a silent void. Yet Mary Prince was able to publish a narrative of her life as a slave in 1831, and Una Marson, a Jamaican feminist, activist, and writer, produced poems, in Caribbean literary discourse. See Francis, “Uncovered Stories,” 81. See also Ramchand’s “Concern for Criticism” for a discussion of Caribbean literary aesthetics, framed by Leavisian criticism’s preference for craft over political content.
plays, and programs for the BBC in the 1930s. Likewise, Phyllis Shand Allfrey published *The Orchid House* in 1953, and Jean Rhys published three novels before Wynter published *The Hills of Hebron* and her fourth and most successful novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in 1966. Both Shand and Rhys are white, but their work is nonetheless additional evidence of the existence of Caribbean women's voices on the literary landscape, in the region and beyond, before the 1970s. There may have been just a handful of Afro-Caribbean women writers in comparison to the male cohort, but women were nonetheless present and writing. There are inequities, but such discourses of voicelessness and absence do not give a full accounting of the presence of Caribbean women writers.

In contravention to their own egalitarian ethos, then, Caribbean feminist historiographies like *Out of the Kumbla* (1990), Chancy's *Searching for Safe Spaces* (1997), and Edmondson's *Making Men* (1999) tend to construct their own points of inclusion and replicate patterns of exclusions, particularly along the lines of race and gender. Alison Donnell's discussion of “double agents” in *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* offers an invaluable revisionist study of how black diasporic criticism has informed feminist scholarship on Caribbean women's writing in ways that eclipse other concerns, like more inclusive considerations of race, class, and sexuality (130).

Illustrative of this problem, Lawrence further suggests that in Wynter's novel, “the paradox is that what should have been a male-centered text turns back on itself and evolves into a work that features women who subvert their assigned roles and transform themselves into self-motivating individuals who ensure the survival of their community” (Lawrence 88). Both the impermeable gender binary and the manner in which the analysis of gender necessarily occludes other, nonfeminist issues are problematic here. In fairness, Lawrence is writing in response to the prioritization of racial above gendered concerns that accompanied the nationalizing and decolonization processes. Nonetheless, I concur here with the revisionist feminism that underlies both O'Callaghan's and Donnell's work, while also wanting to push us beyond this zero-sum approach to address the novel’s concern with how women subvert their traditional roles in a way that does not require us to ignore other forms of domination. Wynter in fact depicts a world in which the lives and struggles of men and women, while partially separate and sometimes at odds with each other, ultimately are inextricably bound together.

This is not to say that Wynter sees herself or her writing as feminist, or even progenitive of Caribbean feminist discourses. According to Natasha Barnes, “Wynter’s tradition of revisionist intellectualism qualifies her for two contradictory roles in feminist genealogy, in which she figures simultaneously as progenitor of a Caribbean feminist intellectual tradition and its most
fierce and recalcitrant opponent” (138). Undeniably, the prominent roles that women play throughout the novel do not translate into their empowerment. Nowhere is this more evident than in the pregnant bodies and silence of the two women whose rapes both secure new beginnings for the New Believers. Obadiah’s discovery of self, as with all the significant shifts in the novel, is also tied to sexual violation. After he loses the eldership of Hebron because of Rose’s clandestine pregnancy, Obadiah’s short stint of madness allows him to clarify the confusion of his life. Problematically, the narrative casts Obadiah here as the victim, displacing Rose’s body as a site of violation. Since Rose never speaks in the novel, we learn that she was raped from the omniscient narrator in a scene where only Obadiah speaks. In response to his question, “‘What happened Rose? Who worked this evil, brought distance between us?’” the narrator provides her answer: “Speaking quietly, she told him how she had been raped” (Wynter, Hebron 82). The narrative seems to deliberately trap Rose in silence, displacing her trauma and making Obadiah’s self-righteous anger the central focus: “He heard her voice echoing inside his head, until it became the rushing hurricane wind. He felt himself felled with demonic furies, wanted to sweep away Hebron and the hills that had witnessed the defilement of his love, this betrayal of his friendship” (82). His anger stems not from the violence Rose reveals she has suffered, but rather from what he sees as his defilement, a betrayal of his friendship. Nevertheless, so far from questioning this process, the narrative is complicit with it, placing the emphasis on Obadiah and marginalizing Rose’s suffering in the process. As Shirley Toland-Dix rightly suggests, Wynter seems to leave “the development of alternative counter-hegemonic womanist/feminist discourse to the next generation of native women intelligentsia” (Toland-Dix 76).

But while Obadiah’s struggles for ontological sovereignty seem to take narrative precedence, as Lawrence, among others, suggests, the novel also inarguably depicts formidable characters in the persons of Kate and Miss Gatha.11 “The next generation of native women intelligentsia” tends to be in agreement that Wynter’s novel does inaugurate a feminist tradition, just by being present at this formidable moment and by presenting a narrative that also shows the prominent presence of women, despite the problems inherent in the narrative. This feminist designation is nonetheless a contested one. As Barnes suggests, Wynter’s revisionist intellectualism plays contradictory roles in the feminist genealogy of Caribbean discourse, but I would add that

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what Wynter seems to resist is the shortsighted polarization of the kinds of discursive patterns outlined above, which prioritize exclusively gendered or nationalist critiques at the expense of other, equally prominent elements in communal order. She nonetheless does not pass up the opportunity to reinforce mid-century anticolonial prioritizations of raced as opposed to feminist terms. For her, secondary consideration does not suggest jettisoning gendered concerns entirely, but rather indicates a more reflective sense of how the subordination of specific elements functions in the maintenance of a particular brand of order. We see this most pointedly in her afterword to *Out of the Kumbla*.

In her afterword to the first anthology of Caribbean women's literary criticism, Wynter seems to repudiate gender as a conceptual category in the epistemological shifts that characterize European colonial enterprises. This is indeed a puzzling stance to offer as the final word, not the least because one of the premier goals of this anthology is the inauguration of a distinctively Caribbean feminist tradition. Through the characters of *The Tempest*, Wynter maps epistemological shifts in hierarchical arrangements instituted by colonization and global expansion to show how in colonial discourse and praxis, race replaced gender as the signal of primacy in marking human difference. Furthermore, gender did not exist as a factor in distinguishing between Europeans and Natives and/or Humans and Others. This denial of gender as a conceptual category in colonial discourse is not a rejection of its significance in these discourses, however, even as it clearly reflects Wynter's characteristic rejection of the Caribbean feminist mantle.\(^\text{12}\) For Wynter, more than the inauguration of a Caribbean feminist tradition, *Out of the Kumbla*’s anthologizing of Caribbean feminist discourse is an occasion to ask Foucauldian questions about the function of the exclusion of gender in modern discourses. Wynter suggests that the importance of a gathering such as that in *Out of the Kumbla* rests in the opportunity it offers to question the larger systemic function of gendered absences, marginalizations, and silences. In noting the absence of Caliban’s mate in *The Tempest*, she asks, “What is the systemic function of [the native woman’s] own silencing, both as women and, more totally, as ‘native’ women? Of what mode of speech is that absence of speech both as women (masculinist discourse) and as ‘native’ women (feminist discourse) as imperative function?” (Wynter, “Afterword” 365). Such questions become

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even more interesting when we consider that Rose, a central character in *The Hills of Hebron*, remains conspicuously silent for the entire book. Despite the primacy of race in her theorizing, Wynter nonetheless gives a nod to *Out of the Kumbla’s* organizing feminist ethos and poses questions surrounding the systemic function of the silencing of native women, as exemplified by the absence of Caliban’s woman—both as woman and as “native.” These questions become crucial when thinking about what such silences set in motion and what effects they have on postcolonial discourses of sovereignty.

