“GOOD EDUCATION, GOOD POSITION, AND GOOD BLOOD”:
CREOLE WOMEN’S LITERATURE OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY
BRITISH WEST INDIES

A dissertation presented

by

Jessica Nelson

to

The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of

English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
August 2015
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Creole women figures in nineteenth-century British fiction are often portrayed as threats to the stability and integrity of English domesticity in both the colony and the metropole. By virtue of the geography of their West Indian birth, these characters are closely associated with the practice of chattel slavery, and this association calls their moral integrity and domestic fitness into question. The fictional British West Indian creole woman represents, in texts written by metropolitan English writers, the potential failures of English domestic cultural reproduction. My dissertation, “Good Education, Good Position, and Good Blood”: Creole Women’s Literature of the Nineteenth-Century British West Indies, examines how representations of creole women in texts written by creole women challenge and revise the stereotype of the culturally and morally degenerate female creole. I engage with the work of Ann Laura Stoler, Jenny Sharpe, Radhika Mohanram, and others who delineate a mutually constitutive relationship between domestic culture and the project of European colonial imperialism, and who figure the woman’s body as an especially important articulation of that relationship. By considering the work of creole women, my project expands these critical considerations of the intersections of gender, race, imperialism, and domestic culture to include the British Caribbean in the nineteenth century.

My analysis of three examples of mid-nineteenth-century writing by creole women authors – Mary Seacole’s *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), Henrietta Camilla Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella; or, Conflict* (1859), and Theodora Elizabeth Lynch’s *Years Ago: A Tale of West Indian Domestic Life of the Eighteenth Century* (1865) – demonstrates imaginings of the creole woman figure that are alternatives to supposed female
creole degeneracy. In these texts, I argue, the creole woman is not merely a reflection of English culture or a marker of the success of English domestication. Rather, she is a figure actively engaged in recreating, modifying, and critiquing English domesticity. I contend that it is her status as a creole woman - with the attendant overlapping and converging conceptions of national, cultural, and racial identity – that casts her as a productive and generative (rather than degenerate) character in creole women’s writing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge my committee – Professor Laura Green, Professor Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, and Professor Nicole Aljoe – for their feedback and support throughout the writing and revision process. Their constructive criticism and suggestions have made my dissertation and its arguments infinitely stronger and more dynamic. Both Professor Green and Professor Dillon served on my exam committee, and their comments and guidance during that process greatly assisted in the early stages of this project.

The graduate students in the English department have been and continue to be a limitless source of support – intellectually, professionally, and personally. Despite their busy schedules, they’ve always managed to find time in the midst of researching, writing, and teaching to give me feedback on seminar papers, field statements, and chapter drafts. Perhaps even more important has been the personal support and friendship I’ve received, particularly from my cohort: Alicia Peaker, Jen Sopchockchai, Sarah Hastings, Janelle Greco, Aparna Mujumdar, Anne Kingsley, and Melissa Wolter-Gustafson. Thank you to everyone who participated in my writing groups and/or who supported and cheered me on: Danielle Skeehan, Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze, Jeffrey Cottrell, Brent Griffin, Max White, Jim McGrath, Emily Artiano, Shun Kiang, Duyen Nguyen, and many, many others.

Finally, thank you to all of my family and friends who have been perpetually encouraging throughout this process. In particular I want to thank my parents, Scott and Lavone Nelson, who have been my biggest cheerleaders. I couldn’t have done this without you.
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Introduction

It is extraordinary to witness the immediate effect that the climate and habit of living in this country have upon the minds and manners of Europeans, particularly of the lower orders. In the upper ranks, they become indolent and inactive, regardless of every thing but eating, drinking, and indulging themselves, and are almost entirely under the dominion of their mulatto favourites. In the lower orders, they are the same, with the addition of conceit and tyranny; considering the negroes as creatures formed merely to administer to their ease, and to be subject to their caprice; and I have found much difficulty to persuade those great people and superior beings, our white domestics, that the blacks are human beings, or have souls.

- Lady Maria Nugent, Lady Nugent’s Journal (1839)

"Jane, I will not trouble you with abominable details: some strong words shall express what I have to say. I lived with that woman upstairs four years, and before that time she had tried me indeed: her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong, only cruelty could check them, and I would not use cruelty. What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant propensities! How fearful were the curses those propensities entailed on me! Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste."

- Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (1847)

In Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason’s insanity is tightly bound to her familial line, particularly that of her creole mother: “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family - idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard!” (257). Brontë’s description of perhaps the most famous female creole character in nineteenth-century British literature paints a savage, violent picture. Bertha is “like some strange wild animal” (258), a “clothed hyena” (258). Brontë’s emphasis on Bertha’s mother’s status as a creole locates the source of madness in the geography of birth - both Bertha’s and her mother’s. This mid-nineteenth-century depiction of a creole woman invokes English fears of the degeneration of English culture in the Caribbean colonies, particularly how that supposed cultural breakdown manifested in women. Brontë’s description focuses on Bertha’s physicality,
which Brontë likens to that of an animal - she “grovelled, seemingly, on all fours” (257); her hair was “wild as a mane;” and, when she finally stands upright, she “was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides” (258). Bertha’s deviance and madness is made clearly visible through and on her body. Brontë’s emphasis on physical characteristics figures the creole woman’s body as an important marker and determiner of cultural fitness. This notion - that the figure of the creole woman has significance to discussions of the state of English culture and civility - is not restricted to Jane Eyre or to fiction. Across genres, textual representations of creole women engage with and reflect anxieties about English cultural reproduction in numerous ways. Representations of creole women in texts written by creole women challenge depictions like Brontë’s Bertha Mason by offering a positive and productive alternative to supposed creole degeneracy.

This dissertation takes three nineteenth-century texts written by Jamaican creole women as its points of analysis - Mary Seacole’s autobiography The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands (1857), Henrietta Camilla Jenkin’s coming-of-age novel Cousin Stella; Or, Conflict (1859), and Theodora Elizabeth Lynch’s domestic novel Years Ago: A Tale of West Indian Domestic Life of the Eighteenth Century (1865). Each of these texts directly addresses the negotiation of cultural values that characterizes the relationship between English and West Indian creole identity, and does so from a Jamaican perspective. By including both novels and a nonfiction text, I hope to show that the negotiation of multiple identities existed not only in the imagined spaces of fiction, but also in the constructed spaces of nonfiction. The texts’ settings range from the 1790s to the 1850s, suggesting that notions of what it meant for a Jamaican creole
to call themselves English, Jamaican, British, West Indian, or creole had been and continued to be unsettled. My analysis of nineteenth-century texts written by Jamaican creole women seeks to demonstrate four things. First, that according to Britons in the nineteenth century, the strength of English domesticity in the West Indies – and consequently the strength of England’s financial, political, and cultural position – depended on and was particularly threatened by the bodies of creole women. Second, that texts written by both creole and non-creole writers explicitly link the state of West Indian domestic health – the successful recreation and/or replication of English familial and social life in the Caribbean – to the health of the English nation, the empire, and vice versa. Third, that creole women’s positions within British West Indian society gave them access to and a unique perspective on this domestic sphere. Fourth, that texts written by creole women acknowledge and engage with English perceptions and representations of creole women while offering alternative models of creole femininity. The environment of the Caribbean presented, the English believed, a unique set of living conditions - including white colonists’ status as the racial minority and the climate - that posed a threat to those colonists’ bodies. As such, figures of creole women in British literature represent a real anxiety concerning performances of femininity and Englishness. The figure of the creole woman in the works of Seacole, Jenkin, and Lynch addresses these anxieties by creating female creole characters that don’t just reflect English culture. These characters also actively engage in critiquing that culture while modifying and building on it to create their own.
The term “creole” is central to my analysis and notoriously difficult to define.¹ Numerous scholars have commented on the different contexts in which creole has been used. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon observes that in colonial contexts “The term ‘creole’ carries a mixed set of meanings: as used in different historical periods and within different languages, it has assumed a variety of definitions that are inconsistent with, albeit proximate to, one another” (94-95). Similarly, Sean X. Goudie calls creole “a term with multiple and overlapping genealogies,” and more specifically, “a term of New World identity” (8). H. Adlai Murdoch also situates creole in a colonial context while acknowledging the terms ambiguity: “Both France and Britain as European colonial powers came to represent the Creole as the unnameable third term, the impossible indeterminacy excluded by the colonial binary’s neither/nor dyad” (2). Each of these explorations of what it means to call something creole suggests that it is a term specific to a colonial context, and that “creole” reflects and creates ambiguity and multiplicity. Not only is creole difficult to define, but any attempted definition must also account for the unsettledness of the term. In other words, “creole” is ambiguous in definition as well as in function.

Other critical discussions of “creole” invoke this same idea of uncertainty while focusing on process, or creolization. Edouard Glissant, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and Kathleen Balutansky characterize creolization as a process that is shifting, changing, and productive. Glissant argues that creolization produces and is produced by ambiguity, making it necessary to “abandon the idea of fixed being” (14). Brathwaite calls creolization a “cultural process” spurred

¹ The term has carried various racial, national, and geographical connotations, and has generally been used in a colonial context, particularly (though not exclusively) in the Caribbean. The Oxford English Dictionary lists 1697 as the earliest known textual usage of the word “creole” (although in this case it appeared as Criole), though its usage is and was not limited to the English language.
by the meeting of two cultures, a process that “was cruel, but...was also creative” (306).

Balutansky takes up this notion of creativity by highlighting the continuous and unending nature of the process. She defines creolization “as a syncretic process of transverse dynamics that endlessly reworks and transforms the cultural pattern of varied social and historical experiences and identities. The cultural patterns that result from this ‘crossbreeding’ (or cross-weaving) undermine any academic or political aspiration for unitary origins or authenticity” (3). Here, Balutansky echoes Glissant’s argument that creolization does not allow for static definition. Both creole and creolization suggest ambiguity, possibility, and contingency. These terms call for contextualization and continued recontextualization in terms of national, historical, racial, and social perspective.

Contextualizing “creole” in the British West Indies in the nineteenth century must include a discussion of the ways in which slavery impacted English perceptions of creoles. White creoles were, in the eyes of the English, tainted by their reliance on and proximity to enslaved labor and laborers. David Lambert argues that white West Indians were “often represented, particularly by abolitionists, as profit-obsessed, degenerate creoles, who brutalised their sable victims” (16). Specifically, representations of white creole women figure these characters as potential sites of contamination and cultural degradation. Critics like Carolyn Vellenga Berman have claimed that white creole women had a “metonymic association with colonial slavery” (13) and were “a synecdoche for the morally dubious practices of slavery in the outlying territories” (16). Berman does not, however, limit the connection between creole women and slavery to only white creole women. Representations of black and mixed race creole women also reflect English fears and
opinions about slavery and its effects on West Indian and English society. Berman, then, defines creole not by race, but by expressions of domesticity: “What makes the Creole a Creole in early-nineteenth-century European discourse is neither her good (or bad) race nor her good (or bad) blood but her upbringing, her distinctive use of language, her (il)literacy, her domestic habits, and her sexual mores.” (39-40) For Berman, creole isn’t a term of racial exclusivity: “What ‘Creole’ signifies, in short, is neither ‘racially mixed’ nor ‘racially pure’ but ‘domestic’ in a particularly problematic way” (43). What Berman’s understanding of “creole” seems to suggest is that rather than being defined racially, creole women can be identified, analyzed, and understood in nineteenth-century textual representations through their shared experience and performance of domesticity.

Judith L. Raiskin’s discussion of the term creole also includes the notion that creoles have particular experiences in common. Specifically, it is the experience of being born into the context of the British empire that, Raiskin claims, defines what it means to be a creole. In her work, the term allows her to compare the work of writers who were born and lived in disparate geographical and temporal contexts (Olive Schreiner, Jean Rhys, Michelle Cliff, and Zoë Wicomb), rather than limiting her analysis to only South African (Schreiner and Wicomb) or only Caribbean writers (Rhys and Cliff). It is Raiskin’s contention that despite their differences, these writers:

All share the status of ‘Creole’ by virtue of their births in British colonies or ex-colonies and their cultural ties to England fostered either by the self-identifications of settler societies or by Anglocentric colonial educations. Their perspectives as ‘Creoles’ share a
great deal yet vary as dramatically as do the different racial and national meanings of their creole identities. (1)

Essential to her use of “creole” is the acknowledgement of both similarities and differences in experience and identity. For Raiskin, then, the term creole “is a useful one for describing a variety of colonial and neocolonial social relationships throughout the world and for highlighting similar experiences and literary responses in different national contexts” (1). A precise definition of creole, then, is significantly less important than understanding the function of the identity category the term signifies. Raiskin acknowledges, as other critics have and do, the difficulty in defining creole:

These variant, even contradictory, meanings make it clear that we cannot pursue an essentialist conception of a single ‘creole identity.’ Rather, we are examining the various cultural uses of a term that, in all its definitions, complicates racial or national binarisms (white, black; European, American). The plasticity of this term permits it usage as both broadly inclusionary and narrowly restrictive. (4)

Despite the difficulty in definition and the simultaneously broadness and narrowness resulting from the term’s “plasticity,” Raiskin considers creole to be a conceptual category that is useful in studying both colonial and the post-colonial literary responses to empire (specifically the British empire).

My usage of the term draws on all of these discussions of creole and creolization, and acknowledges that creole identity is not exclusive to the context of the British Caribbean of the nineteenth century. This context, however, reflected and produced a particular usage of the word.
Specifically, creole invokes a certain geography - the Caribbean - and includes both black and white West Indians who were born, or spent a significant portion of their lives, in the British West Indies. In my analysis, the use of creole signifies the shared experience that is so central to how Berman and Raiskin understand the term. Berman contends that nineteenth-century representations of creole women by English writers embodied particular kinds of domestic failure. Raiskin’s use of creole also presumes a kind of shared history that engenders a range of literary responses. I argue that creole women characters in texts written by creole women share the experience of being burdened by this assumption of domestic failure, but also respond to and counter that assumption. I use the term creole to demonstrate that each of these writers, in addition to identifying as creole because of geography, situate themselves or their characters - and are situated by English men and women - in the blurred space between English, Jamaican, British, and West Indian identities. In other words, geography links these women; more important, however, is their shared experience of being represented and representing themselves and creole characters, as interstitial. When I use the term creole, then, I’m referring to figures who try on different colonial and metropolitan identities, or who are able to wear two or more simultaneously. At the same time, my usage explicitly recognizes that many facets of the experiences of creole women are not uniform. My use of “creole” is racially inclusive while also taking into account how race impacts the experiences and representations of creole women in significant and differing ways. For example, both Jenkin and Lynch center their plots around romance and marriage. Seacole, on the other hand, deliberately minimizes the importance of those elements to the story she presents in her autobiography. Differences in genre (domestic
novel versus tales of adventure and travel) certainly has some effect on the role marriage plays in each of these texts. I would argue, however, that race is equally as important. Jenkin’s and Lynch’s white protagonists are married at the end of their respective narratives while Seacole makes it clear that she has no interest in remarrying after her husband dies. Marriage becomes a way for Jenkin and Lynch to respond to English assumptions of the potential for cultural degeneracy by demonstrating that white creole women can perform domesticity in an acceptable fashion. Seacole is responding to a different set of English assumptions, namely that black women were often thought to be already culturally degenerate, rendering the trope of marriage a less-effective rhetorical strategy for proving domestic fitness.

My analysis of the texts in this dissertation also takes into consideration the scope of the critical conversations concerning nineteenth-century creole women’s writing. Literary critics have sometimes situated Jean Rhys’s work at the beginning of a tradition of British Caribbean women’s writing. Texts written by pre-twentieth-century Caribbean women, with the occasional and notable exceptions of those like Mary Prince’s narrative and Mary Seacole’s autobiography, were generally not extensively examined within the context of British literature. The relatively small body of criticism is in some ways reflective of few practical means of accessing these works. Online textual repositories such as Google Books and the Internet Archive, however, have made it possible for the novels, travel narratives, journals, and other writing of early Caribbean women to be more widely read. Given this recent and exciting proliferation of women’s writing from the Caribbean, placing Rhys as the genesis of canonical women’s writing
in the British Caribbean makes no sense. Critics now have access to a cache of texts – ranging from travel writing to memoir to children’s book to novel – that demonstrate a larger tradition of women’s writing in the British West Indies.

Evelyn O’Callaghan’s *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: “A Hot Place, Belonging to Us”* (2004) is one of the critical texts that broadly examine these women authors and their work. O’Callaghan hopes to bring more critical attention to this work, and provides an overview and analysis of texts written by Caribbean women in the nineteenth century. Her work builds on the work of scholars like Moira Ferguson, who has focused on the writing of Prince, Seacole, and Anne Hart Gilbert and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites - two black creole women writing in Antigua in the early nineteenth century. Rather than delve into a handful of texts or women authors deeply, O’Callaghan instead writes about many different authors and texts in order to address broader thematic issues such as gender and race. Among the writers she mentions are Seacole, Jenkin, and Lynch, as well as other authors cited in this dissertation, including Lady Maria Nugent, Frances Lanaghan, Mrs. A.C. Carmichael, and Mary Prince. It is the figure of the creole woman - particularly the white creole woman, though O’Callaghan does include writing from black and mixed race women authors - that is the focus of most of her analysis. O’Callaghan analyzes representations of home, racial identity, metropolitan and colonial culture, and women’s supposed civilizing influence in the Caribbean. Delineating the white creole woman as an interstitial textual figure, she argues that this figure “is not black, but neither is she English; she is white, but a different kind of white and has colored relations: ‘almost the same

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2 Raphael Dalleo argues that with the wider present-day circulation of these texts, “Claims that Caribbean literature is a twentieth-century phenomenon can no longer be made” (ix).
but not quite.’ Occupying an in-between position, neither black native (but undeniably native) nor white European (but still white)” (108). In these texts, O’Callaghan claims, questions of identity and belonging are constant negotiations of shifting alliances. The flexibility and ambiguity proffered by “almost the same but not quite” makes representations of these women an intriguing and integral part of discussions of what race, gender, and national identity mean; of how these categories are constituted; and of their significance to the study of literature.

To illustrate the vexed position white creole women inhabit in early twentieth-century novels, my analysis is situated within larger critical conversations about the role of domestic culture in the colony and the metropole, as well as discussions of the creole figure in nineteenth-century British literature not written by West Indians. Scholars have thoroughly remarked on how the transmission and recreation of domestic culture abroad impacts the “integrity” of national identity in both the metropole and in the colonial milieu. The relationship between the two locales was not a one-way transaction. Patrick Brantlinger notes that “the early and mid-Victorians were far from indifferent to ‘the colonies.’ On the contrary, colonial politics influenced all domestic issues and reform movements throughout the century” (Rule of Darkness 4). Ann Laura Stoler’s studies of the Dutch East Indies also analyze the influence of this metropolitan/colonial exchange. The colonies, Stoler argues, were, in the minds of nineteenth-century Europeans, sites of potential cultural degeneration. The home is figured as both a threat to and defense against this degeneration:

Management and knowledge of home environments, childrearing practices, and sexual arrangements of European colonials were based on the notion that the domestic domain
harbored potential threats both to the ‘defense of society’ and the future ‘security’ of the
[European] population and the [colonial] state. (*Race and the Education of Desire* 97)
The difficulty in placing the home and domestic culture in this role of contaminant/decontaminant, Stoler argues, was the already-modified nature of European culture in territories abroad. These expressions of domesticity were “unique cultural configurations” that contributed to “new constructions of what it meant to be European” (*Carnal Knowledge* 24).
Simon Gikandi also argues that colonial culture shifted metropolitan identity, specifically in England: “The colonial space would also reinvent the structure and meaning of the core terms of Englishness” (xviii). He sees this reinvention taking place in pieces of English culture, like Shakespeare or cricket, that are transported to and subsequently re-imagined in places like India. A similar argument is taken up by other critics like Carolyn Vellenga Berman, who claims that the specific role the empire plays with respect to English domesticity is that of test case. The empire’s existence necessitated the existence of a strong domestic culture that could exercise a civilizing influence, and Berman sees that playing out largely via domestic fiction. In these novels, she argues, creole women are exposed to English domesticity as a means of halting or reversing what English characters see as cultural degeneration. What Brantlinger, Stoler, Gikandi, Berman, and other critics make clear is the mutually constitutive nature of the relationship between colony and metropole, and the important part literature plays in that process.

The premise of these arguments - that literary representations of domestic culture play a significant role in how European identities are constructed and maintained in colonial spaces -
informs how women are figured in the empire. Two major themes in literary scholarship discussing women and empire ground my analysis: discussions of women’s bodies and race, and analyses of the creole body in nineteenth-century British novels. Jenny Sharpe and Radhika Mohanram both argue that all women’s bodies have the potential to be “corrupted” in the imperial context, and that white women’s bodies are especially vulnerable to contamination. In the nineteenth century in places like India or the West Indies, this imagined contamination occurs via interracial sex, whether forced or consensual. This sexual paranoia proliferates throughout white colonial society, and manifests itself in concerns about dress, housekeeping, childrearing, and the like. This anxiety sometimes reveals itself in domestic fiction in concerns over creole women’s parentage. Works like Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, take up these conversations. Jenkin approaches the issue from the point of view of the creole woman whose racial and national background is the focus of the conversation, while Brontë positions the creole woman as object rather than subject. Each of these texts acknowledges that the creole woman’s parentage (in both a racial and national sense) is viewed, by English society, as a potential threat. Brontë’s text affirms these suspicions through the character of Bertha Mason, while Jenkin’s novel refutes them.