Thus, the novel’s positioning of the marginalization and violent exploitation of oftentimes silent women as intricately enmeshed in problems of sovereignty suggests that issues associated with women provide a potential basis for a solution, if we resist the urge to consider these issues as somehow separate from negotiations of sovereignty. Problematically, a commitment to view this novel as a “male-centered text” that “turns back on itself” in the service of establishing a paradigm of Caribbean feminist critique elides the novel’s poignant representation of the forms of violence and mixing that underlie the achievement of ontological sovereignty.\(^{13}\) Lawrence observes that at the end of the novel, “the women remain. As the two old women cradle the newest life in Hebron, the drought ends”; however, the women who remain are cradling a baby whose gender remains noticeably undisclosed (93). This unmarked baby symbolizes the entire community, in a way similar to Obadiah’s carving. In neither case, however, does this role require some ontologically pure representation of racial, gendered, or national identity. On the contrary, the child is the product of multiracial mixing created through rape and racial exploitation. The baby thus represents the reality of plurality that exists in Caribbean contexts.

Within Rose and Isaac’s baby runs the blood of a black father, a white grandfather, and a Chinese great-grandfather. Though not representative of every ethnicity present in Jamaica, the three the baby does represent are significant when seen in light of the violence of rape enmeshed in its lineage. The baby cradled by Miss Gatha at the end of the novel is the product of the “monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds,” in the sense that Derek Walcott describes it in “The Muse of History” (Walcott 64).\(^{14}\) In

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13. Again, this is not meant to detract from the troubling fact that Obadiah’s individual quest to redefine his being, thus restructuring Hebron, is foregrounded, while considerations of the trauma suffered by these women is backgrounded. What it is meant to point out is that one centralized concern does not preclude or stand in opposition to others.

14. Derek Walcott, “The Muse of History,” *What the Twilight Says* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998). Walcott discusses the ways that differing approaches to the history of the West Indies affect the literature produced by new world poets. The purist poet is criticized for an obsession with a past of slavery and imperialism, which facilitates only an un-empowered
its embodiment of racial mixing, the baby also symbolizes the possibilities for new plural politics more in keeping with Caribbean realities. The baby and the rain that falls, ending the drought that persists throughout the novel, signify this shift for Hebron, which is also brought about by Obadiah's personal quest to redefine his being. Nonetheless, it would be irresponsible to lose sight of the fact that the violation of women problematically paves the way for Obadiah's individual quest. It is worth pausing here, however, to make explicit that Wynter's model for thinking through problems of sovereignty foregrounds relationships forged among a plurality of characters (antagonistic or cooperative, equitable or inequitable). Rose's baby offers a comprehensive symbol through which we can explore the possibilities of this kind of critical approach.

Wynter's creative and critical gestures—even in their polarizations—provide a point of entry for thinking about the connections between gendered, racial, and sexual concerns even within embattled contexts. Her introductory move at the beginning of “Little Culture I” directs us to the ways we might divert our glances from critical binaries to look at connections instead. She says, “My concern is not with labels—English or West Indian, writer or critic. My concern is with connections” (“Little Culture I” 24). My concern therefore also rests in how the novel’s portrayal of the connections that secure power can in turn reflect a complex sense of how community and power are organized and sovereign conceptions of self are achieved.

CREATING SELF AND CARIBBEAN BECOMING

As the epigraphs that open this chapter attest, Wynter sees creative ventures (including criticism) as part of a revolutionary project of reinterpreting colonized realities; such reinterpretations are pivotal to decolonization. In this view, creative endeavors are not simply the end of a process, nor do they exist only for their own sake. Rather, they are a means of interpreting and reinter-

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literature of blame and despair. The alternative proposed in the essay insists that poets who have mastered the language of former rulers regard this mastery as a victorious achievement rather than a sign of continued servitude. This approach privileges both the African and European traditions as those that give birth to the new world theorist, artist, writer, and poet. Walcott illustrates a sense of gratitude for this combination in the closing sentence of the essay when he gives “the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds” (Walcott 64). Acknowledged here is the painful yet beneficial paradox of a joint European and African heritage created by a history of colonialism. This heritage is seen as a gift, and the essay suggests that the ability to see the suffering as beneficial rather than a loss is a sign of victory over a history of servitude and exploitation.
interpreting reality via processes of liberation and becoming. Wynter sees creative endeavors, especially writing, as central to the “Caribbean man’s” processes of becoming. Thus, in the novel, woodworking is a crucial part of Obadiah’s becoming, his self-discovery, and ultimately his ability to lead Hebron into a more viable future. His “new awareness of himself and of Hebron” occurs after he comes to terms with another man’s rape and impregnation of his wife, Rose (Wynter, Hebron 288). His wife’s violation and his subsequent stint with madness force Obadiah to rethink his existence as the head of a struggling, self-exiled religious community. Once Rose’s pregnancy is revealed to the community and an unwitting Obadiah, the latter does not give Rose the opportunity to defend herself against accusations of adultery. For him, the pregnancy is the embodiment of betrayal, not simply by his wife, but by another man dispossessing him of what was meant only for him as Rose’s husband. In a subsequent bout of raving, he accuses the phantom adulterer as follows: “Man, what you did was to take away from me the one thing that was private to me . . . private from my neighbor, private like what was between the wood and me when I was shaping it in my hand” (Wynter, Hebron 80).

Obadiah sees the husband’s relationship to the wife as akin to the woodworker’s private internal process of creativity.

It is tempting to read this metaphor solely as a problematic equation of the woman to a malleable object in male hands, but this lands too quickly on a critique of gender politics while ignoring larger complexities of intimacy, relationship, and creation. The relationship Obadiah imagines here between the exclusive intimacy of carving wood and sexual interaction with his wife offers us a key towards understanding Rose’s inextricability from Obadiah’s new “awareness of himself and Hebron” (Wynter, Hebron 288). Once Rose’s pregnancy is revealed, Obadiah, in accordance with Hebron’s Biblical bylaws, publicly excommunicates her and curses her with death. She flees to her mother’s abandoned hut, atop a hill away from the rest of the village, while his quest for the adulterer consumes him. However, what he finds instead is life changing for both himself and Hebron: “for in searching for the adulterer, he had stumbled on himself” (Wynter, Hebron 82). A retrospective and revelatory narrative unfolds over the course of two hundred pages between this moment and the moment of creation cited at the beginning of this chapter. What becomes clear is that Obadiah finding himself is contingent on his returning to Rose. His equation of marriage and woodworking was, it turns out, not so much descriptive as hopeful, for it is finally his tentative recognition of his complicity in a lineage of violence against women and his return to the pregnant wife he had cursed that allows him to attain in his carving the awareness he had sought.
Obadiah’s discovery that Rose did not commit adultery, but was raped, shifts his quest from finding the adulterer to redefining himself, specifically within the context of a man who is betrayed by another man and as a man who is now responsible for the consequences of another’s violence. He breaks away from Hebron and moves into Rose’s isolated hut, where he seeks alternative methods of providing for his family. The creative processes he engages in while preparing for the baby provide the occasion for his first existential contemplations:

As he worked he sought for a reason for the grass that lived and died, for hurricanes and droughts that outraged the land, for the briefness of the life of a man, for Hebron, its meaning and purpose; for the long years of his blindness in which he had slept and eaten, and made gestures of belief, unthinking, unquestioning. (Wynter, Hebron 287)

He considers the life cycle of nature, man, and the community and ponders his own lack of introspection. While he does so, he also carves a doll for his wife’s unborn child. Thus, Obadiah’s new self-awareness intertwines with the experience of creating consciously for the first time. The carving not only comes to embody Obadiah’s new conceptualization of himself and his community but also provides a source of economic viability. For Obadiah, “this object which had been dredged out of his anguish, his search for a sense of being, had become an extension, not only of his living body, but of Hebron” (Wynter, Hebron 303). Obadiah’s process of “stumbling on God” through conscious carving thus comes to embody the ways artistic projects are akin to self-creation. The doll, as crafted consciously and from a new sense of self-awareness gained over the course of the novel, symbolizes Obadiah’s new awareness of himself and his place in an individual and collective past and present.

Obadiah is not the only character invested in creating cultural products. Isaac also creates through writing (an avenue unavailable to the mostly illiterate Hebronites). His writing is insightful and sharply critical of the colonial establishment, but it is also a testament to his alienation from and disillusionment with himself and his own origins in Hebron. Isaac looks to Rose and Obadiah’s relationship as the subject for his writing and a way beyond his alienation and disillusionment. His identification of the necessity of an indigenous experience for his own secure and grounded sense of self is similar to what George Lamming describes as the West Indian writer’s relationship with the peasantry as the authentic subject: “The West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked down at what had tradition-
ally been ignored. For the first time, the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour” (Lamming, *Pleasures* 39). Prior to the early twentieth-century fervor to represent and articulate discourses of individual and collective self-determination among colonized Caribbean people, the descendants of African slaves and Chinese, African, and Indian indentured laborers were viewed only as a cheap labor source. According to Lamming, the West Indian novel’s restoration of the peasant’s lived experiences recaptures a sense of personhood marginalized by the colonial system, but also conveys a sense of the “authentic” Caribbean subject. By making Hebron and its residents his subject matter, Isaac uses his writing in a similar way to work through his own senses of marginalized personhood. Through Isaac’s eventual violence against Rose, betrayal of Obadiah, and abandonment of Hebron, the novel calls for closer scrutiny of this now-standard romanticization of the rural peasantry not only in literary criticism but also in the construction of national imaginations of collectivity.

Such romanticization seems to be at the heart of the populace’s vulnerability to nationalist enterprise. With this in mind, Donette Francis’s use of antiromance as a template for reading Caribbean women’s writing between 1994 and 2002 is also instructive for thinking about the antiromance aspects of Wynter’s novel, primarily as we see them through Isaac’s characterization. Antiromance, as Francis asserts, is pivotal to unsettling the settled settlements in postcolonial discourses because of “its reluctance to offer a grand narrative closure, settlement, or any satisfaction derived from other genres” and because it “defies reconciliation” (Francis, *Fictions* 8). These characteristics of the antiromance are undeniably more visible and coherent in the contemporary fourth-wave writing that Francis studies. Furthermore, the ending of Wynter’s narrative, where Rose and Obadiah are reunited, Isaac the rapist is gone, a baby is born, the drought breaks, and Obadiah as elder of his community has a new vision for its economic viability, seems neat, happy, perhaps even romantic, and thus contradicts reading Wynter’s novel through Francis’s antiromance lens. But this is only if we accept Isaac’s departure from the narrative as also removing the effects of his actions from the novel. Indeed, the baby whose birth the novel ends with is the product of his violence against Rose. The dimensions of antiromance in Wynter’s novel dwell in Isaac’s characterization and Rose’s silence. Through these portrayals, Wynter’s novel “exposes the folly of believing that somehow the national, the diasporic, or the intimate sphere are privileged spaces for the reconciliation of otherwise impossible differences” (Francis, *Fictions* 8). Indeed, Rose and Obadiah, and even Obadiah and Hebron, do reconcile, but Rose has yet to actually speak, and there has yet to be any reconciliation with Isaac.
I share Francis’s concern with “unraveling the politics of intimacy, how it is narrated, and what it can reveal about the social history of the Caribbean” and similarly look to this tripartite relationship to think about colonial and postcolonial subjectivity and citizenship (Francis, Fictions 2). But while Francis asserts (and I agree) that writing about the violence enacted upon the bodies of Caribbean women and girls “has become the grounds for an emergent Caribbean feminist poetics,” I look to the relationships of intimacy and violence in The Hills of Hebron to think about how they complicate the oppositional strategies of the first and third wave and their respective raced and gendered politics (Francis, Fictions 3). The relationship between Rose, Obadiah, and Isaac forms a lynchpin for considering the creation of self not only as a phenomenon involving multiple sites of experience—race, gender, sexuality, and so on—often bracketed in the Caribbean critical tradition, but also as a process of becoming rather than the articulation of preexisting identity categories. Contrasting Isaac’s forays into writing with Obadiah’s woodworking illustrates how processes of becoming in postemancipation and postcolonial periods often hinge on identity recovery or formation and the best critical and/or creative processes for achieving this. Both Obadiah’s and Isaac’s journeys towards self-awareness illustrate that what is at issue is not simply the choice of an appropriate identity at a political crossroads, but rather the processes of becoming through which identity might in fact produce new politics. I argue that the reconciliation between Rose and Obadiah, and his assumption of responsibility for her child as his own, symbolize the possibilities of this new politics.

Juxtapositionally, Isaac’s characterization as the rapist also offers an unsettling representation of the then-emerging politics of nationalism. In parsing these characters’ processes of becoming, I read their tripartite relationship allegorically. Obadiah and Isaac represent two different possibilities for postcolonial leadership, and Rose represents the newly emerging nation. The self both men become and the ways their self-discovery affects their treatment of and relationship with Rose parallel postcolonial negotiations of sovereignty between leaders and populaces. That Rose remains silent and without recourse is a stark critique of national imaginings of sovereignty overall.

The novel also portrays through the relationship among these three characters the instrumentality of a preoccupation with past, present, and future identity formation to postcolonial discourses. Such preoccupation is an integral liberation strategy in contexts where ongoing problems of sovereignty accompany formal political independence. The political and economic implications of self-governance are obvious and known to postcolonial subjects, but knowledge, power, and control over a sense of being is still under
negotiation and invention in Caribbean discourse. For Wynter, ontological sovereignty requires an understanding of how epistemic constructions of being Human and being Human Other served the colonial system of dominance in the new world and continue to act as blocks to sovereignty in contemporary contexts. Reinterpreting colonial realities necessarily involves reconceptualizing interaction with the past. Wynter’s understanding of ontological sovereignty is useful in understanding what belies the motivations behind Isaac’s sexual violence and what Obadiah is able to achieve by grappling and coming to terms with his wife’s pregnancy, her rape, and his own complicity in the violence that Rose suffers. The novel is in large part retrospective, and it is through looking back into the past that Obadiah and Hebron can reinvent themselves as economically viable and ontologically sovereign.