Critical conversations about creole women in nineteenth-century British novels often figure these characters as foils to or shadowy doubles of white English women. Given that the texts central to these analyses are written by white English women, this isn’t surprising. These scholars argue that for the creole woman, white English femininity is either something to aspire to or a tool of behavioral correction. Critics like Carol Barash, as well as Sandra M. Gilbert and
Susan Gubar characterize English fictional representations of creole women as violent and aggressively, dangerously sexual. One is either striving to be like the archetypal English woman, is disciplined by that ideal, or represents a failure to adapt to that ideal. Creole femininity in nineteenth-century English texts embodies the sins of empire. Berman argues that the creole woman is metonymically linked to slavery and her body signifies the brutality of this practice. She is corrupted by slavery, and this corruption reveals itself in her physical form. She is the specter of interracial sex and the enslaved labor that underwrites the might of the British Empire. West Indian creole women in Victorian novels are threats - threats to physical safety and threats to the moral strength of English identity.

Texts written by creole women, however, present different versions of this female figure. These characters stand at the center of the narrative and are, more often than not, the text’s voice of morality rather than a threat to it. Frequently, they embody the ideals of traditional English femininity. However, these characters do not simply reproduce English culture in the West Indies. Instead, they incorporate parts of that culture into West Indian beliefs and actions in order to create a kind of domesticity that overlaps with its English counterpart, but also exists apart from it. The depictions in Seacole, Jenkin, and Lynch’s texts of the home, the family, and the larger social body of places like Jamaica suggest that West Indians thought of themselves as English, West Indian, British and creole.

Opening up the cult of English domesticity to include white West Indian women was, for many English people, an unwelcome task. Throughout England’s colonial history in the

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3 Barash cites nonfiction work as well as novels like The Jamaica Lady (1720) and The Fortunate Transport (1741-2) while Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis focuses on Jane Eyre.
Caribbean, people living in the metropole had unfavorable opinions of whites who were born in or who spent considerable time there. These unfavorable opinions were, generally, rooted in the effects (perceived and real) that the practice of slavery had on the morality and culture of creole society. Of particular disdain was the newfound social mobility of West Indian planters, acquired in the New World through enslaved labor. According to Trevor Burnard, “the West Indian absentee planter was a new social type that would become a stock figure of fun during Britain’s nineteenth-century empire: the returning colonist as nouveau riche semi-foreigner of dubious origins and vulgar taste” (75). The “dubious origins” of these creoles references the sexual behavior - both real and imagined - of whites living in the West Indies. The intimate relationships formed in places like Jamaica and the intimate relationships forged in England were often imagined as two distinct set of relations. As Catherine Hall so succinctly puts it, “England was for families, Jamaica was for sex” (Civilising Subjects 72). For centuries, the Caribbean was framed as a site of cultural degeneration often caused by these sexual relationships, which figured women of African descent as promiscuous and sexually deviant.4 The “vulgar taste” Burnard writes of as well as the imagined sexual proclivities of West Indian creoles demonstrated, for many nineteenth-century Britons, how unfit this population was for recreating or accepting proper English domesticity.

This perceived lack of domestic fitness was taken as a serious threat to the integrity of English culture. It was, however, sometimes framed as a source of humor rather than a source of danger. Lady Nugent’s Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805 is one example

4 I discuss this perception at length in my analysis of Mary Seacole’s autobiography.
of this perspective. Nugent writes of a woman who is “a perfect Creole, says little, drawls out that little, and has not an idea beyond her own Penn” (52); and another who “is a fat, good-humoured Creole woman, saying dis, dat, and toder” (76). Nugent’s diary also contains comments about the ways of speaking that white creoles and people of African descent have in common (98), and how formal education is wasted on creole girls who will only feel out of place in their West Indian homes because of it (146). The anxieties Nugent voices are of real concern to her, and her humorous and somewhat mocking descriptions of creole women are small, but pointed, judgments against their conduct. She draws a clear line between English women and white creole women, although her observations lack proclamations of cultural and societal disasters, suggesting that there is something fundamental to West Indian character and experience that makes them decidedly not English.

Other contemporary accounts of white creoles reaffirm a lack of domestic and moral fitness that is less than humorous. This lack is framed as manifesting in troubling and often immoral behavior. Berman makes note of this nineteenth-century English opinion of the creole: “A British ‘special magistrate’ thus reported in 1835 that ‘their manner of speaking to and of the negroes is haughty, intemperate and disgusting in the extreme; their disposition to have corporal punishment inflicted is manifested on almost every occasion’” (130). In this characterization, whites in the Caribbean are violent, debased, and unable to exercise control over themselves and their actions. Consequently, it is an English responsibility to address and alter this behavior. This was particularly the case before abolition, although it continued to some degree after. Elizabeth A. Bohls observes how this articulated responsibility impacted how the British Caribbean was
conceptualized: “Abolitionists constructed Britain’s slave colonies as aberrant places in need of metropolitan intervention” (2). While these criticisms of white creoles draw a distinction between the Englishman and the West Indian, they also reinforce the connection between citizens of the metropole and the larger empire, manifested in a concern for the colony’s morality.

The English living in England ridiculed and condemned white creole behavior, but this didn’t stop white West Indians from proclaiming their Englishness. They did so in fictional texts as well as in other forms of written discourse, frequently within political contexts. This claim for English identity is an historical pattern. In bodies like the Jamaican House of Assembly, government officials affirm their status as Englishmen in order to declare their loyalty and connection to the homeland, and assert their right to self-determination. On December 23, 1774, the Assembly recorded the following:

...weak and feeble as this colony is, from its very small number of white inhabitants, and its peculiar situation, from the encumbrance of more than two hundred thousand slaves, it cannot be supposed that we now intend, or ever could have intended, resistance to Great-Britain...Your petitioners do therefore make this claim and demand from their sovereign...that no laws shall be made, and attempted to be forced upon them, injurious to their rights as colonists, Englishmen, or Britons...[We are] entitled to your protection and the benefits of the English constitution; the deprivation of which must dissolve that dependence on the parent state, which it is our glory to acknowledge, whilst enjoying those rights under her protection. (qtd. in Brathwaite 70)
This petition, written in the context of the revolution in the North American colonies, reassures the King that Jamaica has no intention of joining those colonies, but that reassurance comes at a price. That price, “that no laws shall be made, and attempted to be forced upon them, injurious to their rights as colonists, Englishmen, or Britons,” reveals three concurrent identities - colonial, English, and British. By claiming these three identities, white Jamaican creoles are able to rebuff total control of their affairs by England but also make a claim to a protected status. In other words, claiming to be English grants them the rights of Englishmen, and one of those rights is the right to legal self-determination. Consequently, making this particular rhetorical claim binds them to England just as it declares their independence.

This attitude continued into the nineteenth century. On December 14, 1809, a Mr. Barrett of the Jamaica Assembly, reported the Assembly’s response to a letter from Parliament criticizing the planters’ implementation of certain rules and regulations concerning slavery:

His Majesty’s subjects of this island will never permit this novel inquisition to be established amongst them, nor will they ever cease to regard the proposition to introduce it as the artfully devised plan of our enemies and rivals to destroy the colony, by rendering the slaves disobedient and valueless, and thereby inducing a voluntary and uncompensated surrender of the claims of the owner to their services. But, throwing aside our rights of property, as Englishmen ourselves, and the descendants of Englishmen, we view with abhorrence that minute interference with our domestic affairs, which is only exercised by the weakest governments, and yielded to by the most degraded population.

(qtd. in Parliamentary Papers 168-169)
For English people living in England, slavery was conceived of as a practice that made whites of English descent less English. For white creoles, however, it was their very status as Englishmen that reaffirmed their belief that they had the right to enslave humans and benefit from their forced labor.

Even after slavery was abolished in 1833, race relations in places like Jamaica were still a source of concern for whites living in England. While the violent behavior of white creoles was often considered a byproduct of slavery, metropolitan English people claimed that these creoles exhibited the same lack of control even after the practice was abolished. This shifts the source of this “disgusting” conduct from an external source - the enslavement of fellow human beings - to an internal source - something inherent to white creoles that renders them incapable of restraint and rationality. Slavery had been perceived as a practice that degraded Englishmen in the West Indies, and a barrier excluding white West Indians from an English identity. In the case of both the West Indian and the Englishman, chattel slavery degrades what is, presumably, good character. Post-abolition, any observed moral unfitness on the part of white creoles is rooted firmly in their character.

In “The White Minority in Jamaica at the end of the Nineteenth Century,” Patrick Bryan argues that even after abolition, the distribution of power in Jamaica existed as it had before: “Post-emancipation society was to be more of the same thing: white oligarchical hegemony buttressed by new legal sanctions, continued domination of the resources of the colony and the conversion of the slave force into a proletariat tied to the sugar estates” (116-117). Nineteenth-century white West Indians believed that no true understanding or equality could exist between
white and black, and white creole behavior toward black creoles after emancipation perpetuated much of the same violence and cruelty of slavery. Metropolitan Britons considered this violence and cruelty as threats to the moral integrity of English culture, even as they reaped the benefits of the slave system. These threats existed in the empire but were not easily contained, and so the imperial project in the Caribbean, tainted as it was by slavery, was regarded (as it long had been) as a menace to the integrity of Englishness. While some of this anxiety in the mid-nineteenth century was directed at other colonial strongholds like India, the fear of the moral condition of the Caribbean remained. The English response to the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 is representative of these fears.

Henry Bleby’s *The Reign of Terror: A Narrative of Facts Concerning Ex-Governor Eyre, George William Gordon, and the Jamaica Atrocities* (1868), is just one piece of the large body of discourse surrounding the rebellion and the violent response to it orchestrated by then-Governor Edward Eyre.\(^5\) At the beginning of the first chapter, Bleby - who is decidedly anti-Eyre - laments the impact these events have had on England’s moral authority throughout its empire:

> The philanthropy and the Christianity of Britain suffered a sad eclipse in the events which transpired in Jamaica during the latter part of 1865; and the honour of the British army and navy was shamefully sullied by the brutality of military and naval officers, and the readiness with which they lent themselves to perform deeds of cruelty, to which we can scarcely find a parallel amongst any savage people on the face of the earth. (1)

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\(^5\)Henry Bleby (1809-1882) was a Wesleyan minister who spent many years preaching in the British West Indies, before and after the abolition of slavery. In addition to *The Reign of Terror*, Bleby penned a detailed account of the Great Jamaican Slave Rebellion of 1831-32, as well as other religious and anti-slavery texts.
Bleby views Governor Eyre’s violent and overwhelming response to the protests in Morant Bay not only as un-Christian, but also deeply opposed to the “philanthropy” and “honour” of Britain and her armed forces. Eyre’s actions, Bleby argues, are more depraved than the acts of “savages” - “savages” who were, presumably, the focus of the British Empire’s civilizing and Christianizing efforts across the globe. In his narrative, Bleby directly links the atrocities committed in Jamaica with the English metropole, suggesting that the conduct of the governor, army, and navy has damaged Jamaica and England. He repeatedly refers to Eyre, for example, as “the representative of England’s Queen” (3). England’s military and bureaucratic arms reached out across the British Empire, their actions reflecting back on every citizen in the metropole - including Queen Victoria. The behavior of Englishmen in the colonies has consequences that reverberate across the Atlantic. Bleby claims that “Englishmen felt the blush of shame and indignation mantling their cheeks, at the dishonour done to themselves and their country” (1). Indeed, some Englishmen did feel shamed, but the public’s response was far from unified.

Morant Bay became a touchstone for public conversations about the state of England and its empire. Prominent public intellectuals took sides. The liberal Jamaica Committee, which counted John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin as two of its members, endeavored (unsuccessfully) to prosecute Eyre for murder, while Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, and others formed an opposing, conservative committee in Eyre’s defense.6 Regardless of which side they were on, all seemed to understand the larger ramifications of Eyre’s actions. Ian Baucom

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6 For contemporary accounts of the aftermath of Morant Bay, see William F. Finlason’s multiple reports and commentaries of the legal proceedings against Eyre; Hamilton Hume’s biography of Eyre includes the conservative perspective. For modern scholarly analyses, see Catherine Hall’s “The Economy of Intellectual Prestige: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, and the Case of Governor Eyre”; as well as articles by Marouf Hasian, Jr. and Howard W. Fulweiler.
argues that “the discussion of Morant Bay became less an inquiry into the actions of one man than an examination of how the pursuit of empire was redefining what it meant to be English” (43). Questions of how to define Englishness within a global context were common even prior to 1865. The debates that circulated around Morant Bay echoed past conversations about, for example, a British presence in India and the abolition of slavery.

The texts considered in this dissertation went through their first rounds of publication over the course of just eight years, from 1857 to 1865. These eight years are neatly bookended by two major events in the British Empire: the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the aforementioned Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865. Both events signaled major upheaval in the far reaches of Britain’s imperial holdings, and both loomed large in the collective English imagination, causing the public to reevaluate England’s role in these colonial locales. Christopher Herbert’s framing of the significance of the Indian Mutiny to public discourse on the empire closely resembles Baucom’s framing of the importance of Morant Bay. Herbert argues:

In order to grasp fully the culturally destabilizing effect of the real and fantasized horrors of 1857, one needs to set them in the context of the broadly diffused Victorian ideology of reform, progress, improvement, and “civilization.” No conviction ran more deeply in Victorian thinking and self-representation than did the belief in the civilizing conquest of modern, enlightened principles over all that was brutish, violent, primitive. (27)

These events became a litmus test for the moral authority of English culture and the success of its moralizing influence abroad. Furthermore, Herbert argues, the English public’s responses to these events reflected multiple points of view with respect to the English role in the wider British
Empire: “Abundant testimony suggests that the Victorian public at home felt at the time of the Indian war that it was witnessing nothing less than an alarming disorganization of national personality” (24). Herbert’s contention that Victorian attitudes toward the imperial project (and toward the Indian Mutiny) were varied pushes back against what he considers to be a mischaracterization of Victorian society on the part of modern scholars - namely, that Victorian England was uniformly pro-imperialist and racist.

The rhetoric employed in accounts of both major events is strikingly similar. Contemporary accounts of the 1865 riots in Jamaica explicitly link those events with the Sepoy Rebellion eight years prior, particularly when reporting the supposed scope and nature of the violence. These accounts reflect, as the discourse around the Indian Mutiny did, the fractured opinions of the English public. The *Fortnightly* expressed hope that the accounts of violence against and the deaths of white Jamaicans were a distortion of reality (and they were): “The published details [of Morant Bay] are of the most painful kind, and we can but trust that, as in the case of the Sepoy mutiny, fear has exaggerated the truth” (116). Thomas Harvey William Brewin, however, seems to take these inflated accounts seriously, claiming, “Indeed the whole outrage could only be paralleled by the atrocities of the Indian Mutiny” (83). Beyond just observing the violence that occurred, nineteenth-century writers placed these two events in conversation for different rhetorical purposes, specifically when attempting to either condemn or vindicate Governor Edward Eyre and his reaction to the rebellion. Accounts like the one in the *Fortnightly* tended to focus on supposed violence against white individuals -whether English or

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7 Further examples of this linkage include accounts in *The Nautical Magazine, The Spectator, The Popular Magazine of Anthropology,* and *The London Review of Politics.*
creole - and tended to be pro-Eyre. Accounts that related the very real violence against black creoles condemned Eyre’s actions. The *Dublin Review*, for example, reports that the Indian Mutiny was being used as an excuse to justify Governor Eyre’s much swifter and much more savage response to the Morant Bay Rebellion. This, the *Review* suggests, is not something to be lauded but something to be condemned. The *Review*’s writers claim that Eyre had no business being responsible for the governance of Jamaica, saying that he was “destitute of the first mental qualification for the office” (397). Conversely, *The British Army and Navy Review* claims that:

> All these elements of discord had been seething and fermenting in the mind of the coloured population of Jamaica long before Governor Eyre went there. His experienced eye at once detected the plague spot, and it is solely owing to his energy, courage, and determination that an island where there are seven black men to one white, there was not a second edition of all the horrors and atrocities of the Indian mutiny. (9)

Invoking the Indian Mutiny and the Morant Bay Rebellion together had a powerful rhetorical effect. Regardless of whether that move was used to support Eyre’s actions in Jamaica or to decry them, the linking of these two events demonstrates an historical through line from one to the other. A social memory existed of these events and others like them, and these events were often put into conversation with each other when discussing the British Empire.

The texts analyzed in this dissertation were all published in this period of imperial reflection. Literary responses to this historical context were varied. Each of the texts does engage with debates about how to manage empire, the role of England and English people abroad, the

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8 Bleby’s aforementioned account does the same. Eyre is “an unfit man to be placed in such a high position,” and “a man of the most ordinary intellectual abilities” (3).
importance of race with regards to British Imperialism, and how to manage bodies in colonial spaces. How those texts address and engage with these issues varies. The safety of women and the sexual purity of their bodies factors heavily in public discussions of both the Sepoy and Morant Bay rebellions, and this is one theme colonial texts have in common. It is the woman’s body that is often the focal point of questions of what it means to be English. This is true in both India and Jamaica, with the latter representing a critical and longstanding locale that figures heavily in discussions of the role of women in the colonies. Textual representations of Jamaican creole women by Jamaican creole women provide an illuminating perspective on how those negotiations play out.

Chapter one examines the role of race in constructing and complicating creole and English identity in Mary Seacole’s autobiography, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. Seacole, a mixed race Jamaican creole woman who traveled extensively through Jamaica, Panama, England, and Crimea, making her living as a nurse, hotelier, and sutler, was something of a celebrity in 1850s and 60s London. My analysis of the literary figure of the creole woman begins by considering how race, education, and geography impact self-representations of creole identity. Seacole’s autobiography presents a narrative of creole women - specifically creole women of color - that troubles and rewrites the standard narratives of women of African descent that circulated in England in the nineteenth century. These narratives frequently use scientific discourse to essentialize black women as “just” bodies and to “legitimize” hypersexualized characterizations of those women. Even within representations of creole women, whiteness is often the default perspective. Seacole’s status as a mixed race creole writer,
then, in some ways sets her apart from the other authors discussed in this dissertation. Her marginalized position within an already marginalized group (in the context of Englishness) impacts how Seacole constructs and reflects on her identity, and makes racial difference a central concern in her text. By emphasizing her scientific and medicinal knowledge, presenting herself as a desexualized maternal figure, and critiquing the racist discourses she encounters during her travels, Seacole carefully and deliberately fashions a hybrid textual version of herself - Jamaican, creole, English, British, black, and multiracial - that undermines racist ideology while also serving her own financial needs.

Chapter two examines Henrietta Camilla Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella; or, Conflict* (1859), a domestic novel with a white creole protagonist at its center. The narrative follows the life of Stella Joddrell and her family in England and then Jamaica, focusing on familial drama and her romantic concerns rather than the occupational and racial concerns that predominate Seacole’s autobiography. Set in the late 1820s and early 1830s, the novel uses the conventions of the domestic novel to interrogate the morality of slavery, and includes a fictionalization of the Great Jamaican Slave Revolt of 1831-32. Jenkin critiques standard narratives of English domestic ideals and offers Stella as an alternative to typical representations of white creole women in nineteenth-century British novels. In doing so, Jenkin complicates the relationship of English culture to West Indian culture, suggesting that the figure of the white creole woman has the ability to adopt characteristics of both and re-present them in a productive and moral fashion.

Chapter three analyzes Theodora Elizabeth Lynch’s *Years Ago: A Tale of West Indian Domestic Life of the Eighteenth Century* (1865). This novel is a generally idyllic version of
creole identity, and lacks much of the tension present in both Seacole and Jenkin’s texts. Like Seacole, Lynch strongly asserts the connection between West Indian creole and English identity. Also like Seacole, Lynch’s characters are able to occupy more than one identity position at a time. *Years Ago* shares *Cousin Stella’s* focus on the role domestic culture play in identity formation, but while *Cousin Stella* places more importance on abstract parts of domestic culture like morality and industriousness, *Years Ago* focuses on the objects that produce and are produced by domestic culture. Lynch’s novel is set on a prosperous plantation in Jamaica during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Told in the form of the journal kept by its protagonist, Dorothea (Doss), the novel traces Doss’s intellectual and emotional development. The novel negotiates expectations of young British West Indian creole woman through participation in a culture of writing and a culture of domestic commodity circulation. As a result, the narrative affirms the existence of a tangible and direct connection between English identity and West Indian creole identity.

These three texts, considered together, are indicative of the larger tradition of nineteenth-century British West Indian writing by women. Each text, in its own way, makes a cultural connection between England and the British Caribbean, while at the same time describing and embodying a distinct West Indian creole identity. Each author engages with issues of race, gender, and nationality in ways that trouble standard, metropolitan narratives of identity, while also calling attention to the general ambiguity of identity. Taken together, the work of Seacole, Jenkin, and Lynch demonstrate that in the mid-nineteenth century, the British Caribbean continued to play an important role in English cultural formation.
The August 1, 1857 edition of *The Musical World* contains a notice regarding the “Festival for Mrs. Seacole” held just the week before. The “suburban correspondent” responsible for the write-up begins by extolling Mary Seacole’s virtues and describing the unfortunate circumstances that led to her financial bankruptcy - namely, that while in the service of the British empire in Crimea, caring for the sick and wounded soldiers who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the British cause, she was *too* generous with her time and her commercial goods. In response, a “Grand Military Festival” was organized with the aim of raising money for the indebted “Mother” Seacole. The festival raised over £500, and ended with enthusiastic renditions of “Rule, Britannia!” “Partant pour la Syrie,” and “God Save the Queen.” These songs are traditional on military occasions, and placed in the context of the celebration of a mixed race, British Jamaican woman, the lyrics take on interesting dimensions. In particular, the repeated couplet at the end of each verse of “Rule, Britannia!” sounds a somewhat discordant note: “Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:/Britons never will be slaves.” These lines echo the hyper-nationalistic, imperialist leitmotif present in the rest of the lyrics - certainly appropriate for celebration of a noted war hero, and certainly interesting when that war hero is partially of African descent. James Thomson’s poem was set to music by Thomas Arne in 1740, long before the slave trade or slavery were abolished in England or throughout the rest of the British empire. Enslaved people laboring throughout British territory would not have been considered “Britons” when the song

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9 “Partant pour la Syrie” was the unofficial French national anthem during the Second Empire, “Rule, Britannia!” is traditionally associated with the Royal Navy and the British Army, and “God Save the Queen” is, obviously, the British national anthem.
was first introduced. Even in 1857, the year of the benefit, it is debatable as to whether or not general English society would have extended the moniker of “Briton” to people who could trace some or all of their ancestry to Africa. That a song boldly claiming “Britons never will be slaves” would close the celebration for a woman of black and white parentage is, then, somewhat ironic. The celebration of her life and her good works is tangled with British aspirations for global domination - aspirations that had been fueled largely by enslaved labor. While Seacole herself was not a slave - nor was her mother - the impact of slavery on perceptions and treatment of people of color in England and its overseas territories is difficult to divorce from how Seacole herself was perceived and treated. In the press and at this celebration, she is figured as a tool and emblem of the nation, her tireless work, self-sacrifice, and exceptionalism an embodiment of the values of British imperialism. However, in her autobiography, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857), her presentation of self is much more complex. Moving through the space of the British Empire gives her opportunities to situate herself, her experiences, and her motivations both within and without Britishness.

In her autobiography, Mary Seacole reimagines the roles and identities available to black and mixed race people, specifically women, in mid-nineteenth-century England. Seacole’s writing disrupts a cultural narrative that erased individual intellect and ability and figured people of color - particularly women - as purely physical and hypersexualized beings. Through her writing, Seacole positions herself as both an independent actor circulating in a global context and as an essential instrument of British imperial endeavors. She accomplishes this in her text in

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10 For contemporary accounts of this phenomenon, see Stewart and Long. For scholarly discussions of this phenomenon, see Gilman, McClintock, Robert J.C. Young, Mohanram, and de Ferrari.
three primary ways. First, she highlights her intellect by demonstrating her abilities as a doctress and entrepreneur and by foregrounding her reliance on science rather than religion. Second, she de-emphasizes her sexuality by and while emphasizing her maternity. Third, she directly addresses and rhetorically critiques the racist assumptions about people of African descent that she encounters during her travels. In doing so, Seacole constructs, within the pages of her autobiography, a complex and hybrid identity that defies easy categorization. She envisions herself both within and without different categories of race, gender, and nationality.

Contemporary accounts of Seacole and her life demonstrate the degree to which the English public found her rhetorical construction of self persuasive. She is often cast in a positive light. English writers describe her as “gallant,” “watchful,” “most valuable” (The Musical World), “humble” (The London Lancet), “good and benevolent,” “fair,” and “illustrious” (Soyer’s Culinary Campaign); she conducts herself with “fine womanly discretion” and “is not unworthy of respect and honour” (The Athenæum). “Gallant” indicates that Seacole was considered to be brave - brave to a degree that is notable and exceptional. That exceptionality is reiterated in “most valuable” and “illustrious.” “Good and benevolent,” “fair,” and “fine womanly discretion” suggest restraint. These journalists portray Seacole as someone not ruled by emotion or impulsive action. All of these characterizations figure her as singular and remarkable. Her fame seemed to extend from her unique status as well as from the sheer number of British soldiers she interacted with in Crimea. The soldiers’ overwhelmingly positive response to Seacole and her nursing abilities is seen in the numerous letters from supporters that she
reproduces in her autobiography. Her status as a person of mixed race might also have contributed to her acclaim; it most likely wasn’t every day that white English people encountered a black Jamaican creole nurse. Her notoriety was such that even ten years after this benefit, appeals on her behalf were still being made to the public. The February 9, 1867 edition of *The London Lancet*, which insists that in light of her good works in Crimea, as well as her assistance during a recent cholera epidemic, “It would be a disgrace to this country if this humble woman, who, out of the sympathy of her large heart, volunteered generous service during a time which was as disastrous as it was glorious, were allowed to feel the want of succour she so unsparingly supplied to others.” The notice references an already established Seacole Fund to which people might contribute.

She was not, however universally praised. Seacole had requested to be included in Florence Nightingale’s legion of nurses during the Crimean War, but Nightingale rejected her application. Nightingale’s opinions of Seacole were made clear in a letter Nightingale wrote to her brother-in-law:

[Mrs. Seacole] kept - I will not call it a “bad house” - but something not very unlike it...She was very kind to the men and, what is more, to the Officers, and did some good, and made many drunk.

I had the greatest difficulty in repelling Mrs Seacole’s advances, and in preventing association between her and my nurses (absolutely out of the question)...Anyone who employs Mrs Seacole will introduce much kindness - also much drunkenness and improper conduct. (qtd. in *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana* 80)
Nightingale’s mention of drunkenness and “bad house[s]” invokes the sexual paranoia many white English people tended to ascribe to people of African descent in the nineteenth century. An instruction to burn the letter appeared at the top of the page, revealing Nightingale’s hesitation to make public her critique of such a long-beloved figure (the letter was written in 1870).

Nightingale’s was not the only negative opinion of Seacole and her methods. In his narrative of a trip to Crimea during the war, Edwin Galt writes that “she is a sort of mother to the officers of the army, also a good, kind nurse,” but also that:

> It is not to be supposed from these remarks that Mrs. Seacole is a charitable and all-sacrificing nurse and attendant - oh no, - by no means. She is a suttler, she vends every commodity within her large hut, denominated the ‘half-way house,’ and receives, without a _blush_ on her black countenance, two shillings a bottle for pale ale and porter, and sixpence a pound for potatoes, and so on _ad infinitum_, and has thus accumulated a small fortune. (75)

Galt’s account of Seacole’s entrepreneurial skills and the “small fortune” he claims she accumulated in Crimea, potentially complicates the more widely-accepted narrative of Seacole’s life, and shifts her motivations from purely benevolent to significantly capitalist.11 These motives are, in Galt’s eyes, incompatible with the gallantry and benevolence others see in her - and which both he and Nightingale acknowledge. Seacole herself, in her autobiography, does not deny that she seeks to make money through her endeavors. Her English supporters may downplay her

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11The _United Service Magazine_ of March 1857 records that “Mrs. Seacole has been granted an immediate certificate of the first class, on the ground that her bankruptcy has arisen wholly from unavoidable loss and misfortune” (462). _The Musical World_, in its notice of the festival being held for her benefit, attributes her financial woes to unsold stock purchased before the end of the Crimean War.
money-making activities, but Seacole does not. When writing about sick or injured soldiers in Crimea, she admits that she “did not hesitate to charge him with the value of the necessaries I took him” (125).

Galt’s description of Seacole contains phrases implying that his critical view of her is motivated, partly, by her race. His description of her features is stereotypical: “A little further on lives Mrs. Seacole, a black West-Indian woman, with a broad nose, thick lips, but a great celebrity in the camp” (75). Here, Galt places her popularity in the camp in opposition to her physical appearance, intimating that she is respected and known despite her blackness. Later, he comments on her use of the English language, claiming: “Her English is not of the purest description, although there is a lurking desire to introduce fine words, and thus the reproofs she is constantly administering to her servants in her Negro-Anglo dialect becomes amusing, and at times positively ludicrous” (76). The patronizing humor he ascribes to her use of “fine words” undermines her public status as an educated, cultured woman. Highlighting the speech she uses while admonishing her servants suggests that Galt sees no difference between the nurse and the black servants who work for her (although Seacole certainly does). The prevailing narrative of Mary Seacole was a positive one, but Nightingale and Galt’s accounts are a reminder of how assumptions and attitudes can and were affected by the racism of nineteenth-century English society. Seacole may have been lauded and praised in the press, but her characterization was, ultimately, an exceptional one for a woman of mixed race in mid-nineteenth-century England.

The English public’s response to Seacole’s travels typifies the range of ways in which Britons perceived people of African descent. Interactions between white and black English men
and women weren’t monolithically or uniformly racist, although they certainly could be. Relationships between English people of different races were, generally, more complex. Douglas A. Lorimer’s oft-cited study of race and Victorian England cites “the absence of quantitative data” (37) concerning blacks living in England in the nineteenth century. Despite this dearth of information, Lorimer deduces, from the narrative accounts available to him, that white English Victorians had a range of opinions about and responses to people of African descent. His analysis makes distinctions between black Britons and African Americans, as well as black Britons and black West Indians, including former slaves. In England, he claims that “In spite of incidents of discrimination, the black poor did not suffer from universal or even widespread objections to their colour, and, as isolated individuals rather than as an identifiable group, blacks mixed reasonably freely with the commonality of Englishmen” (43). The collection of essays in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina’s Black Victorians/Black Victoriana (2003) investigates the presence and perception of blacks living in and visiting Victorian England, and the conclusions made by these authors are similar to Lorimer’s. None of the accounts deny the presence of racism, but tend to not characterize racist attitudes as inescapable - at least not when it concerned blacks living in England or people of African descent from the United States who visited England.

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12 Norma Myers also acknowledges the difficulty in using traditional historical records to analyze the black population in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England. Her 1996 study uses “new or little-used source materials” (vii) in order “to fill in some of these gaps in knowledge” (1).
13 John M. Turner notes that textual mentions of Pablo Fanque, a circus owner relatively well known in nineteenth-century England, rarely incorporated mentions of his skin color. By all accounts, Turner claims, Fanque “appears to have been treated as an equal...by the general public” (36). Kathryn Castle argues that “Despite evidence that attitudes toward race were hardening in mid-Victorian England as the paternalism of abolitionism waned, one cannot yet argue that a hegemonic racial or imperial ethos was dominant in mid-century” (145-146).
These essays suggest that mid-nineteenth-century English society made a distinction between blacks who were born in England and blacks from the Caribbean. Victorian opinions of black West Indians, while also not homogeneous, were considerably less positive. Before and after the abolition of slavery, the perceived ability of people of African descent to embody an English sense of morality was widely commented on by white, usually male, writers. That depiction dates back as far as the earliest European interactions with Africa, and continues through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in representations of Africa and the Caribbean.¹⁴ Edward Long railed against sexual relationships between different races and the children those relations produced, claiming that European men in Jamaica should “abate of their infatuated attachments to black women” (327). Later, he refers to women in Africa as “common prostitutes” (436), and comments on what he calls “excessive indulgence in a promiscuous commerce...with the black and mulatto women” (535). In 1823, John Stewart’s study of Jamaica calls attention to the deleterious influence of what he calls “the perverseness of the slaves” (170), lamenting that in some cases “There is something in their manner, their behaviour, their language, and, not unfrequently their dress, which, to one not accustomed to such attendants, must appear exceedingly disgusting” (172-173). When speaking of women of African descent, he emphasizes the frequency with which, he claims, they engage in sexual relationships with white men outside the bonds of marriage: “Every unmarried white man, and of every class, has his black or his brown mistress, with whom he lives openly” (173). Stewart may be admonishing white male behavior, but his characterization of it also presents black and mixed race women as

¹⁴ Barbara Bush traces the historical phenomenon of, for example, the sexualizing of black women’s bodies in Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838.
commonly and willingly engaging in this behavior. This depiction presupposes a universal and constant sexual availability of black women.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the debate between Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill on the “Negro Question” is indicative of how West Indians of color were figured in the English imagination. Blacks living in Jamaica, for example, were viewed through the prism of their past as enslaved laborers. Lorimer argues that:

The Mid-Victorians measured the success or failure of the emancipation policy in the West Indies by the standards of their own social background. Emancipated slaves failed to adjust to the established English pattern of wage-labour, therefore blacks appeared not only slothful but also culpably neglectful of their duty to work. (128)

A Victorian focus on the virtue and importance of industriousness can account for both negative attitudes toward black Jamaicans, as well as the public’s overwhelmingly positive response to Mary Seacole, who appeared to embody Victorian values of hard work. That positive response, however, does not negate the fact that Seacole was being judged in a social context in which many whites in England held negative opinions of black and mixed race West Indians. In December 1849, Fraser’s Magazine published Carlyle’s “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question.” In it, Carlyle characterizes blacks in West India as drunk and indolent because, as Carlyle sees it, they demand to be compensated for their labor and refuse to work simply for the benefit of white landowners. Carlyle deploys the condition of the (white) poor in England as a contrast to the condition of former slaves in the West Indies. England, he observes, cannot provide for its citizens, but, he notes sarcastically, “how pleasant to have always this fact to fall
back upon: Our beautiful Black darlings are at last happy” (4). Carlyle goes on to advocate for the continuation of the “beneficial” parts of slavery - it is his contention that slavery provides a structure that encourages the virtues of industriousness - and recommends that black West Indians follow the advice of their “betters” (i.e. white people). John Stuart Mill’s then anonymous response to Carlyle, printed in Fraser’s Magazine in 1850, demonstrates that there was a lack of consensus among English intellectuals on matters of race and the legacy of slavery. Mill’s essay instigated an ideological debate not only between Carlyle and himself, but also within English society more broadly. In its 1850 reprint, the title of Carlyle’s essay was changed to the vitriolic and offensive “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question.” Vanessa D. Dickerson argues that this change in title reflected a shift in public opinion away from the pro-abolition sentiments of the first half of the 1800s, and toward what Catherine Hall has called the “more overt racism” of the latter half of the century (qtd. in Dark Victorians 94). Lorimer calls this “a new and aggressively racist movement” (12), and “a change from the humanitarian response of the early nineteenth century to the racialism of the imperialist era at the close of the Victorian age” (13). What is at stake in these debates, among other things, is what it means to be a white or black body within the British Empire. This concern is frequently worked through in white representations of the behaviors and bodies of people of color. These representations often boil black identity down to stereotypes and other forms of essentialized identity that serve racist ideologies. Anthony Pinn claims that “This discursive black body, then, is perceived as having no positive relationship to intelligence, civil liberties, privileged social spaces, and so on” (6).

15 Patrick Brantlinger, in “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” argues that this shift was a “transition from the altruism of the antislavery movement to the cynicism of empire building” (166).
The circulation of these stereotypes, then, has the effect not only of formulating a problematic, essentialized black identity, but also of limiting an individual’s ability to move through space - both figuratively and literally.

Seacole’s narrative engages with these negative perceptions of blackness, while also confronting adverse and detrimental white assumptions about black women. Scholarly discussions of how black women’s bodies are figured in the British Empire have outlined the problematics of representations that essentialize and confine. In *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space* (1999), Radhika Mohanram links race to mobility or a lack there of, arguing, “Racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relationships between various space and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races” (3). She argues:

There is an embodiment of blackness with a simultaneous disembodiment of whiteness, a disembodiment accompanied by two other tropes at the level of discourse. First, whiteness has the ability to move: second, the ability to move results in the unmarking of the body. In contrast, blackness is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing. (3-4)

In this articulation, movement is freedom - freedom to reposition one’s body in space as well as freedom to elude the confines of racial identification. Whiteness may be shrugged off while blackness is totalizing and permanent. In setting up this dichotomy of embodiment and disembodiment, Mohanram identifies and critiques an historical way of thinking about race that flattens and essentializes certain bodies. She takes up this discussion again in *Imperial White:*
Race, Diaspora, and the British Empire (2007), arguing that black women “took on the burden of embodiment in the long nineteenth century” (85).\textsuperscript{16} Or, as Guillermina de Ferrari’s claims, “The Other, however, is always her body” (11).

The positioning of black women as total embodiment goes hand-in-hand with the hypersexualization of their bodies. This corporeal formation is as reductive as it is totalizing. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century, this embodiment is concretized by scientific discourse. Hershini Bhana Young observes this phenomenon: “Early medical discourse labeled the black woman’s sexuality as deviant, claiming that her innate deviancy was further signaled externally by ‘primitive’ genitalia and a condition known as steatopygia - large protruding buttocks” (9). It is not just that nineteenth-century racial discourse situated black women wholly within their bodies, it is also that discourses of science othered and exoticized that body.

Perhaps the most famous example of the medicalized and objectified black female body is the case of Saartjie Baartman, known in the nineteenth century as the Hottentot Venus. Baartman was born in South Africa in 1789, and in 1809 traveled to England, where she was put on display for paying crowds of gawking, white Europeans.\textsuperscript{17} In these exhibitions, Baartman is meant to be displayed as nothing but the body, the symbol of an essentialized notion of the

\textsuperscript{16} She posits that both black and white women exist culturally “as the body” (85), but she argues that white women’s representation of embodiment relies on a reading of those white bodies as almost or nearly black: “Their [white women’s] whiteness was retroactively conferred upon them due to their heterosexual relationships with white men, not because they were white” (25). Though Mohanram’s focus in this text is on the vulnerability of white women’s bodies, that vulnerability - to contamination and degeneration - relies on black women’s bodies already being read by white society as corrupted by deviant sexuality.

\textsuperscript{17} For a detailed account of Baartman’s life, see Rachel Holmes’s African Queen: The Real Life of the Hottentot Venus, and Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully’s Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography.
African woman. In these conditions, she becomes subject to the disciplinary eye of white male scientific discourse. Anne McClintock observes:

In 1810, the exhibition of the African woman Saartjie Baartman became the paradigm for the invention of the female body as an anachronism. The supposedly excessive genitalia of this woman (represented as they were as an excess of clitoral visibility in the figure of the “Hottentot apron”) were overexposed and pathologized before the disciplinary gaze of male medical science and a voyeuristic public. (42)

Through the rhetoric of “male medical science,” Baartman’s body is “pathologized.” Science is the discourse through which black women are reduced to the body and to the sex. Mohanram further explores the function of this medical and scientific discourse, positing that in European eyes, the black body was figured as a “primitive savage and black spaces as primordial, needing the intervention of Western medicine and law to aid in the evolutionary process” (Imperial White 81). Taken together, McClintock and Mohanran’s analyses imbue medical and scientific discourses with the power to reduce, restrict, and rewrite black women’s identity, specifically their sexual identity. Sander L. Gilman outlines how these sexualized, anatomized bodies were figured in the nineteenth century as the “antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty” (212). What Gilman, McClintock, Young, and Mohanram are describing is a series of reductions that result in sweeping, dehumanizing generalizations. In medical discourse, black women are reduced to their bodies. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century, that field of bodies is sometimes reduced to one representative body - Saartjie Baartman. Baartman’s body in turn is reduced, publically and medically, to her genitalia. These literally disembodied parts - they were,
horrifically, removed from her body after her death - come to stand in for all black women’s sexuality; and, because black women are figured as “just” sexualized bodies, that sexuality becomes representative - in white, male, medical discourse - of all black women. As Gilman argues, “Sarah Bartmann’s sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks, serve as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century” (216).

Seacole resists the essentializing of black women’s identity with the hybrid self-characterization produced in her autobiography. Scholars have repeatedly made note of the layers in Seacole’s text, also claiming that the multiplicity of the identity she constructs within its pages is self-conscious and deliberate - a performance. Angelia Poon, for example, has argued that Seacole’s self-representation “puts strain on the idea of Englishness as foreclosed essence, demonstrating through performance and reiteration its irreducibly performative nature as discourse” (501). Rhonda Frederick echoes Poon’s claim that identity is not a “foreclosed essence,” asserting that the overlapping identity markers Seacole wears - or “manipulates,” as Frederick suggests - “articulate a Jamaican, Creole, female subjectivity,” a “self-representation” that “neither reduces contradictions nor coheres into a ‘Totality’” (494). What these and other critical perspectives hold in common is a belief that Seacole’s autobiography is a deliberate act of self-fashioning that demonstrates the multivalence of her identity. Evelyn O’Callaghan articulates the complexity of this performance of self most clearly, stating that the:

Narrative persona created in this work is itself a fascinatingly hybrid and ambivalent, multilayered text, incorporating tensions and even contradictions: one minute a strong-willed feminist, the next coyly feminine; a proud West Indian creole who unashamedly
calls England “home”; outspoken about her racial pride yet ready to use racial stereotypes for “inferior” blacks; endorsing empire yet subtly critiquing English manners and mean spiritedness. (167)

Seacole’s autobiography captures the ambiguity of creole identity, particularly for a woman of black and white parentage, but does so actively and with confidence. Evelyn J. Hawthorne aligns herself with this perspective, characterizing the autobiography as a technology of resistance and analysis that allows Seacole “to author herself and to critique and unsettle Victorian ideology” (310). She goes on to argue that the primary ideology that is disrupted is the mythos of race. As these readings of Seacole’s work suggest, the autobiography interacts with a range of identity markers and makes use of each of them in the service of her self-fashioning.

It is in this context that Seacole’s public recuperation of medical knowledge and medical discourse as a means of exerting control over the movement of her body, as well as perceptions of her body, becomes even more radical. In a British Victorian world where black women’s bodies sometimes circulated in hypersexualized displays of fetishism, Seacole’s published account of her travels are all the more significant. The title of her autobiography, particularly her “Wonderful Adventures,” suggests agency as well as movement. These are adventures taken by choice and, largely, on her terms. Against the backdrop of a reductive and oversexualized conceptualization of black women, Seacole presents an opposing, individualized account of a nineteenth-century woman of African descent that challenges these narratives of supposed

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18 Bernard McKenna makes a related argument in “‘Fancies of Exclusive Possession’: Validation and Dissociation in Mary Seacole’s England and Caribbean.” McKenna discusses how Seacole’s writing “defies English bias against the intellectual abilities of other races and cultures” (222), and how this act of defiance results in a critique of English cultural hegemony.
degeneracy. By taking back the discourse of science, Seacole counters the “central image” of black femininity. Her autobiography actively resists essentializing, in part, by reversing these racial tropes. In her narrative, it is the black woman’s body that moves while white bodies, weighted down with illness and injury (as is the case during her experiences in Panama and Crimea), are often stationary. Her medical knowledge and skill upsets the dominant bifurcation of white and black, mind and body.