Thinking about both Obadiah’s and Isaac’s struggles for ontological sovereignty ultimately provides the opportunity to diversify discourses of sovereignty. In a little over fifty years, black nationalist and feminist readings of this text have proliferated, but none have offered a complete picture of what transpires in Hebron, particularly among these three characters. Discussion of the novel fall into some of the very inclusion/exclusion patterns it seeks to combat and reproduce what now begins to feel like an interminable and unquestionably useful uncovering of exclusions and marginalizations. As Caribbean literary critics, we need to ask if there are other ways of considering sovereignty beyond excavating and constructing identities in terms of race or gender. We need to ask this especially because of characters like Isaac, who implicitly challenges the unimpeachable heroics of the black nationalist and his revered position as revolutionary in Caribbean spaces. I would suggest that the critical silence surrounding this character in particular rests in the challenges he poses to foundational black nationalist discourses. Along with Obadiah’s process of consciously creating for the first time and finding himself in the process, it is important to also look at Isaac as a symbolic representation of the educated black nationalist, who takes the nation into political independence. How can we make sense of his violence against his stepsister Rose, his betrayal of Obadiah, and his abandonment of Hebron? If we read Wynter’s novel as an allegory of the establishment of an independent nation within a space that still bears the dispossessing vestiges of slavery, what kind of vision of a postcolonial reality does it offer? I explore thus the triangular relationship among Obadiah, Rose, and Isaac to illustrate an alternative mode of critical inquiry, applicable to negotiations of sovereignty in the West Indies that The Hills of Hebron itself proposes.
Reading Sex in The Hills of Hebron

Thus far, I have suggested that The Hills of Hebron allegorizes epistemological negotiations of sovereignty in newly independent nations and offers a narrative context for how contemporary reality is organized, through Obadiah’s and Rose’s handling of the fallout from sexual violence and victimization. Sexual interaction acts as a dually functioning lynchpin in both the narrative itself and in its relation to the prioritizations of race or gender in decolonization discourses. In the novel, sexual interaction serves as the cornerstone for various significant events not exclusive to individual and collective identity formations, but also including the establishment of community and the maintenance of patriarchal lines. Sexual interaction links all the central male characters in the novel to each other across racial and temporal distinctions. Likewise, literal and implied sexual exchanges form the basis for the transfer of power and the implements of the exchange of power (land, for example) between men. Hebron’s lineage is traceable back to Miss Gatha’s great-grandfather, Cato Randall, and his English master. The homosocial dimension of this lineage is symbolic of the ways power is structured and exchanged through male hands throughout the course of the novel.

Cato’s closeness to his master as a loyal house slave is what gives the name “Randall” legitimacy and respectability, in Miss Gatha’s eyes, despite the implied homosexual relationship between the slave and his master. Respectability and legitimacy here ironically flow from Cato’s simultaneous betrayal of his master and the field slaves: “his master thought him loyal, especially when he revealed details of a rebellious plot that, unknown to Randall, Cato himself had fomented amongst the field slaves” (Wynter, Hebron 90). Cato gains his freedom in exchange for details of the rebellion. This revelation gives Randall a false notion of Cato’s loyalty that proves fatal when Cato “lure[s] Randall into an ambush” where “the other slaves slashed red ribbons from Randall’s curling white flesh” (90). Cato’s treachery does not end here, however. Once Randall is dead, he tells a neighboring white planter of the rebel-lion “and of his vain efforts to defend his generous master who had only that day granted him his freedom” (90). This leads to the capture and execution of the revolt’s leaders and Cato’s reward of a substantial gift of money. With this money, Cato buys land and builds a shop on it; the land and the shop become Gatha’s inheritance. According to the narrative, Cato Randall “was determined to found a dynasty,” but he had no sons to pass this legacy on to as an inheritance. Thus, he “left all his possessions to his son-in-law on the condition that he adopted the name Randall and passed it on to his children”
(88). Miss Gatha therefore inherits her grandfather’s “dynasty” matrilinearly through her mother, and by extension, her instrumentality in the founding of Hebron also designates this community as matrilinearly founded, even if grounded in patriarchally brokered homosocial contracts. This first homosocial brokering—between Cato, his master, and other plantation owners—also occurs with a homoerotic dimension, and in turn introduces us to the centrality of violence and sexuality in similar contracts throughout the narrative.

Wynter foregrounds the power relations inherent in such exchanges and the kinds of community that they inaugurate. Moses’s connections with women in the early stages of his ministry provide the seed for the establishment of Hebron. Gatha’s money purchases the symbolic accouterments of his ministry:

She had exchanged her shop and plot of land in Cockpit Centre for that very shirt and trousers, for the swallow-tailed coat of fine broadcloth, the expensive boots. A quarter of the money that she received from the sale of her property had gone to purchase these vestments of the office for her husband Moses. After his death, they passed on to Aloysius and after him to Obadiah. (87–88)

These “vestments of the office” signify Miss Gatha’s place in a lineage that stretches back to the cunning Cato, whose desire in founding a dynasty is to have “an identity of his own, a line of ancestors that he could trace” (88). Hebron is this ex-slave’s lineage. Likewise, if Gatha’s inheritance paves the road to Hebron, Rose’s mother Gloria’s body secures the community’s literal establishment. It is worth noting that like her daughter Rose, Gloria never utters a word in the novel.

Rose’s grandmother Martha gives birth to Rose’s mother, Gloria, in her union with her Chinese “husband,” who “night after night . . . crushed her flesh” (193). After his death, Gloria, who up until this point is raised as Chinese, becomes a maid for Reverend Brooks and his wife. It is in this capacity of servitude that her “docility filled [the Reverend] with a sense of power and mastery that he had never before experienced” (195). Predictably, his experience with power is ultimately corrupting for the reverend, but Gloria’s easy acquiescence to his commands to “take off [her] clothes” and “lie down” problematically seem to provoke the rape that produces Rose. Gloria dies while giving birth to Rose. In a traumatic repetition of the cycle, Moses’s son, Rose’s stepbrother Isaac, rapes Rose. The baby at the end of the novel thus results from a sequence of rapes.
To grasp completely the symbolism of her baby, however, we must return yet again to Rose and how her characterization presents an opportunity to think about the different modalities through which collective identity are voiced and practiced in West Indian discourses. Rose’s silence, though problematic, forces us to explore the relationships that surround her and her pregnancy rather than rely on what she says and conveys to us a more complex sense of how community and power are organized. For Natasha Barnes, “that Rose, who is one-quarter Chinese, and we find out later, half white, is not racially marked in the all-black Hebron community is testimony not only to the success of Moses’ radical nationalism but to its progressive possibilities” (Barnes 149). Rose’s inclusion in this all-black community is a testimony to the progressive possibilities of Moses’s heavily raced vision, but her body is racially marked as different from the other Hebronites. Obadiah notes that it is Rose’s “brown body” that links him to the adulterer who impregnates Rose (Wynter, Hebron 80). Admittedly, Rose is described as “brown” only once in the novel, but she is the only Hebronite not described as black. Thus, while Rose’s lack of racial marking does indeed testify to the success of “Moses’ radical nationalism” and its “progressive possibilities,” it is precisely her diverse racial marking that figures the progressive possibilities of Hebron. That the novel only once describes Rose as brown illustrates the ways blackness sublimes other races and ethnicities within Caribbean nationalist discourses. But in a heavily black-conscious narrative, Rose is never described as black, and as Barnes herself suggests, “the materiality of her mixed-race and gendered body and the colonial meaning ascribed to it . . . make possible the founding of Hebron in the first place” (Barnes 150). Thus, “a gendered cartography emerges nonetheless from the book’s thematic and ideological concerns in which women are center stage” (Barnes 146). Where Barnes “show[s] how the institutional success of Moses’ vision of Hebron—the creation of a ‘black heaven on earth’—appears to depend on a gender hierarchy for its implementation, its organization, and its very survival,” I would argue Wynter also makes the plurality produced by sexual violation and victimization explicit within this matrix (Barnes 148).

Sexual interaction among characters is a significant mode of literal and figurative connection that helps to convey the systemic function of various gendered silences and raced marginalizations in the construction of community in the immediate postemancipation period. Isaac, Obadiah, and Rose are joined in a homosocial triangle of their own, where Rose is the literal and symbolic site of contestation for the ontological struggles of two very different men. The relations among these characters also symbolically depict the
ontological struggles of preindependent communities and the implications of these struggles for leaders and their populace. We might begin to parse the complexities of this homosocial triangle and the novel's representation of the role of sex in subject formation by focusing first on Obadiah.