Seacole complicates dominant racial discourses by highlighting her lifelong history of scientific knowledge, posing her intellect as one of her defining qualities. Born Mary Jane Grant in 1805 in Kingston, Jamaica to a Jamaican creole mother and a Scottish father, Seacole learned much of her medical knowledge from her mother who kept a boarding house and was, “like very many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress.” In the first pages of her autobiography, she traces her development as a medical practitioner from her childhood onward, locating the beginnings of her doctoring impulses in imitation: “I was very young when I began to make use of the little knowledge I had acquired from watching my mother, upon a great sufferer - my doll.” She later graduates to “treating” cats and dogs, and then begins to test her “simples and essences” on herself (2-3). Seacole also recalls, beginning at the age of twelve, helping her mother treat patients. Her thirst for knowledge was lifelong, and was, perhaps, her most dominant characteristic. The details Seacole includes in her description of her childhood build the scaffolding for the rest of her narrative, particularly with respect to her role as a caregiver.

Seacole locates the source of her own medical knowledge in her mother, and characterizes her mother’s abilities as a reflection of her creoleness: “My mother...was, like very
many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress...It was very natural that I should inherit her
tastes; and so I had from an early youth a yearning for medical knowledge and practice which
has never deserted me” (2). Here, Seacole’s doctoring abilities are rooted in her creole identity.
At the same time, she separates the body of medical knowledge practiced by creoles from the
individual and assembles it concretely and independently, calling it “Creole medicinal art” (5).
Taking care of the sick, then, is something West Indian creoles can do because they are creole. It
is also something they do to be creole. By labeling this practice “Creole medicinal art,” Seacole
elevates it to the level of culture. This suggests that certain qualities - the remedies offered, the
efficacy of those remedies, and/or the particular ailments treated - differentiate these doctoring
and nursing skills from an English way of practicing medicine.

Seacole’s recounting of her early years establishes the basis of her scientific identity. She
fills out her self-depiction with, and traces its development through stories from her time in
Panama. In 1850, Seacole’s brother left Jamaica for Panama, and in 1851/52, she joined him in
Cruces to help with the hotel he had established there. The accounts of her time in Panama
demonstrate her skill as a nurse, highlight her intellectual drive, and introduce her skill at
negotiating the different value systems of varying locales and identity groups. She recalls
numerous experiences had during a cholera outbreak in Cruces, but the following, describing her
inability to save a cholera-stricken child, is, perhaps, the most powerful:

And, meanwhile, I sat before the flickering fire, with my last patient in my lap—a poor,
little, brown-faced orphan infant, scarce a year old, was dying in my arms, and I was
powerless to save it. It may seem strange, but it is a fact, that I thought more of that little
child than I did of the men who were struggling for their lives, and prayed very earnestly and solemnly to God to spare it. But it did not please Him to grant my prayer, and towards morning the wee spirit left this sinful world for the home above it had so lately left, and what was mortal of the little infant lay dead in my arms. Then it was that I began to think—how the idea first arose in my mind I can hardly say—that, if it were possible to take this little child and examine it, I should learn more of the terrible disease which was sparing neither young nor old, and should know better how to do battle with it. I was not afraid to use my baby patient thus. I knew its fled spirit would not reproach me, for I had done all I could for it in life—had shed tears over it, and prayed for it. (29-30)

Here, Seacole puts religious belief in conversation with scientific experimentation. Death is figured as the convergence of these two discourses, and those discourses circulate around this moment in varying degrees of importance. Certain moments call for the application of science, others for an appeal to religion. She does not reject religion - she prays for the life of the dying infant - but only resorts to its use when science has failed. When neither medical or spiritual appeals can save the child, she returns to science as a way of making sense of this child’s death by using it as a way to potentially save other patients. Seacole can deploy both knowledge and skill sets - doctoring and praying - and knows when and to what degree medicine or religion should be applied. In this way, she shows herself to be an expert navigator of different social, cultural, and political contexts.

In this case, the “failure” of science only provides an opportunity to increase her knowledge and effectiveness as a nurse. Seacole follows the man tasked with burying the child
and bribes him so that she might have the opportunity to perform an autopsy and better understand the disease that is killing so many. It is her:

first and last *post mortem* examination. It seems a strange deed to accomplish, and I am sure I could not wield the scalpel or the substitute I then used now, but at that time the excitement had strung my mind up to a high pitch of courage and determination; and perhaps the daily, almost hourly, scenes of death had made me somewhat callous. I need not linger on this scene, nor give the readers the results of my operation; although novel to me, and decidedly useful, they were what every medical man well knows. (30)

Seacole fully acknowledges the taboo of the autopsy; she and the man she bribed “stole back into Cruces like guilty things” (31). She expresses, as well, a certain degree of awe at her own ability to carry out the act. The transgression, then, registers on both societal and personal levels. However, she goes on to say that what she learns from this child’s body aids her in her treatment of other patients, and this seems to alleviate any qualms she may have had about the procedure. In this instance, the knowledge gained is greater than the personal cost. This section of the autobiography makes clear that Seacole was adept at navigating the conflicted territory between societal mores concerning death and religion, and the demands of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, for Seacole, these negotiations are personal as well as public; she struggles not only with what the community might think but also what *she* thinks. In this way, she places herself within *and* without the community in which she lives. She ascribes to some of its values and participates in some of its practices, but she also bends those values and practices in her own pursuit of knowledge.
Managing the demands of science and religion appear just a few pages later, but in this case Seacole firmly places herself outside of the community. Here, the tensions between the two ways of knowing and understanding the world are decidedly not a personal conflict for Seacole. In the midst of the epidemic, she expresses disgust (partly in racialized terms) at those who would rely entirely on the mercy of God to cure them when there is medical recourse available: “I found the miserable household in terrible alarm, and yet confining their exertions to praying to a coarse black priest in a black surplice….I had the greatest difficulty to rout the stupid priest and his as stupid worshippers, and do what I could for the sufferer” (33). This episode again puts Seacole at odds with the community’s approaches to taking care of the sick and managing disease. Unlike the trepidation she expresses with the child, however, Seacole gives no consideration to religious practices and approaches in this situation. Here, she is perfectly comfortable opposing religious traditions. This example demonstrates that Seacole has the knowledge to heal the sick. It also demonstrates her understanding of when, where, and to what degree she can openly exert her authority when it comes to treating disease and illness. Her actions are not dictated wholly by science or by religion, but by the shifting prioritization of one or the other as the situation calls for them. In addition to highlighting her medical knowledge, these recollections also bring to the fore her social and cultural knowledge.

Her role as a caregiver draws attention to her medical knowledge and skill, but these episodes also bring bodies - bodies of the sick and dying - to the center of the narrative. It is important to note, however, that these are other bodies, not Seacole’s. Corporeality is a significant theme throughout her autobiography. Individuals in the throes of cholera are wholly
within their bodies; sickness reduces their existence to the realm of the utterly physical. In addition, illness renders them immobile. Seacole, meanwhile, moves through these bodies dispensing her medical wisdom. She is mobile while they are stationary, logical and considered while they are at the whims of their physical needs and bodily responses. This does not mean, however, that Seacole’s own body completely disappears from her writing. On the contrary, on multiple occasions she points out how physically challenging and exhausting her work is. Additionally, toward the end of the epidemic, Seacole herself is stricken with cholera, though she claims that “the attack was a very mild one” (35), and her description of her own experience with the disease is short - little more than a paragraph. Ultimately, Seacole’s body has a place in the narrative, albeit a small one, but she is not just her body. Her descriptions of her own physicality resist the narrative of the “pathologized” black female body observed by McClintock and others.

In specific instances, when Seacole is acting as caregiver, the roles of embodied/disembodied figures of black and white women are, temporarily, reversed. In the narrative, her experiences with white women are generally negative. She particularly dislikes American women, especially Southerners who, Seacole says, “showed an instinctive repugnance against any one whose countenance claimed for her kindred with their slaves” (50). She further characterizes the white women she encounters as “as unpleasant specimens of the fair sex as one could well wish to avoid” (50). Yet when any one of these individuals falls ill, Seacole does not hesitate to provide medical care: “If any of them came to me sick and suffering (I say this out of simple justice to myself), I forgot everything, except that she was my sister, and it was my duty to help her” (50). In this passage, the separation between black and white bodies is bridged in
both a literal and figurative sense. In order to treat these women, Seacole must come into physical contact with their bodies. Figuratively, her choice of words here - “she was my sister” - is a rhetorical blurring of racial distinction. Here, all human beings are part of the same family. In this scenario, in which Seacole is the practitioner and the white woman is the patient, the figure of the embodied black woman recedes as the corporeality of the white woman is emphasized.

In addition to her own remembrances, Seacole bolsters the rhetorical strength of her scientific knowledge and healing powers with letters from soldiers and civilians she meets in Crimea. At the beginning of the section “My Work in the Crimea,” she includes several pages of correspondence received both during and after the war. These letters range from requests for food and drink to testimonials of her effectiveness as a nurse. The total effect of this list verges on overwhelming. She offers another letter just before the conclusion of her story as exemplary of the many others she has received. In this epistle dated June 16, 1856, a W.J. Tynan writes to “avail myself of the only opportunity which may occur for some time, to acknowledge my gratitude to you” (194). Tynan emphasizes that the depth of Seacole’s kindnesses to him and other soldiers were far beyond what could usually be expected. He wants to thank her, but claims he has “no language to do it suitably” (194). Her kindness exceeds the English language’s meaning-making capabilities. In the final paragraph of his letter, Tynan invokes the Queen, God, and empire as he praises Seacole:

I am sure when her most gracious Majesty the Queen shall have become acquainted with the service you have gratuitously rendered to so many of her brave soldiers, her generous
heart will thank you. For you have been an instrument in the hands of the Almighty to preserve many a gallant heart to the empire, to fight and win her battles, if ever again war may become a necessity. (194)

Here, Seacole’s actions are linked both to the will of God and the will of the British Empire. Tynan describes her as “an instrument” whose work has spiritual and political dimensions. While Seacole’s own deployment of religion reflects varying degrees of engagement with spirituality, Tynan’s characterization figures her as an essential and indispensable part of the “Almighty’s” intentions. Furthermore, he affixes Seacole to a chain of action engaged in the preservation of the British Empire. This is a more-than-tacit inclusion of Seacole as a member of the English nation state, the exceptional nature of her service rendering her a part of the larger body politic.

Seacole’s accounts of and testimonials concerning her medical triumphs in Panama, Crimea, and elsewhere place significant importance on her palliative capabilities. This is performed to such a degree that the reader cannot help but view these exploits as exceptional. Her superior knowledge and extraordinary devotion to her patients is the focus of these episodes. Collectively, these unparalleled exploits figure Seacole as atypical when compared to the general public, and these superlatives are particular to her character rather than to a particular gender, race, or nationality. She is an individual rather than a trope or stereotype. This is so much the case, in fact, that her actions are worthy of royal note. Her technique of self-fashioning in her autobiography mirror, to a degree, the tone of the many mentions she receives in the press post-Crimea. This suggests that the self-fashioning she engages in her autobiography is successful and persuasive.
In addition to emphasizing her medical skills, Seacole’s narrative disrupts a standard narrative for women of color in the nineteenth century by minimizing her sexuality and foregrounding her maternality. The degree of importance Seacole places on marriage is one such example of this. In 1836 she married Mr. Seacole; eight years later she was a widow. There is little information about her husband in her autobiography, though their short marriage seems to have been a happy one. Sarah Salih’s introduction to the 2005 edition of Seacole’s biography says that in Seacole’s will, he was described as the godson of Viscount Nelson. Little else about him appears in the text. Mentions of her marriage are equally brief and fairly ambivalent. In her description of how she came to be married, Seacole describes giving her consent somewhat grudgingly: “I went to my mother’s house, where I stayed...learning a great deal of Creole medicinal art, until I couldn’t find courage to say ‘no’ to a certain arrangement timidly proposed by Mr. Seacole, but married him” (5). Mr. Seacole’s timidity contrasts with Mrs. Seacole’s general self-assuredness. Perhaps the lack of “courage” she refers to here is meant to signal a marked change in her usual behavior that could be attributed to her desire to get married. As it stands, her account of her reaction to this proposal is, at best, ambiguous. This is not meant to suggest that through a reading of Seacole’s autobiography we might come to know the “truth” of her feelings about her marriage. What her text can and does show, however, is the way in which Seacole wanted to be perceived. The little attention she pays to her own marriage indicates that this experience does not factor significantly into the project of her autobiography.

However, Seacole does describe her husband’s death as “my first great trouble, and I felt it bitterly” (6). These recollections of her husband occupy only a few sentences of the narrative,
but in that space Seacole reports that she was devastated when she was widowed. What is most interesting here is not whether or not and to what degree Mrs. Seacole cared for her husband, but how she presents those feelings for her readers. Her self-representation in the text is generally proud, and while she often expresses humility concerning her accomplishments, she also frequently expresses satisfaction with her endeavors. She doesn’t shy away from describing her accomplishments and exceptional status, though the tenor of her autobiography is not self-aggrandizing. If her had narrative lingered over her marriage, the focus of her story might shift from her professional endeavors to her domestic situation, and potentially blunt the impact of her “Wonderful Adventures.” She chooses to maintain focus on her medical knowledge and exploits, a choice that emphasizes her intellect and deemphasizes her sexuality.

The only other mention of marriage (with respect to her own life) has a similar rhetorical function:

And here I may take the opportunity of explaining that it was from a confidence in my own powers, and not at all from necessity, that I remained an unprotected female. Indeed, I do not mind confessing to my reader, in a friendly confidential way, that one of the hardest struggles of my life in Kingston was to resist the pressing candidates for the late Mr. Seacole’s shoes. (8)

This is not an outright rejection of marriage on an institutional level; Seacole expresses her difficulty in turning down these proposals, suggesting that a part of her may have wanted to remarry. She addresses the reader as a friend, and this appeal seems to increase the authenticity of her statement. Seacole makes sure to inform the reader that she could have gotten married,
although she does not do so in order to call attention to her marriageability. Instead, this occasion highlights two things: the significance of choice and the power of education. Here, significance of choice refers to Seacole’s ability to be the sole administrator of her own fate. She has the option to remarry but chooses not to. While her education is not a formal one, it has supplied her with the skills and knowledge to support herself financially. What’s more, the benefits of this education go beyond the bounds of providing food, clothing, and shelter. Seacole is able to travel throughout Jamaica, Panama, England, and Crimea because of her occupation. Ultimately, her mentions of her marriage and later proposals function as evidence of her independence rather than her ability to attract men.

Seacole’s account of her time in Crimea also foregrounds her maternity. Her dominant role in the narrative is that of mother rather than wife - ironic considering she had no biological children. She earns her status as a mother figure by nursing and comforting the sick and wounded rather than through the physical act of sex. Her childlessness, then, serves to de-emphasize her sexuality. When she travels to Crimea, she frames her fondness for the soldiers there in maternal terms: “[I] grew fond of him - almost as fond as the poor lady his mother in England far away” (62). When she writes of soldiers coming to her to say goodbye before going to battle, she characterizes their interactions as those of a mother and son: “I used to think it was like having a large family of children ill with fever, and dreading to hear which one had passed away in the night” (152). Of another soldier she writes, “I grew to love [him] like a fond old-fashioned mother” (153). She does the same for her self-characterization, calling herself a “motherly yellow woman” (78), referring to her store as “Mother Seacole’s” (114) and herself as
Mother Seacole or “mother” (118, 124, 127, 139, 140, 142, 153). The narrative also includes multiple examples of soldiers calling her mother (84, 88, 119, 137, 157). In addition, she is commonly called “Mother” Seacole in the press post-Crimean War. In both her self-fashioning and in public perception, Mary Seacole is a mother figure.

She becomes this maternal figure in part through close association with English domestic culture. The text locates one of the sources of these maternal appellations in Seacole’s ability to provide small material comforts to soldiers on and off the battlefield. Specifically, it is pieces of English culture that she dispenses, and these bits of culture are associated in the narrative with the home, the family, and the mother. The text figures English culture alongside medical care as an important palliative measure in wartime. “Mother” Seacole provides both. In Chapter 14, Seacole devotes nine pages to what resembles a sales pitch for, or perhaps a justification of, her business in Crimea. She begins this section by relating an anecdote involving a pocket-handkerchief, or, rather, the lack of one. When Seacole discovers that a soldier has no handkerchief and no means to make another (having ripped up his last remaining shirt), she orders “a hundred dozen of these useful articles...and I sold them all to officers and men very speedily” (137-138). Seacole acknowledges that the goods she offers are small comforts, but she also argues for their importance: “Tell me, reader, can you fancy what the want of so simple a thing as a pocket-handkerchief is?” (137). The swiftness with which she manages to sell these handkerchiefs suggests the soldiers’ desire for these and other similar items.

19 Publications that refer to her as “Mother Seacole” include the May 30, 1857 edition of Punch, the August 1, 1857 edition of The Musical World, and the September 1857 edition of The Baptist Magazine and Literary Review.
Acting as one of the few purveyors of English goods - and as one of the few women - in Crimea, Seacole is transformed into a surrogate mother. Seacole argues for the positive effect the commodities she sells have on a soldier’s health and wellbeing:

That the officers were glad of me as a doctress and nurse may be easily understood. When a poor fellow lay sickening in his cheerless hut and sent down to me, he knew very well that I should not ride up in answer to his message empty-handed. And although I did not hesitate to charge him with the value of the necessaries I took him, still he was thankful enough to be able to *purchase* them. When we lie ill at home surrounded with comfort, we never think of feeling any special gratitude for the sick-room delicacies which we accept as a consequence of our illness. (125-126)

The geographical space of the war - the battlefield and the camps - is described as a place supposedly removed from the domestic sphere. As she circulates domestic materials in this space, Seacole inextricably links herself to domestic culture and, subsequently, to remembrances of home. In turn, these remembrances of home bring with them memories of the women existing within and constructing the sphere of the home - namely the mother. As she recalls the “privilege” of making and serving food to these men, Seacole remarks that each soldier “must have a mother, wife, or sister at home whom he missed, and that he must therefore be glad of some woman to take their place” (144). The text locates a source of the relief she provides - and, consequently, her maternality - in the domestic comforts she distributes. Seacole mentions wife, but the inclusion of mother and sister in this list of female caregivers highlights the nonsexual nature of the relationship she constructs between woman and soldier.
Seacole’s distribution of English goods also endows her with undeniable English character. Towards the end of her autobiography, Seacole offers the following observation which serves to strengthen her connection to Englishness:

I wonder if the people of other countries are as fond of carrying with them everywhere their home habits as the English. I think not. I think there was something purely and essentially English in the determination of the camp to spend the Christmas-day of 1855 after the good old “home” fashion. It showed itself weeks before the eventful day. In the dinner parties which were got up—in the orders sent to England—in the supplies which came out, and in the many applications made to the hostess of the British Hotel for plum-puddings and mince-pies. The demand for them, and the material necessary to manufacture them, was marvellous. (185)

Here, English culture is portable and, given the right materials, partially reproducible outside of England. What is distinctly English about this holiday celebration is not only the presence of English goods and food, or the desire to carry on in Crimea as if they were in England, but also the “determination” exhibited in making this possible. English culture is characterized in much the same fashion in *Cousin Stella*. Both texts emphasize that the desire to spread and replicate Englishness is as fundamental to the culture as is the food, the language, the dress, and the manners. To be English is to eat and celebrate as the English do, but it is also the motivation to bring English culture to other places in the hopes of recreating it. As an agent of this cultural circulation, and as someone who is able to describe Englishness and identify it when she sees it, Seacole associates herself intimately with British culture.
In the text, Seacole uses her maternality to position herself as an English person. In turn, her association with English culture renders her more maternal. Seacole’s business activities in Crimea - the wholesale purchase and subsequent small-scale resale of English commodities - are intertwined with her work as a doctress. In addition to providing medical remedies for the soldiers’ physical ailments, Seacole provides them with small comforts from home. She doesn’t shy away from her participation in these transactions. In fact, she addresses them directly while advocating for their importance. She expresses no shame at turning a profit: “And although I did not hesitate to charge him with the value of the necessaries I took him, still he was thankful enough to be able to purchase them” (125). Seacole argues that her participation in these activities casts her in the role of surrogate mother. She recalls bringing various English foodstuffs to the huts of various soldiers and their response to that service: “I tell you, reader, I have seen many a bold fellow’s eyes moisten at such a season, when a woman’s voice and a woman’s care have brought to their minds recollections of those happy English homes which some of them never saw again” (126-127). As the distributor of English goods, Seacole inevitably becomes associated with the English home. That association, in turn, casts her in the role of mother figure for many soldiers. Seacole asserts that the resulting popular moniker of “Mother” Seacole results from her activities as a sutler: “Then their calling me “mother” was not, I think, altogether unmeaning. I used to fancy that there was something homely in the word; and, reader, you cannot think how dear to them was the smallest thing that reminded them of home” (127). It is not just her medical care, then, that has value. The labor that yields some financial reward is also characterized as an essential contribution to the goals of British imperialism.
Perhaps the most overt way Seacole’s narrative counters nineteenth-century perceptions of women of mixed race is by directly attacking racist ideology. The most frequent targets of these attacks are white Americans, and her critiques of their racist assumptions are swift and witty. She gently critiques the words and actions of English people as well, but her responses to British comments about her race are of a slightly different tone. Seacole handles these situations in much the same way that she negotiates the varied expectations of science and religion during the cholera outbreak in Cruces. Specifically, she has a fine sense of when and how to respond to the racist responses she receives from the people she encounters in her travels. The tone of her reply is largely predicated on her opinion of the person to whom she is responding, and her opinion is largely predicated along lines of nationality. Considerations of her physical safety also seem to be in play in these episodes. Take, for example, her recollection of being taunted because of her skin color during her first visit to London:

Strangely enough, some of the most vivid of my recollections are the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion’s complexion. I am only a little brown—a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much; but my companion was very dark, and a fair (if I can apply the term to her) subject for their rude wit. She was hot-tempered, poor thing! and as there were no policemen to awe the boys and turn our servants’ heads in those days, our progress through the London streets was sometimes a rather chequered one. (4)

Considered in isolation, there doesn’t appear to be much to this anecdote other than mild irritation toward a few English boys and, perhaps, a desire to call attention to the relative
lightness of her skin as compared to that of woman beside her. The lack of any organized authority to turn to - the police, for example - suggests that her response to this taunting may have been muted out of concern for her safety and the safety of her companion. Placed within the context of the rest of Seacole’s autobiography, however, her presentation of this scene seems to mask a harder edge. She remarks that it is strange that her clearest memories of London would be racially charged, but given how she responds to other similar encounters with Americans, this doesn’t seem strange at all.

As the narrative progresses, her critiques of racism become more pointed. They also become increasingly focused on Americans. Her dislike of people from the United States is infused in her interactions with, and observations of, them. The first mention of Seacole’s opinions of Americans is critical but measured, similar in some ways to her description of the aforementioned scene in London:

My experience of travel had not failed to teach me that Americans (even from the Northern States) are always uncomfortable in the company of coloured people, and very often show this feeling in stronger ways than by sour looks and rude words. I think, if I have a little prejudice against our cousins across the Atlantic—and I do confess to a little—it is not unreasonable. I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related—and I am proud of the relationship—to those poor mortals whom you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns. And having this bond, and knowing what slavery is; having seen with my eyes and heard with my ears proof positive enough of its horrors—let others affect to doubt them if they will—is it
surprising that I should be somewhat impatient of the airs of superiority which many Americans have endeavoured to assume over me? (14)

Seacole calls attention to her status as a person of mixed race in her description of her skin color, which is “a few shades deeper brown” than, presumably, the white skin of her English readers. She casts herself in an intermediary role here, situating herself among white English people, people of African descent who still toiled in the bonds of slavery, and “our cousins across the Atlantic” - the Americans. In this configuration, Seacole positions herself within a larger Atlantic world comprised of white and black, free and enslaved, English and American. She most closely aligns herself with the English with the use of “our,” but suggests distance with her use of “you” when referring to England’s long and recent history in the global slave trade. This is another moment in the text where Seacole is both within and without. She traces relationships between and among different Atlantic populations, affirming her status as a person of color and as a Briton. At the same time, she makes clear that even as a Briton, the stain of slavery is not on her conscience but on the consciences of white English individuals. Because of this, Seacole can claim a moral authority that the English do not possess quite yet and that Americans most certainly do not have.

Seacole’s next critique of Americans even more clearly distinguishes her response to racist encounters with Brits from her responses to Americans in similar situations. While living in Cruces, Seacole attends a dinner with several Americans, one of whom makes a toast to her virtues, expressing disappointment, however, that she is “not wholly white,” and claiming, “if we
could bleach her by any means we would” (47). Seacole crafts a response that tempers the rage she feels internally, yet still manages to get the best of her dinner companions rhetorically:

“Gentlemen,—I return you my best thanks for your kindness in drinking my health. As for what I have done in Cruces, Providence evidently made me to be useful, and I can’t help it. But, I must say, that I don’t altogether appreciate your friend’s kind wishes with respect to my complexion. If it had been as dark as any nigger’s, I should have been just as happy and as useful, and as much respected by those whose respect I value; and as to his offer of bleaching me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without any thanks. As to the society which the process might gain me admission into, all I can say is, that, judging from the specimens I have met with here and elsewhere, I don’t think that I shall lose much by being excluded from it. So, gentlemen, I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners.” (48)

Seacole openly insults her dinner companions, but they only laugh at the speech, something Seacole attributes to her status as “a somewhat privileged person” (48). In other words, the American’s laughter is a response to her exceptional status as a nurse, a status that - to a degree - minimizes, in the eyes of white Americans, her blackness. Still, their laughter seems to indicate either a lack of basic understanding, or the depth and breadth of racist assumptions that don’t permit them to imagine that a black woman might insult them so directly. The confrontation may not be violent or aggressive, but Seacole’s speech is a biting critique of Americans and American culture. Her call for the “general reformation of American manners” goes beyond an indictment of decorum, implying that even if she were to be granted admittance into their society, she would
refuse it. Seacole is not just criticizing a few acts of impoliteness; she is critiquing the whole of American society.

Compare this response, then, to Seacole’s description of her encounter with racism in London. Her behavior in that situation seems relatively benign when compared to the verbal dressing-down she gives to the Americans in Panama. She describes her companion as “hot-tempered,” and a “poor thing” (4), but her reaction to the dinner speech suggests she sees the merit of a “hot-tempered” response. Perhaps Seacole calls her companion a “poor thing” because she can’t stop herself from speaking. This might account for their “chequered” journey through London streets. What all three of these examples demonstrate is Seacole’s desire and ability to engage with and critique discourses of racial superiority.

Seacole’s engagement with and comment on racist attitudes and actions associates her with English character, specifically by placing British attitudes at odds with American attitudes. Her distaste for Americans and the ways in which she engages with and undercuts their racism aligns her more closely with England. In her autobiography, white characters from the United States often provide the fodder for her critiques of more general assumptions about race. These figures also provide Seacole with the opportunity to set up the differences between Americans and Britons, and to attach herself to both the British perspective and Britons themselves.

Desiring to leave Panama and return to Jamaica, Seacole secures passage on an American steamer despite being advised to wait for an English ship. After boarding the ship, she is subject to interrogation from a crowd of white Americans. She is subjected to a barrage of racial slurs and insults, and her servant, Mary, is spit on by some American children. Seacole, exhausted,
tells the stewardess she is willing to spend the duration of the trip anywhere onboard, including the storeroom. The stewardess, however, refuses this request, and articulates a perceived difference between American and English attitudes towards people of African descent:

“There’s nowhere but the saloon, and you can’t expect to stay with the white people, that’s clear. Flesh and blood can stand a good deal of aggravation; but not that. If the Britishers is so took up with coloured people, that’s their business; but it won’t do here” (58). Seacole then reveals that “This last remark was in answer to an Englishman, whose advice to me was not to leave my seat for any of them” (58). Her sole champion on the boat is an English passenger, and British custom is invoked to act as a foil to American custom. Racism is not unique to the United States, and Seacole’s narrative says as much. However, her inclusion of this particular incident suggests a general divide between how people of color are figured in these societies. In this instance, British attitudes recognize Seacole’s personhood, her right to partake of certain services, and her right to exist in public spaces. Here, Seacole figures English opinion as aligning and allying with her point of view. That opinion is informed by her experiences as a mixed race woman and creole, and it is on this that she bases her critique of racial discourse. Her dissection of racist language incorporates her lived existence as a person of color. In addition, Seacole acknowledges that because she is lighter skinned than other people of African descent, and because she is a skilled medical practitioner and hotelier, she is in a unique position to publicly respond to racist discourse. Her retort to the American who suggests bleaching her skin, for example, is put into the context of her particular set of life circumstances. She calls herself “a somewhat privileged person” (48) as a means of explaining the lack of angry responses to her speech.
Within the autobiography, Seacole’s self-fashioning delineates a subject who moves and speaks freely. She does not simply absorb the insults hurled at her; she addresses them directly and undermines them with her sharp wit. This is not to suggest that other black or mixed race West Indian women were not also reacting to and pushing back against the racist discourse that circulated around their bodies. However, Seacole is, perhaps, the most visible and well-known British woman of color in England in the 1850s and 1860s. *Wonderful Adventures* is an example of self-fashioning that deliberately highlights specific aspects of her character in order to advertise herself as a good British subject. Taken together, her notoriety and her autobiography put Seacole in the unique position of participating in mainstream print discourse, and that unique position is largely of her own making.

Throughout the text, these negotiations of different identities - her within and without-ness - form the basis of and propel her narrative. The hybrid identity Seacole cultivates throughout the autobiography is enabled and constituted by the text’s focus on her scientific knowledge, maternal character, and critique of racist attitudes. These three major rhetorical moves rely on her assumption of multiple identity markers - British, English, Jamaican, creole, mixed race, and etc. At the same time, these strategies produce and reinforce Seacole’s inclusion in each of these groups. In the first chapter of her narrative, she constructs a nexus of personal and political affiliations. Seacole begins by claiming Kingston, Jamaica as her birthplace, describing herself as a “Creole,” and noting her father’s Scottish family. She has “good Scotch blood coursing in [her] veins” (1). Her mother is described as creole and “an admirable doctress” (2). After identifying her parentage, Seacole describes her desire to travel, with England as the
sought-after destination: “I was never weary of tracing upon an old map the route to England; and never followed with my gaze the stately ships homeward bound without longing to be in them, and see the blue hills of Jamaica fade into the distance” (3-4). Here, her longing to go to England is delineated in both a figurative - the map - and a literal - watching the ships - sense. In both instances, the trip Seacole envisions is one-way. When she describes the ships as “homeward bound,” she is referring to the ships’ country of origin, but in that description is the suggestion that Seacole herself is returning home. When she imagines herself on those ships, it is significant that she envisions herself watching Jamaica recede. Part of the allure of going to England, then, is that it means leaving Jamaica behind. She also refers, somewhat indirectly, to her race, describing herself as “only a little brown - a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much” (4). Already, in the first few pages of her autobiography, Seacole attaches herself to several different geographical and cultural conceptualizations of identity.

Her relationships with these different aspects of her identity are, however, ambiguous. At one point in the narrative, when discussing diseases contracted by visitors to the West Indies, Seacole describes the caring nature of the relationship between creole and English people, claiming that Nature is responsible for “instilling into the hearts of the Creoles an affection for English people and an anxiety for their welfare, which shows itself warmest when they are sick and suffering” (60). Here, Seacole draws a distinction between creole and English and the different roles they play in the space of the Caribbean. Further on in the autobiography, though, that distinction disappears. She titles a section of a chapter with “I Become an English Schoolmistress Abroad” (102) and calls those fighting in Crimea “our English soldiers”
When the fighting in Crimea ceases, Seacole describes Russian soldiers’ reactions to her presence as she rides into Tchernaya, saying that they were “very much delighted...to see an English woman. I wonder if they thought they all had my complexion” (188). These examples point to a variance in how Seacole fashions her relationship to England, and that variance seems, largely, to depend on geography. When in Jamaica she more often than not calls herself a creole. In Crimea, she is more likely to refer to herself as English or British. Additionally, the last example suggests that, for Seacole, the color of her skin has little bearing on her status as an Englishwoman. In other words, Englishness is not exclusive to whiteness. When and where Seacole adopts the appellation of English reflects a fluid relationship with this part of her textual persona.

Seacole’s status as a creole woman both enables and necessitates her shifting of identity. As a creole, she already exists in an interstitial space of both being and not being English. The ambiguity of this position allows her to move into and out of Englishness as well as other identity categories. Because she is not firmly fixed as either English or not English, she can choose to rhetorically situate herself as either, or both. It is this being and not being, however, that also requires her to signify across multiple identity categories. As a creole woman, her body is, in the eyes of the English, in need of discipline. Seacole cannot escape her creoleness entirely (nor, it seems, would she want to), but by demonstrating in her text the degree to which she embodies English maternity, she can “prove” her domestic fitness. Her status as a black creole woman burdens her with nineteenth-century English assumptions about black women’s sexuality, making her ability to rhetorically be creole, black, and English essential to pushing
back against a narrative of deviant sexuality and making her a public figure sympathetic to a white, English audience.

Mary Seacole’s autobiography is a carefully constructed collection of history, memory, and commentary. The resulting text contradicts conceptions of an essentialized identity for black and mixed race women. Seacole figures herself as doctor, as mother, and a vocal critic of mid-nineteenth-century racism. In doing so, she both reflects and constructs a hybrid identity that moves in and around a range of identity categories. This self-fashioning produces a subject who is both within and without these communities, a participant in and a critic or observer of the contexts in which she lives and works. Seacole’s skill in constructing and dispersing an image of herself that solidifies her importance to the British imperial project demonstrates the rhetorical persuasiveness of her textual representations.
Marriage, Slavery, and the Domestic Ideal

in Henrietta Jenkin’s Cousin Stella; or, Conflict

In 1834, Mrs. A. Carmichael published Five Years in Trinidad and St. Vincent: A View of the Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies. Carmichael’s nonfiction narrative, as its descriptive title suggests, covers considerable thematic ground, but much of her attention focuses on domestic concerns such as the state of the white West Indian household:

West India houses, open as they are necessarily on all sides to admit the air, cannot be secured in any way to prevent nightly intruders; and I speak from experience, when I say that I envied the poorest cottager in England, who could fasten his door and windows, and call his little home his castle, while every night in the West Indies, you feel that you cannot secure your house; and one half the night is frequently passed in listening, rising out of bed, and ascertaining whether or not all is quiet. (57-58)

What is particularly striking about this description is that Carmichael doesn’t attribute the habit of sleeping in unsecured dwellings to a defect in creole character; she explicitly states that these houses are open out of necessity - a necessary evil. The climate requires an open, unsecured house; the inhabitants of that house are only responding to the realities of an adverse environment. Throughout the text, Carmichael acknowledges how her experiences in the West Indies and her observation of West Indians challenge the assumptions she had made of creoles and creole life. She admits that the general English impression of white West Indians - “a casual observer generally will conclude all creoles to be lazy, luxurious, ignorant, proud, and even
deficient in feeling” (53) - is an incorrect one. After two years of living in the Caribbean, she believes that the difference in security between the home of a well-to-do white West Indian plantation owner and that of “the poorest cottager in England” is a difference born out of necessity. The contrast can’t be measured in terms of apathy, lack of civility, or lack of education. Instead, it reflects the realities of living in England’s West Indian colonies.

Carmichael’s sketch of these homes suggests two things about the domestic situation of white creoles. First, it links bodily safety and security with domestic space - the home. Second, it characterizes a difference between English and colonial homes not wholly as a failure of cultural reconstruction on the part of white West Indians, but rather as a common sense practice in the face of a Caribbean climate. A “brick-by-brick” reconstruction of an English home in tropical environs is, from Carmichael’s perspective, impractical. This is not to say that she views West Indian homes positively, or that she dismisses concerns about the physical safety of the house’s residents. On the contrary, the passage quoted above is bookended by two paragraphs about the welfare of white bodies in this colonial context. In these paragraphs, Carmichael laments what she considers a dangerous imbalance between the white and black population on a typical plantation. She expresses particular concern for the wife of the planter, as she and her children are “surrounded on all sides by negroes, she knows that she has no means of escape, and that she and her family are left entirely in their power” (57). Again, Carmichael frames the situation as a reality of living in the British Caribbean rather than a choice that reveals white creoles’ cultural failings. This small section of Carmichael’s writing demonstrates ways of thinking about life in the West Indies that are complicated and layered. An unsecured home is both a necessity and a
constant source of anxiety, and this complexity is not easy - perhaps not even possible - to resolve. Carmichael’s writing suggests that for whites, the perception of vulnerability is inherent to life in the Caribbean colonies. Her focus on the woman of the home genders this vulnerability, making it a particularly female concern.

In reality, of course, enslaved laborers are those most vulnerable to physical violence on West Indian plantations. The reforms to Jamaican slave law enacted in 1816 acknowledged the range and frequency of violence slaves endured. Mutilation of slaves, for example, was so common that the law outlined a twelve month punishment for those who mutilated an enslaved person, including the provision that if an individual was mutilated to an “atrocious” degree, the court could grant that person their freedom. Laws that limited the number of lashes that could be administered at one time (ten) or during the course of one day (thirty-nine), indicate that many enslaved people were regularly subject to repeated, sustained floggings. Ten lashes is, obviously, not a small number, and its reduction from an even greater number demonstrates just how brutal - even deadly - this form of punishment was. Sexual violence against enslaved women and girls is also addressed, the new laws declaring that rape is an offense punishable by death. While this law might suggest that sexual assault was taken seriously, one has to wonder what the burden of proof would have to be in order for a white man to be convicted of raping an enslaved woman. Furthermore, this law is accompanied by another that declares the rape of a female child under

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20 For a discussion of “physical coercion” used as a labor incentive against enslaved people, see B.W. Higman’s Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807-1834. For a discussion of sexual assault on enslaved women see John Smolenski and Thomas J. Humphrey’s Early American Studies: New World Orders: Violence, Sanction, and Authority in the Colonial Americas. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine’s More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas includes a more general account of violence against enslaved women. For contemporary accounts of corporal punishment in nineteenth-century Jamaica, see Thomas Cooper’s Facts Illustrative of the Condition of the Negro Slaves in Jamaica, Volume 10.
the age of ten a felony. That this particular act needed to be explicitly condemned by law indicates, perhaps, how frequently enslaved female children were raped. More broadly, it indicates just how vulnerable enslaved bodies, particularly the bodies of women and girls, were. For Carmichael, though, as for other white writers, violence perpetrated by whites and visited upon people of African descent is frequently normalized, often framed as a “necessity” within the system. Whites living in the colony and the metropole clung to the misperception of their own vulnerability, and it frequently appears and reappears in both the fiction and nonfiction writing about the Caribbean. Particularly, this anxiety centers around white, female bodies.

Carmichael’s unsecured West Indian home, threatened by intrusion, is analogous to how British West Indians viewed the white creole woman’s body. Both were susceptible to corruption by external forces and existed in a social context of heightened anxiety over the safety and security of these bodies. The sexual overtones of the concern for white women’s bodies in colonial spaces are suggested by the West Indian home’s vulnerability to penetration, and this fear - of sexual assault as well as consensual sex between persons of different races - is a recurring theme in novels set in the Caribbean and in novels with Caribbean-born characters. In the works of Carmichael and other nineteenth-century writers, West Indian domestic spaces and the white creole woman signify similarly complex ways of being in colonial contexts. On the one hand, the physical and moral integrity of the home and the female body were essential to the sustained existence of white creole culture. On the other hand, both figures - the home and the

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21 This includes, of course, *Cousin Stella*, *Jane Eyre*, and the works of Jean Rhys, as well as other, lesser-known texts like *Constance Mordaunt; or, Life in the Western Archipelago* (1862) by E.J.W. In these novels, the racial backgrounds of creole women of European descent are often highly scrutinized. The suspicions roused in English characters concerning creole women’s parentage in these narratives call into question the moral goodness - even the sanity - of these creole characters.
female body - were susceptible to moral and physical compromise. English domesticity and idealized English femininity were always at risk in the West Indies. In other words, the success of quasi-English culture in the colonial Caribbean depended on two figures who were, by their very existence there, always potentially corrupted or corruptible.

Henrietta Camilla Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella* (1859) takes up this fantasy of vulnerability, but revises the narrative. While Carmichael’s text presents white susceptibility to violence as constant and pervasive, a consequence of life in a locale sustained by enslaved labor, Jenkin frames it as a threat that is played out only in moments of great crisis - crisis originating from outside the colonial sphere. But, like Carmichael’s text, *Cousin Stella* delineates a mutually constitutive relationship between the security of white women’s bodies and the domestic sphere.

The role creole women and domesticity play in the practice and perpetuation of culture in the West Indies is acknowledged in writing from both the colony and the metropole, particularly in women’s writing and the domestic novel especially. What West Indian novelists like Jenkin offer are versions of white creole women that differ from representations in Victorian novels written by English women. In English fiction, the creole woman is a less fully-realized subject than white English protagonists. The most famous and widely-discussed creole woman in Victorian British literature is Jane Eyre’s Bertha Mason, depicted in Charlotte Brontë’s novel as insane, savage, and animalistic. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan

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22 In addition to Carmichael’s *Five Years in Trinidad and St. Vincent* and Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella*, Theodora Elizabeth Lynch’s fiction and nonfiction writing also depicts the white creole woman as vital to the preservation of both West Indian and English culture. Maria Nugent’s *Lady Nugent’s Journal*, Mrs. Lanaghan’s *Antigua and the Antiguans* both devote considerable time to describing the qualities and abilities of white creole women, commenting on their speaking habits, eating habits, housekeeping skills, physical appearance, and education, judging each according to English standards.
Gubar’s influential discussions of Bertha figure her as “[Jane’s] secret self” (348), an “avatar of Jane (360), “Jane’s truest and darkest double (360), and a “raging specter” (368). Gilbert and Gubar imagine a creole woman whose primary function is to mirror an English protagonist. Her entire textual existence, in fact, depends upon the existence of that English woman. Gilbert and Gubar’s assertion that Brontë creates a character who embodies English public opinions about West Indian creoles is not particularly controversial. The overarching critical view in which this analysis participates, however, has been interrogated, perhaps most famously by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak’s response to this view figures Bertha as “a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism” (247), and reads Bertha’s character as a dehumanized “Other” figure who serves only to reaffirm Jane’s humanity. This acknowledgement of Bertha’s peripheralization and dehumanization offers the possibility of a broader and more complex critical view of the fictionalized creole woman and what that means for discussions of how Englishness was imagined in the nineteenth century. She is an object whose body functions as a barometer for the moral integrity and authority of English culture. In Jenkin’s novel, however, these women are not merely case studies for the success of English domestication abroad, but active interpreters and creators of domestic culture in Jamaica. The white creole woman is not a tabula rasa on which English culture experiments or tests its powers of domestication, nor is she a mere conduit through which that culture travels to the colonies. She is subject not object, more active than passive. The title character of Jenkin’s novel, Stella, does not gain moral authority by adhering to English cultural norms; rather, her expressions of that culture are imbued with

23 Jean Rhys’s reimagining of the Bertha Mason character in Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) is a twentieth-century example of shifting a female creole character from this mirroring role to the center of the text.
authority because she already has moral character. Jenkin’s characterization of Stella critiques existing English domestic ideals and offers alternatives to those paradigms.