**CALIBAN BECOMING MAN**

**Obadiah.** Where his second carving embodies a complex and total apprehension of self and community, Obadiah's first carving introduces us to how sexuality figures into the apprehension of self. Unlike his conscious carving of a doll for the baby, Obadiah's first creation occurs while “he whittled idly with his knife at a piece of wood” (Wynter, *Hebron* 158). His friend Hugh alerts him to what he unconsciously produces by “nudging him and grinning shyly” (158). When he looks down at “what he had made” he “saw a roughly-hewn miniature of his mother as she danced at a Pocomania meeting, her eyes wide and lost in a cold ecstasy, her breasts taut like thorns, her legs strong and powerful, the muscles raised and trembling as if with a fever” (158). While Hugh relates his childhood to Obadiah for the first time, unconsciously Obadiah carves a memory of his own childhood into the wood he whittles. When a giggling Hugh alerts Obadiah to his unconsciously erotic creation, Obadiah smashes the carving because it “had reminded him too much of his mother, of those times when he had been remote, her spirit ugly and set against him.” For the young Obadiah, “the spells during and after the frenzies of her dancing” and “the nights when men came to visit her one after the other and she pushed him out of the room and slapped him when he started to ask why” become fused together (158). As such, religious fervor and sexuality coalesce in an unpleasant mutual association.

It is unsurprising that the newly married Obadiah, on Hugh's advice, takes a vow of celibacy to mollify Miss Gatha's accusation that he brought down God's wrath in the form of a hurricane "by indulging [him]self too much in the pleasures of the flesh" (Wynter, *Hebron* 15). Excessive carnality, in Miss Gatha's estimation, links natural disasters to the community's falling out of favor with God. The religious service that opens the novel is supposed to be in celebration of the end of Obadiah's “one month and a year, until the next hurricane had passed its bitter cup,” where he vowed not to “touch [his] wife, he wouldn't know her, or any woman else” (17). The reality of the vow's singularity is exposed with the revelation of Rose's pregnancy. Likewise, though the vow does coincide with an abatement of hurricanes, the community at the beginning of the novel suffers from the extreme of this abatement, drought.
This portion of the novel thus calls into question the ability of a representative individual to stand in for the community as a whole.

But Obadiah’s vow also involves a complex convergence of unruly female sexuality, alienation, and impotence. Miss Gatha recommends abstinence, in part, we suspect, because of her own reaction to her deceased husband and Hebron’s founding father, Moses, who is described as “a most lusty stallion” \(^{(38)}\). Moses’s near-constant meshing with the flesh of woman understandably informs his wife’s response to sexuality \(^{(37)}\). The misogyny and gynophobia evident in the sexuality of the novel’s men, moreover, symbolically parallels those attendant in mid-twentieth-century national projects. As Natasha Barnes points out, early nationalists viewed feminist identity politics “as deeply threatening to their foundational aims and agendas” \((Barnes 135)\). And in contemporary Caribbean societies where economic resources especially are scarce, feminist prioritization is “stigmatized as shrill, partisan, generating rhetoric and modes of analysis from suspicious foreign sources, and hence dangerous to what is conceptualized as local, autochthonous expressions of community” \((Barnes 136)\). Thus, Gatha’s assertion that Obadiah’s sexual needs distract from his attention to the community: “the Elder Obadiah who is now so wrapped up with his wife that after he preach Thy Word a few hours a day, he lay down the tools of his trade, whilst the whole of Hebron fall to rack and ruin” \((Wynter, Hebron 23)\).

Yet Gatha’s response in turn problematically conflates women and sexuality with degradation and depravity. The method behind Obadiah’s vow is clear when we consider that the source of his and the community’s degradation (by way of hurricane) is believed to be his enjoyment of sexual coupling with his wife. But Obadiah’s abstention from such coupling does not, as we have seen, correct anything. The polarized swing from a disastrous abundance of rain to the austerity of drought nonetheless reveals a flaw in Gatha’s and Obadiah’s thinking about the destructive nature of female sexuality. Their initial misrecognition of Isaac as the adulterer/rapist also illustrates this flaw. Though we discover that Rose is raped in the first of four books in the novel, we can only speculate who the culprit is for most of the narrative. It takes us almost the entire book to fully understand this moment of violence committed by a man whose mother assumed he “never once looked at a woman to lust after her unseemly” \((21)\). According to the narrative’s symbolic investment in the resolution between spouses, however, Isaac’s seeming asexuality is itself suspicious.

\textbf{Isaac}. Isaac’s colonial education accounts in large part not only for his misrecognition as the rapist but also for his alienation from and disillusionment
with himself and Hebron. If “in searching for the adulterer [Obadiah] had stumbled upon himself,” Isaac, the adulterer, emerges as if from the shadows of the narrative in its eighteenth chapter directly after his father Moses dies via crucifixion (Wynter, Hebron 82). This first foray into Isaac’s interiority begins with a child’s sense of alienation and disillusionment: “when his mother sent Isaac away to school in Cockpit Centre, he saw Hebron for the first time, through the mocking eyes of unbelievers” (248). After only two days at his school, he “was gripped by two boys, made to stand in the playground and watch whilst the others re-enacted his father’s attempt to fly to heaven, his failure, his trial, his exodus, his crucifixion” (248). The shock of seeing his father’s exploits through the eyes of mocking outsiders for the first time deeply scars Isaac. Coupled with this, however, is the time when he is “forced . . . to join in the choruses of the bawdy songs that they sang about the Prophet, and when at first he refused, twisted his lame foot and rubbed his face in the dust” (Wynter, Hebron 248–49). His contact with communities outside of Hebron works to destroy any faith the young man might have had in his father and Hebron. On his first weekend return home, he questions Aunt Kate in the hope “that she would give back to him the illusions he had been robbed of” (Wynter, Hebron 249). His difficult first week at school, however, is sufficiently traumatic to make him realize “that Hebron was small . . . Aunt Kate could not help him. No one in Hebron could. They were all dreamers” (249). He tries to avoid returning to school, but his mother, the only one in Hebron he recognized as not a dreamer, “forced him to go back to school,” and in turn “he began to regard all the New Believers with contemptuous indifference” (249).

Not only does his education alienate Isaac from the community of his birth; predictably, it also contributes to feelings of superiority. Isaac begins to see Hebron in relation to himself, in diminutive ways: “a giant amongst pygmies, an adult amongst children” (249). Not even his faith in Hebron’s God remains untouched by this onslaught of disillusionment: “On Sundays in the church it was all he could do to keep himself from laughing aloud at the stupidity of their belief . . . He knew that his father was a fool and God a lie” (249). Obadiah is also singled out as an element once central to Isaac’s life that no longer holds the meaning and security it once did: “In Obadiah, Isaac could see all the farce of his father’s mad aspiration. In his mind he trampled on all the memories of tenderness which the big man with his great strength had shown towards him” (249). Isaac’s contempt for Obadiah’s emulation of Moses is evident in his smashing of “the wooden horse, which Obadiah had made for him, which had helped him take his first uncertain steps. He did not need it now” (249).
Without the ensconced and isolated security of Hebron, Isaac’s first journey into the world beyond his home makes him cold, cruel, and distant towards everything and everyone once important to him. As he grows into a young man, these feelings of isolation, alienation, and disillusionment only become more intense, but he excels academically nonetheless. It is as though such detachment is necessary for his academic success. Within the symbolic framework of the novel, the violence of the rape that Isaac eventually commits against Rose and his subsequent abscondence with money earmarked for the community’s survival reflects the nation’s vulnerability to the possible violence of the educated though alienated black nationalist. Isaac’s characterization as the most unlikely of threats parallels those at the foundations of political sovereignty. The novel’s critique of the early nationalists entrusted with ushering the new nation into political independence depicts a project freighted with alienation, ignorance, insecurity, disappointment, and threat. Here we can see why it received a cold reception during the first wave of canon formation.