Sue Thomas describes *Cousin Stella* as “the first Caribbean reworking of *Jane Eyre*... an analogue or parallel text” (104). Thomas argues that “Stella Joddrell, in spite of her white Creole and Spanish lineage and her descent from a family in which women earn livings as dancers, embodies an English middle-class Christian domestic ideal” (125). Stella does, indeed, embody many of these traits, but Jenkin also critiques these domestic models. Perhaps Thomas comes to this conclusion about Stella via an imagining of Victorian novels that places canonical works (like *Jane Eyre*) at the center, while pushing works like Jenkin’s to the periphery. In this configuration, *Cousin Stella* wants to be like *Jane Eyre* in the same fashion that, from an English perspective, white creole women want to be like white English women. Certainly, Stella strives to adhere to the rules and assumptions of English domesticity, but the novel’s critique of those rules and assumptions is too pointed to make “ideal” a satisfying description of the protagonist’s character. The figure of Stella Joddrell embodies some of these ideal characteristics, but rejects others by choosing, in some situations, what Jenkin represents in the novel as West Indian ways of doing things.

Most critical conversations about the relationship between domestic culture and the creole woman analyze texts that consider these subjects from an English point of view, texts that position these characters as outsiders, interlopers, or curiosities. Creole women are compared to ideals of femininity and domesticity that set typical Englishness as the standard. Critical conversations, including work by Gilbert and Gubar, Carol Barash, and Carolyn Vellenga
Berman, are essential to understanding how English people in the metropole imagined creole life, how they conceived of the relationship between their homes and the homes of their compatriots in the Caribbean (if they did indeed consider those men and women their fellow citizens), and the role the white creole woman’s body played in evaluating the moral fitness of both English and West Indian society. This, however, is only part of the story. By focusing on a text that typifies the British Victorian novel but is written by a white creole woman who places a white creole woman at the center of the narrative, we can consider how these imaginings were envisioned from the other side of the Atlantic. Doing so reveals a West Indian text engaged in complex considerations of national and gendered identity. English and West Indian novels place particular importance on the figure of the white creole woman and express trepidation about her ability to maintain her moral character. What makes the representations of these things in novels like Jenkin’s different from those written by English women is the metric by which these characters are evaluated. In *Cousin Stella*, that metric is critiqued and revised.

Prior to the nineteenth century, female creole characters are represented as threats to Englishness. Barash describes the creole woman’s depiction in eighteenth-century novels and nonfiction writing as “brutally, almost sexually, violent.” These characters are “the most mysterious and most potentially damning members of the Jamaican society constructed in early eighteenth-century narrative” (424). Barash’s argument notes the cultural significance of female creole characters and the power they hold with their ability to corrupt and disrupt Englishness. In nineteenth-century novels, these characters still represent a threat, but they are not entirely irredeemable. In these texts the creole body is marked by its vulnerability, particularly to sexual
and cultural corruption, but this body might be recovered by adhering to certain domestic norms. Berman draws attention to this attitude in the nineteenth-century British novel, noting that, “the Creole woman represented the promise - as well as the limitations - of domestication” (188). Berman’s focus here is on female creole characters in novels written by English authors. For these writers, the “limitations of domestication” are a moral failing, a sign of the corrupting colonial influence on English culture, particularly the influence of slavery, a practice that threatens to undermine the strength and stability of English national identity.

Concern over the vulnerability of white women’s bodies is not unique to the Caribbean. *Cousin Stella* is set in the 1820s and 30s, but was written mid-century, some years after emancipation (1834) and the end of the transitional apprenticeship period (1838). As the profitability of plantations in the West Indies declined, many English whites shifted their attention to other parts of the expanding British Empire for professional advancement and financial gain. In 1859, the year of *Cousin Stella*’s publication, the colonial context signified, for many Britons, India. Though not entirely analogous to endeavors of empire in the Caribbean, British forays into India in the nineteenth century produced a similar set of concerns. The English woman’s body continued to be an important marker of English imperial success. Women were the primary transporters and creators of English domesticity abroad, and success in the recreation of the home and social life of the metropole corresponded to the strength of English influence. In addition, women’s bodies were thought to be vulnerable to sexual “threats” from Indian men. Safeguarding the sexual “integrity” of white English women in India was, for English men, a task that helped ensure the integrity of Englishness itself. In these ways, the
symbol of the white English woman functioned similarly in domestic and sexual contexts in both India and places like Jamaica.

Radhika Mohanram takes up these concerns in her discussion of the figure of the white woman in colonial India:

[White women’s] sexuality became a matter of tremendous concern for men, a matter to be policed because she could dilute the ethnic/racial group...Thus, contamination was at the very heart, the very core of white Britishness. Yes, the British woman’s body and her whiteness were utterly problematic, so vexing and unreliable...Her whiteness could so easily be muddied; her body was so flimsy it could easily produce and lapse into a blackness as well. (*Imperial White* 34)

Mohanram draws connections among race, sexuality, and gender that emphasize the importance of the sexual regulation of women’s bodies. Despite possessing so much power, these bodies are also fragile, “vexing and unreliable.” White women in India, like white creole women in the West Indies, are imagined as the gatekeepers of English culture, the paper-thin barriers between civility and depravity. The integrity and purity of nineteenth-century British identity rises and falls on the ability of these women to safeguard their sexuality.

Jenny Sharpe also observes the significance of purity in relation to representations of white women’s bodies in an Indian context. She highlights how an attack on imperial authority is often translated into an attack on white womanhood:

During the 1857 revolt, the idea of rebellion was so closely imbricated with the violation of English womanhood that the Mutiny was remembered as a barbaric attack on innocent
white women. Yet Magistrates commissioned to investigate the so-called eyewitness reports could find no evidence to substantiate the rumors of rebels raping, torturing, and mutilating English women. (2)

Both Sharpe and Mohanram emphasize the fictive nature of this imagined sexual violence, while also acknowledging the prevalence and power of these fantasies. Their observation of the perception of violent threats against white women in India can be similarly observed in texts from colonial West India. Sharpe goes on to argue that “English womanhood emerge[s] as an important cultural signifier for articulating a colonial hierarchy of race” (4). In the novels of the British Caribbean of the nineteenth century, we see the white creole woman performing a similar function. Texts like Jenkin’s also focus on the body of the white woman, shifting the setting from India to Jamaica and foregrounding the importance of domestic culture in creating and sustaining the collective abstraction of white female racial purity.

_Cousin Stella_ invokes many of the standard conventions of the mid-nineteenth-century domestic English novel. It was published in three volumes and its plot revolves around the romantic and familial concerns of its female protagonist. Although Jenkin, championed by Elizabeth Gaskell and mentor to British writer Vernon Lee, was a figure of at least some note in nineteenth-century literary circles, _Cousin Stella_ received cursory notice in the periodicals of the time, though it was published in several editions throughout the 1850s and 60s.24 While the novel adheres to many of the literary conventions of the Victorian novel, a significant difference

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24 _The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art_ from July 23, 1859 contains a lengthy review of _Cousin Stella_. The reviewer comments that the novel “has the merit, now becoming rarer and rarer, of a comparative novelty in its subject” (107), evidently because it sets the well-worn marriage plot in Jamaica during the time of slavery. Although the reviewer critiques the skill of the author, the _Athenæum_ called it “an excellent novel, written with great care.”
between this West Indian domestic novel and its English counterparts is the role of the creole woman. Instead of existing on the periphery of the narrative, Stella is at the center. This shift makes possible the principal work of the novel - critiquing the assumed superiority and coherence of English culture. Jenkin utilizes the tropes of the domestic novel in order to demonstrate that representations of English culture rely on unattainable and inaccurate characterizations of home and family life. *Cousin Stella* pushes back against the assumed superiority of English customs and manners, asserting the importance and quality of West Indian society while demonstrating that white West Indians are also, in fact, English in both a political and cultural sense.

*Cousin Stella* follows the life of a young Jamaican-born creole - Stella Joddrell - from her fifteenth to twenty-first year. Set in the years leading up to the Great Jamaican Slave Revolt of 1831-1832, the plot moves from continental Europe to England to Jamaica and back to Europe; the characters’ connections to each other are an intricate web of familial and romantic entanglements. The story opens near Lake Geneva where Stella lives with her paternal grandmother, the woman who has cared for her since her Spanish mother’s death when Stella was young. After the death of her grandmother, Stella is sent to England to live with her father’s sister, Celia, so that she can be given a proper, English education. After a number of years, she joins her newly remarried father in Jamaica. Shortly after she arrives, her father and two younger half-brothers die, leaving Stella the sole inheritor of her father’s wealth. The central conflicts of the novel are Stella’s unrequited love for her cousin Louis (whom she eventually marries) and
the racial and political tensions that culminate in a slave revolt, a fictionalized account of the rebellion that serves as the climax of the novel.

What differentiates Jenkin’s depiction of creole women and their relationship to domesticity from the depictions in other nineteenth-century domestic novels is both the character of those women and the kind of domesticity that she represents as ideal. In Jenkin’s novel, the white creole woman is the protagonist. This resists the typical depictions of creole women in English texts that exist both before and after the publication of Cousin Stella. Stella’s performance of English domesticity accepts certain aspects of it while rejecting others and represents a shift in how creole women in literature inhabit their own bodies. Jenkin interrupts the fantasy that white West Indian women can be controlled via domestication by their English betters, pushing back against most literary versions of characters like Stella. For Jenkin, this pushing back doesn’t represent failure (as some English novelists might believe). Instead, moments of dissent are opportunities.

Cousin Stella forcefully critiques the notion that domestic culture exists in an ideal state. More significantly, Jenkin challenges the idea of an always unified and coherent expression of domestic mores. She does so by challenging the prevailing notion of what appropriate domesticity is. Early in the first volume of the novel, Jenkin begins her critique by first presenting a typical domestic scene. Stella, her Aunt Celia, Celia’s husband Major Dashwood, and Dashwood’s aunt - Philadelphia Dashwood - are sitting down to tea at the opening of the passage. The interior of this English country house, specifically a dining scene, serves as the specimen for Jenkin’s dissection of English domestic culture:
Yes, the scene was excellent; one of those English interiors considered peculiarly the result of English laws and English soil. Paint it. A lovely young woman on a sofa, a handsome husband placing a footstool beneath her feet; a respectable old lady, a model for any one bent on delineating motherly love, presiding at the rich tea-table; a young girl in her teens, to be the object of anxious interest to those so happily themselves in harbour. Even behold an attached old servant in the background completing the picture.

How is it in reality?

The dear old lady makes the room ring with a species of shout.

“You stupid creature, mind what you are doing!” This was addressed to the attached old Pompey, waddling forward with a large salver; the wine glasses and decanter on it, making an ominous jiggle. “Who told you to bring wine?”

“Massa say –”

“What has ‘massa’ to do with it?”

Here Celia said sharply to her husband –

“What makes you interfere? As you choose to live here, you know it’s no business of yours to give orders.” (1: 74-75)

In this passage, Jenkin situates Englishness in several overlapping fields. English identity is produced legally and geographically, is embodied through marriage and the presence of multiple generations of family, is linked to whiteness, and is reproduced and perpetuated through childbearing.
First, English culture is established legally, through a particular set of laws (English); second, English culture is bound to place (England). The suggestion that the scene is a product of both English soil and English law depicts a domestic sphere that is both natural and man-made. Englishness is not only produced through governmental practice, but also a characteristic fundamental to a particular geography. It is a thing both constructed – laws – and inherent – location. In this imagining, the physical space of England possesses an essential quality that has allowed the constructed component of the equation – English law – to develop and take root. By foregrounding these sources, Jenkin calls attention to the geography and constructedness of traditional conceptions of English domesticity. An emphasis on place sets the stage for considerations of how domestic culture shifts in the novel as it moves from England to Jamaica. If the culture is “the result of English laws and English soil,” what happens when the soil changes? These concerns manifest in scenes of West Indian housekeeping and dining, as well as in scenes depicting or discussing enslaved labor. In the novel, the practice of slavery has the potential to cause degeneration in both people and places. It is the opinion of English characters that overseeing slaves in the colonies, for example, is liable to turn one “nearly as black as one of his own negroes - a perfect rum-and-water savage” (1: 95).\(^{25}\) In order to question the assumption of English cultural uniformity and coherence, the novel first acknowledges the public fear that Englishness will be disfigured or eradicated when translated into a colonial context, or the notion that it simply cannot exist in a place like Jamaica.

\(^{25}\) For contemporary accounts of the threat of contamination by slavery, see Alexander McDonnell’s *Considerations on Negro Slavery* (215), Rev. R. Bickell’s *The West Indies as They Are; or A Real Picture of Slavery* (104), *Parliamentary History and Review*, 1826, (108), and Esther Copley’s *A History of Slavery and Its Abolition* (643).
Jenkin also establishes that ideal English culture is embodied in felicitous marriage; or, at
the very least, marriage. A bad marriage or the appearance of a bad marriage, however, lacks the
hallmarks of “good” English behavior. This representation of marriage is shown to be a fantasy
as the dining room scene progresses. Major Dashwood and Celia argue about whether or not his
position in the household allows him to give orders to servants. Celia and Aunt Philly argue
about slavery. Aunt Philly complains that Major Dashwood turns the pages of his newspaper too
loudly. Jenkin ends the scene by attempting to explain these conflicts: “So ill-assorted, so
without sympathy the one with the other, how had this trio come together? The answer is
‘Circumstances;’ and the same answer will explain many of those unions, intimacies, and
situations, which provoke the question of how they ever came to exist or subsist” (1: 81). The
types of family arrangements that give rise to arguments like those of Stella’s relatives are not,
Jenkin seems to suggest, unique. Rather, they’re the result of something as banal as
circumstance. Domestic discord, including the arguments of married couples, is utterly
commonplace. Identifying entirely blissful marriage as fantasy, however, does not take away its
power. The nineteenth-century English novel is a novel of (among other things) domesticity and
marriage. That so many Victorian novels end with an engagement or a marriage, or take the
process of becoming engaged as a significant part of the story, speaks to how central marriage is
to these plots, as does the depth of scholarship devoted to the subject.²⁶ The marriage plot is not

²⁶ Nancy Armstrong’s Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel is perhaps the most well-
known and foundational critical work in this field. Scholarship that has built off of Armstrong’s work takes up a
variety of themes. For an examination of the importance of Victorian novels specifically to contemporary readers’
conceptions of “the nature, purpose, and law of marriage” (1), see Rachel Ablow’s The Marriage of Minds: Reading
Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot. For an analysis of the role relationships between women played in
representations of marriage in Victorian novels see Sharon Marcus’s Between Women: Friendship, Desire and
only a way to propel a narrative but also a representation of what English life should or could look like. Jenkin may set up this caricature of married life as a way to show what marriage often isn’t, but her inclusion of this matrimonial narrative also acknowledges the power and pervasiveness of the fantasy. More important, however, is what the fantasy suggests in terms of the intimate connection between domesticity and Englishness in a general sense, while also implicating matrimony as a specific and essential part of sustaining English identity.27

In Jenkin’s depiction of the English home, marriage is only one layer of the interpersonal relations that typify Englishness. English identity spans generations; it has a demonstrable lineage. While Englishness relies on literal reproduction for replication, it also is literal reproduction. It exists, has existed, and will continue to do so. In other words, a perpetuation of English culture relies on English people to reproduce, and part of being English is having and raising children. The novel suggests that English culture isn’t something that can be taught to someone not born to white English parents – hence the emphasis on reproduction. This is shown most clearly through the white characters and their attitudes toward the education of people of African descent, specifically enslaved people. In the novel, slaves might be taught about the

*MARRIAGE IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND*. Lisa A. Surridge’s *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* explores Victorian fictional representations of domestic violence within marriage. Natalie Schroeder and Ronald A. Schroeder’s *From Sensation to Society: Representations of Marriage in the Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, 1862-1866* argues that sensation fiction directly critiqued idealized conceptions of Victorian marriage and domesticity.

27 Jenkin’s own marriage was not entirely a happy one. The little biographical information we have of her life suggests that in terms of intellect and personality, she and her husband were ill-matched. She was social, artistic, and intellectual while her husband was a practical military man. In the biography of Jenkin’s son Fleming, his biographer, Robert Louis Stevenson, characterizes their relationship thusly: “[Captain Jenkin’s] wife, impatient of his capacity and surrounded by brilliant friends used him with a certain contempt” (19). Jenkin was also rumored to have had multiple affairs over the course of her marriage, notably with two Italian brothers, the novelist Giovanni Ruffini and his younger brother, Agostino. While it’s impossible to determine from this her exact beliefs about marriage – whether she found monogamy unrealistic and/or confining or whether she had affairs as a way to escape her unhappy marriage – we can conclude, at the very least, that the idealized version of marriage from many domestic novels of the nineteenth century did not, for her, ring true.
Christian religion (a practice Stella is engaged in at the end of the narrative), but rules of decorum or appropriate sexual behavior (to name just two) are not things that can be transmitted via education. One cannot become English. In particular, the narrative suggests that enslaved people cannot. Individual slaves might exhibit qualities and behaviors resembling those of English culture, but those qualities and behavior are undermined, in the novel, by their race. Endowing Englishness with a specific racial identity reaffirms the racist and racial hierarchy that supports the continuation of the use of enslaved laborers to maintain economic position. It also explicitly links Englishness to whiteness. In addition, through its focus on marriage and the presence of multiple generations, this dining room scene identifies childbearing as an important method of reproducing culture.

Jenkin’s depiction of Stella’s aunt’s home is more than a critique of English domesticity. It is also an attack on English attitudes toward slavery. The domestic scene she sets is underwritten by the British Empire, and the empire depends on enslaved labor to sustain itself. The existence of the Dashwood’s servant Pompey explicitly links a sitting room in England to the plantations of the British West Indies. He can also be read as a figurative example of the reaches of empire. In a figurative reading, Pompey becomes the reminder of the labor of enslaved Africans whose toil supports the prosperity of the metropole, blurring the boundary between English soil and the reaches of the British Empire. The English readily and easily accepted the empire into their homes; indeed, it was quite integrated into their everyday lives. Signifiers of the empire – whether in the form of sugar imported from the Caribbean or elsewhere, or in the pages of the newspapers brought into the home – were part of the fabric of
English domestic life.\(^{28}\) The English characters in Jenkin’s novel attempt – and in their own minds are sometimes able – to divorce those signifiers from their complicity in slavery. Pompey’s presence in this scene pushes back against a nineteenth-century assumption that what went on in the colonies – while under the purview of English laws and social critiques – operated in a fundamentally different and foreign sphere.

Acknowledging the human and material presence of empire in the scene complicates the nature of the relationship between the colony and the metropole. That there was a relationship, and that there is a relationship in the novel, is clear. However, most of the English characters in the novel see their role as one of advisor and moral compass. These characters frequently designate themselves as outside observers who possess a critical distance from the mundane everyday of colonialism. For example, Major Dashwood’s aunt - Philly - has plenty of opinions concerning West Indian slavery: “‘It makes me sick to think of born Christians being waited on by creatures with iron chains round their legs’” (1: 78). Celia responds: “‘I assure you I believe my brother’s negroes are better treated, and have far less to do, than your English servants’” (1: 78). The servant in question is the verbally abused Pompey. Celia’s claim that enslaved people in Jamaica are treated better than servants in England is suspect, but this exchange attempts to point out the hypocrisy of those in the metropole criticizing whites in the colonies when it comes to the treatment of those who labor for them. Pompey may not be enslaved, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that he is well-treated or well-compensated for his work. What this scene suggests, then, is

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\(^{28}\) For analysis of the intimate relationship between colony and metropole in the British Empire see Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism; Politics and Empire in Victorian Britain: A Reader*, ed. Antoinette Burton; Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*; and Tanya Agathocleous’s *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World*. 
that the critical distance Aunt Philly affects is a myth. At the same time, Jenkin points to the metropole’s complicity in the practice of colonialism and slavery - that its existence relies on the very processes it condemns. The scene implies that those who benefit from slavery yet claim they have no part or stake in it, often condemn others for the practice; this is an implication that is meant to be both humorous and troubling. Jenkin’s text suggests that English society thrived in close proximity to - and because of - slavery.

By satirizing a “typical” domestic scene in England, Jenkin delineates a particular and prevalent notion of nineteenth-century English domestic life, particularly as it relates to the colonial enterprise. The conclusion that this scene is a critique is one that is easily arrived at. The satirical description of domesticity and the subsequent – and abrupt – reversal of those expectations are clearly meant to be humorous. Additionally, Jenkin undermines the power of this supposed domestic ideal by arguing that it comes into being not by choice but by chance: “So ill-assorted, so without sympathy the one with the other, how had this trio come together? The answer is ‘Circumstances;’ and the same answer will explain many of those unions, intimacies, and situations, which provoke the question of how they ever came to exist or subsist” (1: 81). Her sketch of this kind of prototypical scene extends her critique beyond the realm of social criticism. Claiming that this critique “goes beyond the realm of social criticism,” doesn’t de-emphasize the importance of that social critique. The dining room scene Jenkin describes comments not only on nineteenth-century British domestic society, but also on the nature of nineteenth-century British domestic literature. This passage suggests not only a way to read
domestic interiors and the relationships taking place there, but also suggests a way to read texts. In this moment, the novel provides a method of reading fictional representations.

Appropriately, then, Jenkin opens the scene with “Paint it.” This command functions on a number of levels. Firstly, it suggests a way of reading the aforementioned domestic interior as an artistic representation. “Paint it” implies the constructed and fictive nature of this domestic ideal. In other words, it indicates a set of relations and a setting that is a fantasy. This particular level of felicity is unrealistic. It only stays harmonious and idealistic if it is a moment frozen in time – like a painting. The moment the people depicted come to life, begin to speak and to move, the scene falls apart. This passage suggests that as long as English domesticity remains an abstract, unlived concept it can retain its ideological integrity – a necessary, aspirational fantasy. When it becomes a lived thing, it collapses. It is an ideal that is unsustainable. This scene is not reality, but an artistic rendering of it – an unchanging, de-contextualized image with all signs of dirt and disorder glossed over. The means of its production are elided; its tranquility easily dismantled. Self-conscious caricature rather than characterization, this description neatly draws the distinction between cultural expectation and cultural reality. Of course, Jenkin’s novel isn’t a “lived thing” either; it, too, is an artistic representation, evoking the always-fictive nature of domestic ideology. By calling attention to the fictitious reality of domestic ideals, Jenkin calls attention to the unreality of her own text. This evocation is deliberate. By invoking an artistic medium – painting – Jenkin hints at a reading of not only her text, but of most nineteenth-century British novels that take domestic matters as their subject.
The phrase “paint it” also refers to the creative nature of aesthetic production. This scene’s description of the domestic novel as an artistic representation provides a context in which we might consider improvisation or variation. By characterizing this narrative of English domesticity as an unattainable ideal, Jenkin encourages readers to compare that fantasy with the fantasy of her fictional text. This move is critical, yes, but it is also generative, meaning that introducing and questioning dominant cultural narratives allows Jenkin to offer potential alternatives to these narratives. The characters in this scene do not and can not embody the qualities of ideal Englishness; their failure to live up to these standards highlights the futility of attempting to do so. This calls into question the existence and usefulness of a singular and unified national cultural identity, while hinting at the possibility of different ways of understanding what it meant to be English.

Jenkin’s critique does not untangle the contradictions of a homogenous kind of Englishness. Rather, the scene she sets establishes the ways in which the cultural practice of novel writing creates spaces for critique. What Jenkin offers goes beyond mere analysis of the English domestic practice and identity. Her critique is obviously and purposefully engaged with historical and political concerns. She refuses to accept the superiority of English culture and the inferiority of white creole culture. By resisting this measure of Stella’s domestic and gendered fitness, Jenkin offers the possibility of a moral white West Indian culture that determines not only its domestic future, but its political future as well.
To do so, Jenkin imbues Stella with a realistic mix of positive and negative traits. Before returning to Jamaica after her father remarries, Stella’s plans for her activities there are the civilizing kind:

Stella had lately been full of projects of keeping papa’s house and remodelling the government of his slaves. She had been busy erecting a visionary Church on Cedar Valley. She was to make such an Eden of her father’s estates, that every planter in the island was to be led to emulate the good example. (1: 204-205)

Here Stella envisions herself as a reformer and a missionary, the teenaged daughter of a plantation owner who will single-handedly overhaul chattel slavery in Jamaica. Jenkin describes these impulses as fleeting and half-formed, suggesting that the reader not take Stella or her plans seriously. The realities of colonial life - her father and stepmother’s attitudes towards their slaves and her limited connections with anyone beyond her immediate family - soon temper her plans, as does her preoccupation with her cousin Louis.

The physical spaces of the home are the locus for most of the novel’s action, and it is in these spaces that we see the deployment of English culture. The domestic space in the West Indian home measures the powerful influence of Englishness in the same ways that the white creole woman’s body does. The home is also a predictor of how well domestic culture has “taken” to a body, particularly a creole body. When Stella first comes to Jamaica, she finds her father’s house in domestic disorder. Jenkin presents the chaotic nature of this household in the same fashion in which she critiques marriage in an English household - through a depiction of a
dining scene. Despite her father’s protestations that the family is on the brink of financial ruin, meals are the picture of excess:

Stella was quite unprepared for the sight of the breakfast table. It glittered with silver, and glass, and showy china. Meat, fish, piles of unknown fruit and most strange vegetables met her eye. Four men-servants, dressed in suits of spotless Russian duck, were standing in a row at the sideboard - four boys, also in white, with long branches of the cocoa-nut tree were fanning away the flies. Mr. Joddrell, instead of his riding coat, appeared in a fine white flannel dressing-gown; but always with his feet encased in pink silk stockings and pumps. His lady wore a French cambric wrapper trimmed with broad lace, a French lace cap, satin slippers, and stockings to match her husband’s. (2: 54-55)

The display put on at mealtime is in conflict with the financial realities of the Joddrells’ estate. Neither Stella’s father nor her stepmother demonstrate a bit of prudence or economy, choosing instead to live as if the plantation were still at the zenith of its prosperity. This luxurious abundance is framed in the novel as both a product and source of continued household disorder: “In spite of all the abundance on the table, the Custos found something wanting...and as the servant went rather slower than suited his master’s impatience, Mr. Joddrell flung a fork at him” (2: 56). Stella’s stepmother seems not to notice her husband’s tantrum, while the men and boys attending the breakfast table, “all laughed aloud and unchecked, as if they thought it the best sport in the world. Master and slaves were equally out of the pale of the law” (2: 56-57).

Disorder begets disorder. The excess of food is linked to Mr. Joddrell’s outburst; that, in turn, is

29 The Custos of a parish served as the main representative of the monarchy and the colonial government.
linked to the slaves “unchecked” laughter. Stella’s father is not, in Jenkin’s eyes, fulfilling his duties as master of the plantation. Both his temper tantrum and his disregard for and lack of response to the enslaved servants’ reactions to it are signs that his behavior is not meeting expectations. Stella also considers the laughter of those waiting on the table to be an affront to the expected social and racial order. What this scene demonstrates, then, is that chaos in the administration of the home has a very real effect on West Indian racial hierarchies. An upset in the domestic sphere radiates out into the larger social relations of the plantation and the whole of Jamaica.

Stella, for her part, longs to bring order to the house, to have an occupation of any sort despite that, “the fact of any housekeeping, as understood in England, did not exist” (2: 59). This desire to keep house in an English fashion is strikingly similar to Mary Seacole’s account of recreating an English Christmas in the war camps of Crimea. In Seacole’s narrative, English people are fundamentally motivated by the impulse to reconstitute England’s culture outside of the metropole. Stella wants to live in a house managed by the rules of English domesticity. More importantly, she wishes to participate in the application of those rules. The activity and industriousness she longs for conflict with the primary occupation of the white women in the typical Jamaican household. The warm days are passed - for the women - in a hazy state of half-sleep, and this way of living continues unabated: “The next day, and the next, passed in the same heavy monotony. Within the Great House there was a regularity of doing nothing except eating, drinking and sleeping such as could not fail to produce a stupifying [sic] of heart and intellect”
When she communicates her desire to do good work on the island - by which Stella means providing a religious education for enslaved people - her cousin and future husband, Louis, advises against it. Stella first meets her cousin while living with her Aunt Celia. Louis travels to England to argue in Parliament for the rights of Jamaican planters, namely that they be financially compensated for their “property” if slavery were to be abolished. If Stella’s father and stepmother represent some of the worst behavior of white landowners in Jamaica, Louis represents an ideal version of the paternalistic slave owner - ideal in the eyes of Stella and (perhaps) Jenkin. He rarely uses physical punishment and concedes that slavery must be abolished at some point, though he refuses to go so far as to stop using forced labor on his plantation.

Many of the interactions between Stella and Louis in the novel consist of Stella declaring her intentions or beliefs (usually concerning slavery) followed by Louis dampening her enthusiasm with what the novel characterizes as practical wisdom. Such is the case when Stella speaks of taking on the task of religious education. Engaging in this kind of activity, Louis argues, would upset the careful balance of Jamaican race relations. Louis draws attention to the precariousness of white Jamaicans’ positions in this hierarchy, while communicating the importance of Stella’s role in defending against these vulnerabilities: “‘Look at this rock, Stella, it fell from the mountain above; this piece of pasture is a land slip; our social position in Jamaica…'

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30 For accounts of the supposed effects of climate on the health and intellect of Europeans and those of European descent, see The Present State of the West-Indies (24) and George Pinckard’s Notes on the West Indies (56). For its effect on visiting soldiers see Thomas Staunton St. Clair’s A Soldier’s Recollections of the West Indies and America. For its impact on Europeans versus those of African descent see Thomas Coke’s A History of the West Indies, James Johnson’s The Influence of Tropical Climates (192), Richard Reece’s The Medical Companion for Visitors to the East and West Indies (49), and R. R. Madden’s A Twelvemonth’s Residence in the West Indies, During the Transition from Slavery to Apprenticeship (181-182).
is as uncertain as our soil, and it behoves everyone, even a girl like you, to be guarded in your actions for the sake of general weal” (2: 94-95). The white creole woman bears the responsibility of maintaining an appropriate distance between herself and people of African descent. Louis’s comparison of Stella to a land slip suggests the fragility of the racial hierarchy in Jamaica. The slightest of movements might cause the entire system to collapse, and that collapse, according to the novel, will result in violence against white people. As Louis says, “Our safety depends on our allowing of no associations” (2: 95). These associations include Stella taking on the role of religious educator, but also include how Stella’s mother and father behave. The kind of relationship Stella is proposing is more benign than the way her father interacts with slaves at the dinner table, but both are examples of a breakdown in what Louis sees as an appropriate - and safe - order between white West Indian and enslaved laborer. Here, Louis’s belief stands in for the belief of the white West Indian population in general. Scenes like these indicate that the text gives some credence to the supposed connection between the behaviors of white individuals and the stability of the hierarchy engendered by slavery. In the end, however, the violence in the novel stems not from what Stella does or doesn’t do, but from intervening outside forces.

The text sanctions this notion of appropriate relations between white and black people to a degree, endorsing paternalistic associations (the benevolent master) but condemning physical punishment and cruelty. Stella’s stepmother (an Englishwoman transplanted to Jamaica), for example, who perfectly exemplifies the “doing nothing” (2: 69) routine of wealthy, white West Indian women, has no interest in running the household or engaging in any kind of productive
labor. In a kind of parallel to her husband’s behavior at the breakfast table, her mishandling of domestic concerns bears heavily on her interactions with slaves on the estate. The condition of her home is a “vulgar scandal” (2: 101) and her treatment of enslaved laborers lacks compassion and moral restraint. The confluence of these is no coincidence. Stella’s stepmother is particularly brutal (and defies the law\(^{31}\)) with her punishments of enslaved individuals. She places one of the house maids in the stocks for “insolence,” and then “forgets” about the girl for three days. Stella, by contrast, is “depressed and discouraged,” and resists the “colourless life” (2: 137) of her family’s estate. The prospect of any form of physical punishment taking place on the plantation horrifies her, and her desire for any kind of useful activity is linked to her distaste for violence. Her situation doesn’t improve until her father and half-brothers die, leaving her the sole inheritor of the estate.\(^{32}\) She then goes to stay with Louis, his mother, and Stella’s mother’s sister, Olympia. Tension exists between Stella and Olympia because of Louis’s (not entirely suppressed) romantic feelings for Stella, but in general the house embodies the kind of calm industriousness Stella craves. Jenkin’s text links morality with industry, and goodness with domestic success. Whether positive or negative, the condition of the mind is constitutive of the condition of the home and vice versa. If a well-run household is the sign of a morally sound body and mind, and white women’s bodies are indicative of the stability of hierarchical racial

\(^{31}\) See *Slave Law of Jamaica: With Proceedings and Documents Relative Thereto*, published 1828, for an explanation of legislation concerning the treatment of enslaved people just prior to emancipation. For information regarding the updates to the Slave Code in 1831 see *The Anti-Slavery Reporter, Vol. 5* (1-37).

\(^{32}\) The household cook, French Charles, puts poison in Stella’s father’s food because of the Custos’s treatment of Charles’s wife, Rebecca, and because Stella’s father refuses to allow Charles to buy his freedom. Stella’s younger brothers eat the food first, however, and die soon after. Stella’s father dies under more ambiguous circumstances, but it seems that he falls or jumps to his death from a balcony in the hours after his sons’ deaths.
structures in colonial society, domestic culture, then, is an essential part of the foundation of white society in Jamaica.

White women’s bodies are particularly important when tensions arise just before the depiction of the Christmas Rebellion that serves as the narrative’s climax:

Rumours reached even the recluses of Silver Hill, of a growing licence among the blacks in the towns. One of the stories of the day was, that a list had been discovered in which certain ladies’ names figured, as the intended brides of the ring-leaders of a soi-disant conspiracy. It also said that young ladies had been addressed by negroes in terms which made their escort, military men, use their riding whips. (3: 40)

The novel acknowledges the supposed vulnerability of both male and female white bodies in colonial society, but puts a particular emphasis on the sexual vulnerability of women. This, then, is Stella’s part in maintaining the stability of white colonial culture - to protect her physical body and abstract purity from the specter of interracial sex. The most effective way to do so, according to Louis, is to protect feminized spaces and bodies from the kind of so-called inappropriate interactions that could undermine the already tenuous stability of Jamaica’s racial hierarchy.

This is not that different from the sentiments expressed through creole characters in nineteenth-century novels not written by West Indian women. In these English novels, Berman argues, “the Creole woman helps us to discern this wider field of sexual politics in early-nineteenth-century fiction because she highlights the role of upbringing as well as sexual behavior, stressing the importance of early childhood education, household mores, mothers, governesses, and children’s nurses in the (re)production of nations” (20). Berman’s assessment
of the connection between sexual and domestic politics echoes the sentiments expressed in Louis’s land slip speech. Appropriate domestic behavior begets appropriate sexual behavior, and appropriate sexual behavior assists in the maintenance of West Indian racial hierarchies. At the same time, the novel suggests that a breakdown of this carefully structured set of race relations can be reflected in the sexual violation of white women, whether real or imagined.

Consequently, Stella’s character and behavior become barometers for measuring the stability of a racial hierarchy that situates white West Indians at the top. Her transformation from an impetuous child to a responsible young woman is a process that stretches over years of the novel’s plot. There is, however, a moment of crisis that forces all of her nascent moral qualities to the fore. That crisis is the Great Jamaican Slave Revolt of 1831-1832.\(^{33}\) Sometimes called the Christmas Rebellion, the Baptist War, or Sam Sharpe’s War, the revolt lasted eight days, and though some of the revolters were armed, their goal was to disrupt work on the plantations “with a minimum of disorder and bloodshed” (Reckord 124). Sharpe, considered the leader of the rebellion, claimed that he envisioned only passive resistance in the form of a work stoppage. However, preparations were made to arm a slave regiment (Reckord 114), and there were various small battles over the course of the rebellion. While property damage and monetary losses were significant, only fourteen whites were killed during the revolt. By comparison, 207 slaves were killed over the same eight-day span. White responses to the rebellion were severe. Over 600 slaves or free people of African descent were brought to trial and 312 executed, though these trials were perfunctory at best: “The militia were bent on vengeance and among them were

\(^{33}\) For a more thorough accounting of the rebellion see Henry Bleby’s *Death Struggles of Slavery* (1853) and twentieth-century historian Mary Reckord’s “The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831.”
individuals whose political rancour approached insanity [sic]” (Reckord 120-121). Baptist missionaries and their churches were also the focus of white Jamaicans’ ire. Henry Bleby recounts numerous church burnings, acts of intimidation, arrests, and even one account of a missionary being tarred and feathered. His account reflects the “insanity” Reckord alludes to. Bleby quotes the Courant, a pro-slavery Jamaican newspaper that he calls “the organ and oracle of the planters” (21), as an example of white attitudes during and after the revolt:

“We say, let the dogs loose, until every slave who continues in the woods with arms in his hands is brought to his senses. We are aware of the hue and cry such a recommendation will create in England: but the people of England must now be told that we shall wholly disregard their opinions.” (21)

The swift, violent response advocated for here is defiant and an articulation of independence from England. This is especially significant because from the white West Indian point of view, English interference into Jamaican affairs is one of the major causes of the revolt.

Pre-rebellion, Jamaica was a colony in both political and economic turmoil. This condition was coupled with a strong network of religious instruction for slaves and an atmosphere of rumor concerning the legal status of enslaved peoples. Reckord provides a list of four conditions that foster revolt in slave societies: “political excitement stirred by rumours of emancipation, economic stress, a revolutionary philosophy circulating among the slaves and the presence of a groups of whites whom the slaves could identify as their allies” (108). All of these conditions existed in Jamaica in 1831. Parliamentary debates in England fueled the belief that full emancipation was imminent; Jamaica’s economy was on the decline; exposure to religious
ideas bolstered enslaved people’s convictions that their freedom was guaranteed by God; and white Baptist ministers, while not able to directly call for or assist a revolt, generally seemed to support the idea that chattel slavery was inhumane and immoral.

Jenkin’s fictionalized account of this same event changes some significant historical details. While she makes the claim that England’s legal actions concerning slavery were a significant force behind the rebellion, the novel locates the immediate source of the revolt in an English response to one specific event. Jenkin’s account begins with a physical confrontation between an enslaved laborer, Maurice, and a white woman, Olympia Gautier. Maurice, “royally drunk,” attempts to talk to Olympia, who rebuffs him when he grabs her arm. The two struggle, and when Louis encounters them on the road, he throws Maurice to the ground, where his head hits a rock. Louis believes the man to be passed out drunk when in reality Maurice is dead. The subsequent inquest into Maurice’s death brings the character of Stapylton Smythe - last seen in England, flirting with a sixteen-year-old Stella and seducing rich women - back into the narrative. Smythe is Olympia’s estranged husband, a philanderer who squandered her savings. After he refuses to change his ways, Olympia leaves Spain for the Caribbean and takes a new name, finding refuge in the home of her sister’s widow - Stella’s father. Smythe then changes his name (from Richard Smith) and spends the next few years moving from rich woman to rich woman across Europe. He manages to get himself named as Slave Protector, and travels to Jamaica, a move that the novel suggests is on account of Stella. Although many of the novel’s characters are quite taken with Smythe’s superficial charms, he is the clear villain in the narrative.
Stella’s Aunt Celia describes Smythe’s foray to Jamaica as Slave Protector in both
domestic and political terms. She accuses him of “speculating in emancipation and heiresses” (3:
16). His arrival in Jamaica is greeted, by white Jamaicans, with skepticism and irritation. The
inquest into Maurice’s death is framed as something of a farce, and Jenkin describes the twelve
men assembled to decide Louis’s fate as:

Men, the purple of whose faces, their misty eyes and sodden features, found an
explanation in the long tenpenny nail hanging as a badge at their buttonhole; that nail
measuring the depth of the rum in each tumbler, drained many times a day. Men who
could not sign their names until one or two draughts had been swallowed. Others, lean,
yellow, with red-rimmed, sunken eyes, above their leathery lantern jaws: these were the
crueler; the men striving to make money, honestly if they could, but money at any rate.
(3: 118)

After the inquest determines that “Maurice had met his death by what the law called
misadventure” (3: 121), Smythe voices his objections to the decision. Some of those in
attendance heckle him, yelling out “‘We don’t recognise you or your office’” (3: 122). Smythe
is, in the eyes of white Jamaicans, an interloper - an example of the Crown’s intrusion into
colonial politics. This is not the only instance of Jenkin characterizing English people and the
English government as unwanted and dangerous encroachments into Jamaica’s affairs. In the
novel, it is the Orders in Council of 1831 that “the people of Jamaica accused of having caused
the late insurrection” (3: 218). Both the Orders and Smythe’s presence in Jamaica are figured as
instances of English interference. Smythe’s role, in particular, is depicted as both ridiculous and
dangerous. In addition to conducting the inquest, it is implied that Smythe attempts to murder Louis during the rebellion, apparently because of Louis’s attachment to Stella and the personal embarrassment Smythe feels after his failed inquest. Physical violence in the novel is largely the product of English intervention into colonial affairs. The collective effect of these details displaces responsibility for the violence, shifting it from slave owners and the conditions of slavery, to the English government.

Jenkin further diminishes the significance of the rebellion, which is largely considered to be the single biggest motivating factor in the abolition of slavery in Jamaica, by reframing the rebellion’s participants. No longer are they largely non-violent protestors making a conscientious decision to halt their labor. Instead, Jenkin describes them as animalistic, destructive, and violent, motivated by nothing but the desire to cause chaos:

Peals of laughter echo through the chambers of the pretty dwelling; tables, chairs, books, clothing are tossed out among those outside; figures more like apes than aught else are dancing about dressed in Gautier’s white shirts, in the ladies’ dresses and bonnets. The air is rent with whoopings, guttural screams, with all the various furious cries of licence and thirst of vengeance. (3: 177)

Here, Jenkin figures the group of rebelling slaves as an invading mass, penetrating the space of the home and misappropriating or dismantling the various physical manifestations of domestic culture: the “tables, chairs, books, clothing.” The novel’s depiction of the revolt is not only an inaccurate reworking of actual events, but a fundamentally racist one as well. Apart from the stereotypically racist comparison of enslaved people to apes, by making the rebellion the fault of
the English, the novel uses a discussion of slavery to foreground the lives and desires of its white characters at the expense of the black characters. While this is perhaps not surprising, the relegation of the rebellion and the rebels to the background demonstrates the racist undertones of Jenkin’s critique of domestic culture. Although the novel’s characters briefly discuss the political outcomes of the revolt, these are subordinate to the domestic outcomes.