Though Isaac can identify the façade behind his father’s and classmates’ vision of power—particularly its dependence on possession of the female body—he nonetheless is unable to resist participating in this kind of power. In fact, where Obadiah is able to see his own complicity in a lineage of patriarchal domination and successfully extricate himself from it through a return to Rose, Isaac achieves no such success, despite his sophisticated understanding of the working of colonial power. This understanding manifests itself in his midcourse examination, where he writes papers that harshly criticize British imperialism. Isaac explains in “The Rise of the British Empire” that “the true greatness of the English lay in their ability to enslave themselves, consciously, in order to enslave others; on their carefully constructed and chauvinistic vision of the past which enabled them to conceive of a civilization which could flower like an orchid, on the bent backs of subject races” (262). Isaac’s use of the flowering of orchids lends a sense of irony to the English’s true greatness. In his estimation, it is not a greatness that is without consequence for the British, especially since it occurs because of a conscious enslavement of themselves, in order to justifiably build an empire through the enslavement of others. At a glance, this seems to be a metaphor of parasitism, but the relationship between empire and subjects related here is more complex and perhaps better encapsulated in the commensally symbiotic image of an epiphytic plant. The irony that Isaac begins his essay with a notion of the “true greatness of the British empire” is extended in comparing the empire to a plant that grows commensally to its host, offering neither benefit nor detriment while taking support. It is barely plausible to say that the rise of the British Empire
on the “bent backs of subject races” did not mean any detriment for the subjugated host. Nonetheless, the novel’s engagement with the negotiations of sovereignty among a once-enslaved race indicates that this particular host also participated in the commensality of the relationship—particularly where the establishment of privileged cultural identities is concerned.

We might begin to understand this notion of “enslav[ing] themselves, consciously, in order to enslave others” by again revisiting an earlier moment in the novel where the narrator tells us how the English themselves reacted to colonization: “When they found themselves absolute rulers over vast numbers of alien peoples they felt compelled to rationalize their overlordship. The most satisfying assumption was that the natives peoples were an inferior race” (Wynter, *Hebron* 179). Additional behaviors emerge from this rationalization of colonial domination in order to satisfy this assumption of inferiority: “They lived their lives shut away from any real contact with the people whom they ruled. They transported a mannered ritual of behavior from the home country, and wore dinner jackets in the heart of the jungle” (175). It is this rationalization of overlordship that Isaac sees as a dual sense of enslavement.

Global expansion facilitated the growth of expatriate populations, who also are exiled to colonial outposts in the service of the empire’s growth. In the context of the novel, this dual sense of enslavement adds an additional layer of lunacy to Isaac’s schoolmates’, the barristers’, and the early nationalists’ emulation of expatriate British culture and values. This is especially ironic since the inherited culture that developed under colonization depends on the inferiority of natives along with a ritualized expression and conveyance of culture. As the novel suggests, the assumption of this culture by early nationalists as a means of consolidating a unified populace and their own political power also perpetuates colonial inequities. Thus, Isaac’s essay illustrates the young man’s awareness of what Wynter describes as the “unreality of unauthenticity [sic] of the so called real” (Wynter, “Little Culture I” 24). It also reflects his attempts through writing to reinterpret this reality—his writing can be seen as a commitment to a revolutionary assault against the unreality, a process

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15. An additional irony that is made all the more apparent through Deborah Thomas’s study, *Modern Blackness*, is early nationalists’ reliance on select elements of folk blackness as definitive components in the construction of an authentic national culture, while at the same time they rejected more presentist modes of blackness (manifested in popular culture, for example) as tools for political mobilization. As Thomas suggests, this duality enabled the framing of blackness within national imaginations as a revered thing of the past or an aspirational ideal. Thus, “this was a utopianist vision of what blackness could do, could be, if it were to get with the creole program, a vision of ‘tamed’ blackness that mirrored the values that have come to be associated with the creole professional middle classes” (13). As we see with the barristers and Isaac’s classmates in *The Hills of Hebron*, blackness as a racial marker of the subjugated and derided masses is simultaneously instrumental in and rejected by the text’s educated middle-class nationalists.
that, in Wynter’s theoretical terms, “marks the path for the West Indian from acquiescent bondage to the painful becoming of freedom” (Wynter “Little Culture I” 24).

Though Isaac’s essays are clearly superior to those of his colleagues, however, the examiners give him second place, so as not to encourage excessive hubris on Isaac’s part. Once the others in his dormitory resume their “talk about women” on the evening Isaac gets his exam results, he deduces that “they were shadow-men” whose emphasis on the façadal and lack of insight into the more concrete and practical realities of their ambitions make them seem without substance. Nonetheless, Isaac finds that he “envi[es] them” because despite this lack of substance, “their confident virility made them secure” (Wynter, Hebron 265). In the novel, masculine virility is a part of the shadow that prevails in place of substance. Second place undermines Isaac’s major source of confidence—intellectual pursuits—and his envy of his classmates’ “confident virility” and its association with his father’s own confidence and power drives Isaac down to Kingston in search of a “confident virility” of his own (265).

This is not the first time Isaac stumbles on what seems to be the norm of finding security within a woman’s flesh. His intellect, like his literacy, is what he feels separates him from the community of his birth, Hebron. After just a short time in school, he recognizes the “smallness” of Hebron’s isolation and its belief, loses his own faith in these beliefs, and in turn belittles them with contempt. Consequently, Isaac, in the context of his school life, becomes ashamed of the elements of himself that belong to Hebron. At the monthly musical meeting, he is mortified when outside “a wave of drumming broke in on the recorded sound of the piano,” signaling a “group of Pocomania reviv- alist worshippers passing in procession,” and Mrs. Holland, the headmaster’s wife, looks at him, “her eyes pinning him down” (255–56). Isaac resists her gaze, recognizing its connection to his father’s notoriety as the insane leader of a faith similar to the passing band that disrupts the appreciation of classical music. The invocation of disruptive rival cultural aesthetics is critical here, in particular because of Isaac’s response to his association with the revivalists. “The other students stared at Isaac;” also in recognition of a similarity, and “Isaac felt suddenly as if he were caged” (256). In a manner that recalls the barristers’ resistance to being associated with Moses, Isaac flees the mortification inherent in his association with the passing band and his father’s legacy by abruptly leaving the party. He flees to the sea, the same place his father had spoken with God years earlier; for Isaac, “only the sea could wipe out the memory of the room that he had left behind and the puppets that sought to imprison him with their importunity” (256). Isaac develops this complex relation to the sea while in school in Cockpit Centre. He learns that “the sea was
so big that Cockpit Centre would be lost inside it" (250). Moreover, "he knew about the sea from Moby Dick and there it was even vaster and more powerful than he had imagined it" (256). Here we see Isaac coming to an understanding of the scope of the world beyond Hebron and Cockpit Centre, in literary terms, through a relation to the sea.

If Moses experiences a God made in his own image, "the God of black men," at the seaside, Isaac experiences a similar moment of all-encompassing psychic transformation the first time he goes to the seaside in Kingston (Wynter, Hebron 152). On this first occasion, in his escape from an uncomfortable room and its importunate occupants, he does not wander through the alleys and lanes of Kingston to find a prostitute, but one finds him. This encounter makes more obvious the complexity and difficulty of the relationship between alienation, sexuality, power, and the sea that characterizes Isaac. He is aroused when the prostitute rubs herself against him, but the realization that she doesn’t desire him but the money he will pay her evaporates his desire for her. When she asks him, "How much can you pay?" Isaac “turned and walked away rapidly” (258). In his mind, this prostitute’s “spirit would have been too small to encompass the sea inside him” (258). He likens the turmoil at being associated with the Pocomania band to the expansiveness of the sea. As a boy, “when his tongue got tied up he would open his arms and his eyes as if to embrace the sea, to contain it within the breadth of his arms, the length of his reaching, quivering body” (250). The novel contrasts the shaking of his body with something as expansive as the sea and the world beyond it. As such, when words and understanding fail him, Isaac’s attempts at grasping the sea between his arms and with his entire body are also an attempt at quelling his own internal confusions with the sea’s expansiveness. On his first encounter with a prostitute, Isaac knows her spirit is not vast enough to bring stillness to his troubled ego.

A tense relationship thus develops between Isaac’s sense of sea-like internal expansiveness and the security to be found in a more confident virility than he currently possesses. The second time around, when he is awarded second place in the half-year exams, he returns to Kingston, “this time [making] sure to take money with him” (265). Yet again, however, his best efforts at self-preservation are thwarted by outside imperial factors—most of the better prostitutes are engaged by American sailors from the naval ships docked at the port, leaving “only the aged and the worn-out available. And even they shrank from the ugly young man with his staring eyes and dragging foot” (265). Without the security of a “confident virility” of his own, Isaac throws himself into his work with a new sense of fury and early in his second year at college falls ill with pneumonia and needs to “return home for a few weeks
to convalesce” (265). The young man who returns to Hebron “find[s] himself even more of a stranger than before” (265).

Despite his repulsion, Isaac’s distance from Hebron, over the course of fifteen months, nonetheless enables him to romanticize the community in a way that is similar to the manner in which cultural nationalism romanticizes folk culture. While on the train home, he begins to see his return as a “return to the sound of a living language, its rhythms sprung from the earth” (266). The irrelevant and repressive stagnancy of an “education [which] had no relation to [his] daily life” makes Isaac welcome what he romanticizes as a more relevant way of life in Hebron, one that is nurturing because it is organic (251). He sees himself as

return[ing] to a real people, his people, in whose eyes he could see what he had become, just as they saw themselves mirrored in their land and its seasons: and seeing himself, would see them, and be set free to write without having to share experience vicariously through books written by other peoples, in their language, holding up their images, informed with their rhythms, their words. (266)

Articulated here is the freedom inherent in writing one’s experience of seeing self through seeing others as mirrored in the landscape, rather than through the vicarious experience of books written by others foreign to him and Hebron. The people of Hebron, for Isaac, reflect a sense of the real in a mediatory way. Isaac needs to see himself reflected in the land-based stability of their lives. Nevertheless, his rape of Rose highlights the exploitative capacity of such modes of seeing self and thus problematizes the necessity for this particular kind of mediation. Furthermore, his reception once back in Hebron illustrates the limits of Isaac’s ability to imagine himself through his community in the mediatory manner he wishes.

The novel portrays the peasant farmers of Hebron as having no frame of reference for Isaac’s complex negotiations of writing and its role in his own ontological formation. After all, their ontological formation resides in a relation to the land. His education enlightens him to the impossibilities of his difference. The history he read, wrote sharp critiques of, and earned second place for writing about binds with his alienation (from his education, his self, and his community) and his community’s alienation from him. The New Believers have their own expectations of what Isaac will be like when he returns. However façadal these are, the people are disappointed when they do not materialize. In his fifteen months away, to them, Isaac has not changed: Isaac is the same. He has not grown any taller than his five feet seven inches; his clubfoot
has not straightened. Education is supposed to improve individuals in visible ways; they have no frame of reference for Isaac’s psychic turmoil and focus only on the exterior things about Isaac that have not changed. They would have preferred even pomposity: “This would have given them some tangible proof of his wisdom and learning. But his awkward attempts to be one of them only caused them to dismiss him as before” (266).

Even at home then, Isaac remains isolated and an outcast. What makes this even more pronounced for him, however, is the absence of his stepsister and childhood playmate from his mother’s home. Thus, after dinner, “when they left, Obadiah with Rose, he became more conscious than ever of his isolation” (267). Growing up, Rose acted as a conduit between Gatha and Isaac and by extension became “for him, the center of Hebron” (268). Without Rose, mother and son “were unsure of each other” (268). Isaac feels even more isolated and imprisoned in Hebron and in himself. Furthermore, his response to women in Hebron bears a telling understanding of their relationship to the impotence he experiences. For him, “the woman-laugh was shrillest of all, annihilating his timorous manhood” (269). Like Obadiah, who shrank from what he perceived to be an overpowering sense of female sexuality, Isaac too feels that women’s laughter threatens his unstable sense of himself.

The recurring nightmare he suffers during his time of convalescence in Hebron perhaps best reveals Isaac’s tumultuous and inchoate sense of self. In the dream, he is trapped in Hebron and cannot escape to the sea, as hard as he tries. This desire for the sea’s ability to contain his internal turmoil remains elusive to Isaac in the dream: “each time he thought he was free, an opened book, enormous and shaped like iron bars, blocked his way, and printed on the pages was a musical score of the sound of laughter that echoed round him” (269). Here it is not only the isolation and alienation of Hebron that traps him but also the repressive nature of his colonial education—as symbolized by the book—which will guarantee him success only if he accepts the intellectual enslavement espoused in the pages of history. The laughter he hears and the musical score printed on the pages evoke the attitude of his cohort and the headmaster’s wife to indigenous religious expression and their problematic association of it with Isaac, endowing him with a similar sense of perceived primitivity and inferiority. In this nightmare, Isaac can be freed only if he “translate[s] the score of laughter into exact words before morning” (269). Translating the score of laughter into exact words equates to an understanding of the prejudice, marginalization, and scorn behind the laughter, and behind Isaac’s discomfort in being identified with a Pocomania revivalist group. It can also equate to apprehending the substance behind the shadow his classmates see as power.
Such an undertaking is complicated, and though he does manage to finish his translation, “when he looked at what he had written it was all gibberish” (269). Gibberish is not the only thing reflected on Isaac’s nightmare page: “in the left-hand corner at the bottom of the page was a drawing of the woman who had approached him in Kingston, her low curved buttocks and high breast drawing profile, but her face was the face of Rose” (269). In a symbolic foreshadowing of sorts, Isaac’s inability to make anything but gibberish of the score of laughter leaves the prostitute with Rose’s face as the only other possible mode of release from his imprisonment. Rose’s amalgamation with the prostitute coalesces in Isaac’s mind her status as a source for his “confident virility.” Isaac’s internal confusion, produced by alienation, disillusionment, and isolation from Hebron and from his colonial education, by his colonial education, prevents him from making sense of the score of laughter. Thus, we can understand (though definitely not justify) Isaac raping Rose, as an attempt to find a spirit “large enough to encompass the sea inside him.” Isaac imagines writing an epic—“another Moby Dick”—on the train ride home, when he still has romantic fantasies (269). Rose remains a central fixation; in his epic, he imagines Rose as “the fixed star of his return” (270). If Rose is a fixed symbol of home, security, and identity for Isaac, Obadiah disrupts this when he marries her. We can also see the rape, then, as Isaac’s violent exertion of a sense of virile masculinity meant to usurp the object of Obadiah’s virile masculinity.

The inability to make sense of himself and his experiences ultimately leads Isaac to look elsewhere for his self. Once he rapes Rose, he walks “away from the land and the people whose reflected image of him had shaped his dreams, fashioned the self that he would go in search of, to be swept away into the wide indifference of the sea” (279). Much like Naipaul’s Ralph Singh in Mimic Men, who prefers to be shipwrecked in London rather than bear the contradictions of his island home Isabella, Isaac heads overseas for some other self.16

CALIBAN AND HIS WOMAN

For both Obadiah and Isaac, then, Rose becomes a fetish of sorts, upon which their senses of themselves as men can be exercised. For Obadiah, finding himself means returning to Rose and her child. It is also not accidental that the

16. As my anonymous reader observed, and I agree, Isaac’s Moby Dick fantasy and the land versus sea dichotomy belying his characterization can viewed as Wynter’s tongue-in-cheek critique of overly celebratory readings of the ocean, such as James’s Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways, and which thus anticipates critiques of more recent marine celebrations such as Rediker and Linebaugh’s Many-Headed Hydra and Gilroy’s Black Atlantic.
description of how Isaac draws the prostitute with Rose's face is similar to the description of how Obadiah unconsciously carves his mother's sexualized visage into wood. I would argue that in their un-negotiated homosocial contract, Isaac is aware that violating Rose would disrupt her husband's sense of himself as a man—a masculinity that also resides in his sexual relationship with his wife. Isaac's desire to commit this violence against both Rose and Obadiah rests in his own need to grasp a sense of virility, in this instance, by possessing the source of another's. One of the stories that Isaac does manage to write while in Hebron illustrates not only this desire to usurp what belongs to Obadiah in the economy of the narrative but also a nascent, potentially more redemptive longing for community. In one sense, it is a conflicted jealousy, but in another, it stems from his discovery that he can dissolve into the couple while in their presence. Isaac eventually finds commonality in the couple's isolation from the rest of Hebron, but their isolated togetherness negates his individual existence: “Their closeness isolated them from the rest of Hebron, as Isaac himself was isolated. At times he felt non-existent, diffused into these two people, who were his only friends” (271). He continues to visit them and use them as subjects for his writing. In his first story, written in the first person, “his identification with the young boy was complete. The young boy was amalgam, in appearance, of himself and Obadiah. And the young boy's mother looked like Rose” (271). In a way that is similar to the amalgamation of Rose's visage with the prostitute's body, Isaac coalesces his sense of self with Obadiah and imagines for himself a more intimate relation to Rose. Thus, “his obsession was not only with Rose, but with Rose and Obadiah together” (272). It is not just Rose who becomes the fixed point of home for Isaac, but both Rose and Obadiah, and the power of this togetherness to make him dissolve into them, in a way that is similar to his relation to the sea. After he rapes Rose and she runs away, “he wanted to stand up and call out his name to her, to reassure himself as to who he was. For, impersonal like the sea, she had taken him, then left him a castaway, without purpose, without being” (275). On one level, the desire to call out his name to her is a kind of vengeance for her marriage to Obadiah and her keeping from Isaac what he considered as a possible source of virility. Though at one point a comfort, the couple's ability to dissolve him needs to be countered by reclaiming his own sense of individual self; Rose again becomes the conduit for this reclamation. In this moment, Isaac subscribes to the narrative's pervasive patriarchal contract of domination and exchanging power through the violation of female bodies, finding himself a man as men are defined in this novel. But on another level, Isaac here experiences a longing for community that, we might argue, remains illegible because it falls outside of the heteronormative form
of the couple. The tragedy is that he can enact his desire only through an act of sexual violence figured as an Oedipal struggle with Obadiah.

**Conclusion**

Where Isaac fails at grasping a secure and unselfish sense of ontological sovereignty, Obadiah's introspection brings him to a level of consciousness that Isaac's colonial education especially seems to preclude him from—one that positions Obadiah as the more successful candidate for leadership at the end of the novel. We can understand, further, the significance of creative processes—woodworking, in this case—in grasping subjectivity when Obadiah tries to imbue his first conscious creation with a sense of the self-awareness he garners from Rose's rape. The carved doll is a representation of an assumption of the totality of the past; that it was "dredged out of [Obadiah's] anguish" mirrors a sense of living imaginatively through the furnace of the past (Wynter, *Hebron* 303). This creative manifestation of anguish produces an object that both embodies Obadiah's consciousness of himself and, according to the stranger, bears resonances of an African heritage of which Obadiah himself is unaware. Its value and symbolism to him makes Obadiah reluctant to show the carving to the stranger modeled after Janheinz Jahn who asks to see it.17 The stranger urges Obadiah to "tell [him] what legend did [he] carve this doll from" and eventually explains, when Obadiah responds in confusion, that the "carving looks like one that [he] saw in Africa" (304). The foreigner gives Obadiah a five-pound note for the doll, linking the discovery of self in the creation of wooden crafts to self-sustainability and economic viability. Here Wynter clearly links Afrocentricity to the formation of sovereign black Caribbean identity.18 But this is no less important than Obadiah's realization that the stranger's five-pound note "would mean food and water for Rose and the child" (305), a realization that—crucially—does not depend upon Obadiah sharing the stranger's Afrocentric vision of the carving's meaning. When Obadiah returns to Hebron, he tells the community the following:

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17. See Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*. The resemblance to Janheinz Jahn is noted first by Ramchand. Jahn's interest in literatures from Africa and the African diaspora increased after meeting the Senegalese poet Leopold Sedar Senghor. As a collector, editor, translator, critic, and historian of literature, he strove to mediate what he termed "neo-African literature." Wynter's inclusion of him in the novel as the individual who reveals to Obadiah the economic potential of his carvings indicates her own position on the arts, namely, Africa's place of prominence in new world creative imagination.

18. A move that she is taken to task for by Ramchand in the first edition of *The West Indian Novel*. 
The first thing we are going to do, starting tomorrow, is build a good road, a broad road out into the world! . . . And up and down this road we will walk carrying the work of our hands to exchange for a man who will teach us how to read. (312)

In this respect, the carving embodies not so much the stranger’s vision of the carving’s Afrocentric lineage as a reconceptualization of self and a means of survival for both Obadiah and Hebron, one that involves new economic possibilities produced by abandoning their isolationist position.

By the end of the novel, Obadiah comes to a more complete awareness of himself and his position in relation to his and his community’s past, present, and future. The novel presents indigenous art as not only a source for negotiating ontological sovereignty on a personal level but also a vehicle for self-sustainability on the communal level. Obadiah’s confrontation with what belies Rose’s silence sets his journey towards ontological sovereignty in motion. If we look at this couple through the paradigm of The Tempest in Caribbean discourse, we can begin to see the possibilities for sovereignty inherent in a meeting between Caliban and his mate. Caliban/Obadiah’s ontological sovereignty is contingent on his reconciliation with the violence his mate/Rose historically suffers in the service of securing a variety of sovereign realities. This reconciliation between spouses forces us to rethink how we understand the function of silence and absence in not only the establishment of sovereign communities, but the establishment of critical orthodoxies in postcolonial literary discourses.

If abandoning their isolation brings the possibility for a more economically viable and, by extension, more sovereign reality for Obadiah and his community of New Believers, perhaps shifting our own focus to the relationships between subjects also brings us to more precise understandings of the possibilities for ontological sovereignty. Despite Wynter’s own prioritization of black nationalist concerns above gendered ones, her only novel represents a complex network of relationships that provides an opportunity to work in between the impasses of West Indian literary criticism and raises new questions of prospective and plural forms of community. Twenty-first-century problems of sovereignty are perhaps best served not by new epistemological conceptualizations, but rather by a shift in our critical point of focus to facilitate the cultivation of “an ethos of antagonistic respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference, which constitutes our present reality” (Scott, Refashioning 224). In practice, what I have outlined here illustrates that rather than establishing encampments of identity reflecting critical orthodoxy, our realization of sovereign realities rests in considerations of the relationships forged between camps—whether they are cooperative, antagonistic, or otherwise.