In the novel, the most significant consequence of these events is how they impact - and in some ways how they complete - Stella’s personal development, coupled with how the rebellion alters her domestic situation. The rebellion is the crisis that reorganizes the lives of the central (white) characters in productive ways. For example, the demise of Stapleton Smythe allows Olympia to marry a doctor and leave the household after she learns definitively that her affection for Louis is not reciprocated. Her absence makes possible, in part, for Louis and Stella’s engagement. In addition, Louis’s injuries catapult Stella into the role of the head of the household. Unable to rely on her cousin, Stella is forced (or allowed) to take on responsibilities that she might not otherwise have had. Circumstances specific to the Jamaican colonial context in concert with the knowledge Stella has acquired while on the island overlap with her English education in a way that makes her uniquely suited to the tasks at hand. In other words, in Jamaica, Stella wields more power and influence than she might in England; Jenkin describes her as “the stately young châtelaine” (3: 263). Stella is so powerful, in fact, that she is able to circumvent current laws by forbidding any person from detaining and punishing a slave, Rebecca, who has run away from the plantation. It is not, then, the brute power and influence of English domesticity - its superiority - that changes her character.
What most clearly distinguishes the reality of Stella’s existence from the English ideal is not so much the adult she becomes, but how she arrives there. Consider the ways in which Stella’s upbringing parallels that of Brontë’s Jane Eyre. Both are orphaned (though Stella is nearly an adult when she loses her father), both marry men who are seriously injured during moments of crisis, and both, at different points, disrupt the order of their respective homes. Yet while Jane is unjustly labeled a troublemaker as a child, Stella often behaves like a petty, jealous child, particularly when it comes to being the sole object of her father and her cousin Louis’s affections. Jane’s acts of rebellion spring from a strong personal sense of right and wrong. Stella’s rebelliousness, on the other hand, is both embarrassing to her family and potentially dangerous. This makes her emotional restraint and responsible house and estate keeping post-rebellion all the more meaningful.

One way in which Stella’s moral fitness is manifested is through her choice to stay in Jamaica rather than journey back to her extended family in England. This act of choice and display of agency demonstrates the potential for white creole women to self-regulate in the absence of pervasive Englishness, and to find their own ways of creating a domestic environment in colonial spaces. The lack of economy and planning she observed in her father’s household is remedied:

She retires into the little drawing-room, which has been tacitly given up entirely to her use. There she has her desk, and keeps a strict account of the house expenses, and makes a memorandum of all that is ordered from the stores in Kingston: there, she gives her
private audiences to Mr. Eff, the clergyman, about the children’s school she has established;...and to any negro who claims to be heard. (3: 262)

The plans she had for her father’s home when she left England, a product of her education there, come to fruition post-rebellion. In an ideal domestic setting, one with a husband figure physically able to see to the workings of the estate, Stella would have neither the need nor the opportunity to be so intimately involved in its day-to-day business.

In addition to her daily occupations, Stella forges familial bonds that resist the unreal ideal of the English domestic scene. In the face of English criticism, communicated through her Aunt Celia’s letters, Stella does not alter her living situation. She dismisses Celia’s claims that, by taking on the work of not only her plantation but Louis’s as well, Stella is being taken advantage of. Her aunt calls Louis and his mother “self-seeking, self-interested” (3: 227), and questions Louis’s devotion to Stella: “But worst of all to bear were covert insinuations about Louis and the widow.34 ‘She would find some day how completely she had been made a fool of. She did not see that she was used as a screen,’ &c. &c.” (3: 228). Her refusal to acknowledge the “scandal” of her living situation is reflected in her choice not to engage in the debate. By rejecting Celia’s assessment of her living situation, Stella is symbolically rejecting English opinion and thereby the dictates of English domesticity. This example also highlights the difference between perception and reality with respect to culture and morality. In truth, there is nothing shameful about her relationships with Louis and his mother. From the outside, however,

34 Here, Jenkin is referring to Olympia, Stapleton Smythe’s widow.
the situation is suspect. What Stella rejects is the abstract - the perception of impropriety, the domestic ideal - in favor of the concrete and tangible.

Consider, then, how Jenkin’s depiction of Stella’s home at the end of the novel compares to the English dining room scene from the first volume of the novel (and Jenkin’s claim that that familial structure is merely the product of circumstance), or the Jamaican breakfast table scene from the second volume:

What an evening it was! The mother, with her son and his affianced bride, sat in the porch watching the decline of day; Stella’s hand lay in that of Louis. There was little conversation among them; they were all under the spell of languor, like combatants reposing after a battle. (3: 278)

In contrast to the yelling and chaos of both the English dining room and the Jamaican breakfast table, this scene is conspicuously quiet and calm. Rather than fighting amongst each other, Stella, Louis, and Louis’s mother are described as fellow soldiers, united and working together. This familial formation - derided by her Aunt Celia - is harmonious not because it adheres to custom or ideals, but because it is a set of relations entered into out of choice - specifically, Stella’s choice, a choice enabled by Jenkin’s construction of the colonial space in which white women wield power. This passage hints at the traumatic events the family has experienced - they are “combatants,” for example - but the pervading sense of calm and quiet distinguishes this domestic tableau from others in the narrative.

Their childlessness in the novel is also another way in which Jenkin rejects this formation of the ideal English family because it is unreal. The dining room scene from the first volume of
the novel locates Stella as “the object of anxious interest” to the other characters. Stella represents the future of England – literally and figuratively. She is meant to uphold its value through her behavior while at the same time producing future citizens. Jenkin troubles this narrative as the hero and heroine of her novel – Stella and Louis – cannot have children due to the injury Louis sustains during the slave revolt. Stella and Louis’s inability to have children offers an alternate domestic future to the one often proposed in the Victorian novel. Louis’s injury is a physical embodiment of how the practice of slavery impedes the replication of English culture in the colonies. Jenkin’s discussion of the ills of slavery focuses only on how it affects white characters, giving particular attention to how enslaving blacks and benefiting from the labor they provide damages the moral authority of whites. That damage manifests in the degradation of the body, both male and female. In this case, that degradation results in the cessation of Stella’s family line.

The conclusion of the novel, then, is a resistance to a standard courtship narrative. Yes, Jenkin still focuses on what happens before marriage, and poses that moment as the pinnacle of (female) life, but her refusal to create a typical nuclear family at the novel’s close is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of this model as well as a subtle indictment of typical narrative resolution. At the conclusion of the narrative, Stella, Louis, Louis’s mother, and a problematically unnamed black woman, are still in search of a treatment for Louis’s injury. Jenkin doesn’t indicate that Stella’s group does or does not find a cure, an ambiguity highlighted by placing them in a series of different European locations over a number of years with no definitive end to their travels. Their journey has no end, indicating that they may never find a
cure. While the ultimate conclusion may be uncertain, the ending resists presenting that uncertainty in negative terms. Instead, the novel’s final paragraphs focus on how the group is perceived by those they encounter as they travel:

A beautiful, pale young woman, her face more remarkable for its expression than even its regular features. An expression, at once decided and full of goodness, loyal and frank - softening with a golden smile of love when her look met that of her husband. He was a helpless cripple, but had a magnificent head, and his eyes were wonderfully beautiful. Every foreigner attached a romantic story to the English invalid and those with him; the few with whom he conversed were charmed by a manner only to be described as playful sadness. (3: 297-298)

This description does not conceal the fact of Louis’s illness. In fact, the positive qualities assigned to both Louis and Stella are highlighted by the inclusion of the challenges they face. An ambiguous ending, then, is not necessarily a bad ending. Instead, it has the potential for a range of outcomes. More importantly, it suggests that individual character and choice, rather than circumstance, is a determiner of happiness.

These choices represent a variation of domestic life that is not an imagined model, but a lived experience. Stella’s creation of a domestic space within her own circumstances constructs a relationship between that space and her own moral integrity that reverses the configurations between creole women’s bodies and culture that is expressed in many English novels. Rather than being shaped by domesticity, she instead shapes it to suit her needs. The choices she makes result in a functional and moral domesticity not because of their connection to an already
established sense of national or cultural identity, but because Stella herself has moral character. In this way, it is less the specific characteristics of English domestic culture that she casts aside, and more the ways those characteristics come into being.

Including novels by white creole women, featuring white female creole protagonists, in critical discussions of the cultivation and expression of Englishness in nineteenth-century literature reveals a West Indian culture of writing that resists easy attempts to classify the identities of white creole women. These texts - particularly those like Cousin Stella and the others discussed in this dissertation - engage with other representations of creole women, push back against the assumptions that underwrite those representations, and offer up alternative ways of describing and understanding creole women’s bodies and their place within the domestic realm. The creole women in these novels are active shapers of their environments and their own conceptions of morality and goodness. In addition, they introduce a self-reflective method of evaluating textual representations that is generative rather than dismissive. This narrative, and other narratives like it, negotiate the consequences of “being” English or “being” creole, and reveal a sense of cultural self that includes and defies both.
Theodora Elizabeth Lynch’s history of the British Caribbean, *Wonders of the West Indies*, seeks to correct what the author believes to be an unfortunate dearth of nonfiction writing about the Caribbean. In this text, Lynch constructs a succinct history of the various islands and their people, flora and fauna, weather, religious practices, economies, and social customs and culture. Her sketch of the latter includes an intertwining of the domestic and political spheres that characterizes them as mutually constitutive. In a chapter describing Spanish Town, Jamaica, Lynch links government and society:

The streets are laid out with some regularity, but they are unpaved and narrow, and there is a character of desolation impressed on the whole aspect of the place. Few white people are seen in the streets during the day/ only under the arcades of the public buildings in the square, gentlemen may be occasionally observed in animated groups, discussing some commercial or political subject.

During the sessions of the Legislature, however, all the principal families of the island assemble in Spanish Town; and like a fresh green branch unexpectedly bursting from a grey and mouldering trunk, a sudden mirthfulness appears in the place; sprightly *soirees* follow each other in rapid succession; and those who have all morning been engaged in some important political debate, grace the sumptuous entertainment at the Queen’s House in the evening, with brows from which care has at least for the time
disappeared, and enter into the gaiety of the ball-room with as much earnestness as if the welfare of a nation depended on the amount of their enjoyment. (112)

This confluence of social and political lives is both temporal and geographical. The shift from the business of government to the business of social engagement and back again is a necessary and deliberate one. The town - the “grey and mouldering trunk” - is brought back to life by the influx of people and activity. Here, it seems that the “grey and mouldering trunk” also refers to the business of the colonial government. Lynch’s statement that these politicians “enter into the gaiety of the ball-room with as much earnestness as if the welfare of a nation depended on the amount of their enjoyment,” humorously hyperbolic as it may be, suggests that sociality functions not just as a distraction from the serious business of governing, but that it also is an integral and necessary part of the legislative process. This depiction gestures towards a theme present not only in Lynch’s work, but the work of many nineteenth-century Caribbean writers - that participating in social activities has implications that reach far beyond the scope of mere diversion. Or, more specifically, that diversion and pleasure are significant ways of strengthening colonial society and reinforcing its values. The value of Jamaica’s social milieu, in the context Lynch provides, rests in how the pleasure derived from its diversions can then be exchanged for political productivity. Dancing and socializing becomes some of the currency of the stability of the colonial government.

In Lynch’s novel *Years Ago* (published in 1865, though set in the 1790s), as in her *Wonders of the West Indies*, social and domestic cultures are intimately connected to the political and public spheres by the texts, material goods, and other commodities that produce and are
produced by them. These “things,” ranging from the concrete - a pair of shoes, for example, to the abstract - West Indian social culture, are tools that the characters use in the novel to express and understand various notions of gender, race, class, and nationality. Objects that circulate in the novel have a value that is more than monetary. A diary becomes a way to access public discussions of national identity, while a writing desk is a means of both defying and exerting parental control. The characters’ complicated relationships with these objects and how those “things” are used are indicative of the multifacetedness and sometimes ambiguous nature of identity characteristics in the British West Indies in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella, Years Ago* contends with issues of both domestic and political significance, and these realms - the domestic and private, and the political and public - are mutually constitutive. In Lynch’s narrative, these spheres have in common the near-continuous circulation of texts and other material goods. When interacting with these “objects,” the characters in Lynch’s novel negotiate their West Indian creole and English affiliations and loyalties. These interactions also establish characters’ relationships with gender, racial, and class expectations. Print and commodity culture, both in public and in private, are the tools with which these characters construct selves and understand their roles in colonial Jamaican society.

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is one of the most influential pieces of the large body of scholarship that discusses the relationship between print discourse and colonial and/or national identity. His arguments concerning the advent of print culture and its role in the formation of the modern nation-state emphasize the importance of the novel to the formation of a collective national imagination. He describes the nation-state as “‘modular,’ capable of being
transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations” (4). While this transportability makes the concept of the nation hard to define (3), it also imbues that concept with possibility and flexibility. In a colonial setting, the plasticity of the conceptual nation means that white Jamaicans, for example, can inhabit and claim an English national identity despite geographical displacement (portability). At the same time, that identity can be repurposed to construct a West Indian creole consciousness that depends on but also differentiates itself from Englishness (flexibility). The result is a colonial culture that is distanced but is in some ways indistinguishable from the culture of the metropole. The domestic novel produces and is produced by that colonial culture.

The white inhabitants of the British Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries embody what Leonard Tennenhouse has called a “generic English culture” (1). Tennenhouse explores the ways colonial culture and English culture overlap in an American setting, arguing “most writers and readers in America considered themselves to be members of the generic English culture that we generally mean by ‘British culture,’ and they thought of their literature as products of such a culture” (1). Tennenhouse resists labeling texts produced in pre-Revolutionary America as English and texts written after as American (2-3); British Caribbean novels, including Lynch’s, similarly resist this kind of classification. Tennenhouse’s discussion of Anglo-American cultural reproduction is useful in thinking through the slippery nature of categories of national identity and literatures in colonial British North America. Because it did not achieve independence until 1962, well after the United States, Jamaica and its literature take
a turn away from the scope of Tennenhouse’s analysis, but many of the questions of identification with which he grapples with respect to early American literature translate to eighteenth and nineteenth-century British Caribbean literature as well. What both Anderson and Tennenhouse articulate are ambiguous - yet productive - relationships among written discourse, nationalism, and a sense of belonging. As Tennenhouse points out, these relationships are particularly important in a colonial setting, a place where multiple discourse communities converge. The texts that emerge from this convergence reflect the ambiguity of national identity in an imperial context, while also demonstrating how the written word assists in the production of that identity.

The circulation of texts is an integral part of the formation of identity categories in the British Caribbean, as is the circulation of other types of commodities. These “things” not only help reinscribe and reimagine nationality, but gender as well. In the realm of material culture, interactions with commodities have overwhelmingly been gendered feminine and/or discussed critically within the context of gender. As Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough observe, “In Western societies, acts of exchange and consumption have long been obsessively gendered, usually as female” (1). For women in the English-speaking world in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, playing a part in the circulation of “things” is an exercise in power and control that complicates and pushes back against their own status as commodities. Within the colonial setting, a marriageable woman’s value is frequently expressed in the terms of the

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35 See Mary Louise Roberts’s “Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture” and Thomas Richards’s *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* for more discussion of the gendered nature of commodities.

36 For another discussion of commodities and gender that also takes print culture into account, see Abigail Solomon Godeau’s “The Other Side of Venus.”
marketplace. For example, in his *Travels in Canada and the United States*, Francis Hall collapses the language of marriage and the language of capitalist exchange:

Women bear a high rate in the American market, because they are scarce in proportion to the demand, in a country where all men marry, and marry young; consequently they are not called upon to make great exertions to captivate; they can do without striking accomplishments, and, to recur to a trading maxim, which they very well understand, there will seldom be more of a commodity reared for market than the consumption calls for. (297)

Hall’s characterization of American women is decidedly unironic. The value of these women, like the values of other kinds of commodities, is subject to the law of supply and demand. What is interesting about this configuration is that as a woman’s “price” goes up, her intrinsic value goes down. In the Americas, a single woman is a precious commodity. At the same time, *because* she is so precious and sought after, she is not required to be of particularly high quality. While Hall claims that these women “bear a high rate in the American market,” a phrase that suggests a certain amount of feminine power, there are limits to that power. When the commodified becomes the consumer by participating in the consumer culture, she exercises a different kind of power - one of action rather than merely being.

The act of consuming and the objects circulated in that consumption are mutually constitutive when it comes to producing gender. Lori Merish argues that:

Discourses about consumer culture are *always* about female desire: since at least the late eighteenth century, consumerism has constituted a principal arena in which forms of
female subjectivity and desire have been mapped out, articulated, and contested. As feminist critics of contemporary consumer culture insist, consumerism is a primary site in which femininity is imposed and enforced, and forms of femininity produced. (8)

Participation in commodity culture, then, also means participating in the production of gender. Taking this a step further, within the context of the nineteenth-century domestic novel, consumerism doesn’t just impose, enforce, and produce femininity. In addition to reinforcing traditionally femininity, the act of consuming creates an important space in which a woman might push back against that imposition and enforcement and produce her own form of femininity.

These gendered acts of consumerism are varied, extending beyond just exchanging currency for goods. De Grazia and Furlough catalogue a plurality of definitions of the terms that surround the act of commodity consumption: “Thus, consumption is discussed here in terms of processes of commodification, spectatorship, commercial exchanges, and social welfare reforms, processes that involve the desire for and sale, purchase, and use of durable and nondurable goods, collective services, and images” (4). Viewed in this light, the act of participating in commodity culture encompasses acts like the purchase of English clothing that is then sent across the Atlantic to Jamaica. It also includes the concretization and commodification of certain kinds of domestic labor, paid and unpaid. This broad definition of consumption and consumer culture highlights the various stages of a commodity’s “life” as it (the commodity) circulates. The value of a thing is embedded in both what it is and what it does. Or, rather, what a thing “is” is closely tied to what it “does.” An object in circulation may not have immediate monetary
value, but it may have value in a different kind of exchange. In Lynch’s novel, consumption and deployment of English culture, for example, is exchanged for a sense of belonging or community affiliation in a colonial setting. Additionally, particular modes of dress afford characters the privileges of a certain race or class.

Commodities play an integral role in negotiating categories of nationality, gender, race, and class. In some instances this is a negotiation of a symbolic kind. In Years Ago certain commodities, like clothing, mark an individual as belonging or not belonging to a particular group. In other cases, the commodity is a tool through which a character performs, consciously or unconsciously, their nationality, gender, race, or class. This performance sometimes adheres to conventional standards associated with these identity markers, but in some instances the commodity performance is a way of circumventing, resisting, or reimagining those conventions. While my analysis does not strictly define these commodities as “property,” Deborah Wynne’s definition of what constitutes a piece of property is a useful way to think of commodities as tools. Wynne claims that “property is actually a relationship, a site of affect, sentiment, dreams and passions which focuses on objects” (16). Here, property functions on both a symbolic and a productive level. In other words, property (or a commodity) can be a symbol imbued with, for example, an individual’s “dreams and passions,” but it also resists the sometimes static nature of a symbol. To call something property - a thing that, by definition, must be owned by a person - is to highlight the relationship the thing has to an individual. Commodities can be conceptualized in a similar way - as things with relationships to the individual in whose possession those
commodities rest. The value that results from that relationship can be monetary, but in domestic novels like *Years Ago*, the value for characters is often cultural.

The above conceptions of consumer and commodity culture expand the definition of what a commodity is or can be. In the novel, a commodity is a “thing” in circulation, but what constitutes these “things” extends beyond the expected boundaries of capitalist consumer culture. While it includes goods that are bought and sold - things with monetary value - it also includes things not explicitly meant for the marketplace. So while objects like the fans, dresses, and shoes the protagonist and her sisters wear are included as commodities, so too are objects like personal needlework, letters and other forms of writing - private, personal, and/or published. The cultural value of written texts in Lynch’s novel is especially important. But it is not only the texts themselves that have value. The instruments with which they are written as well as the simple act of authorship are all “worth” something, and each is in some form of circulation and/or exchange in the novel. Daniel Hack notes that “prominent novels and discussions of authorship often treat the ‘material’ parts and props of writing - including writing designated as ‘literary’ - as neither insignificant and transcendable nor scandalous and regrettable, but rather as potential sources of meaning, value, and power” (2). Lynch’s novel calls attention to the material objects required for writing - a journal and a writing desk, for example - and situates those objects as sources of “meaning, value, and power.”

In Lynch’s *Years Ago*, characters use commodities as a means of establishing identity. Dresses, needlework, public and private writing, as well as knowledge are all commodities - things that can be circulated and exchanged. That circulation can be within the capitalist
marketplace, the domestic space of the home, or between two characters as an exchange of power or information. The relationships between an individual character and a commodity as well as the relationships created by these commodities become spaces in the novel where gender, national identity, race, and class are created, resisted, and discussed. In the instances of both gender and nationality, language is a means of accessing particular cultural spheres with different ways of knowing and understanding the world. Characters in the novel interact with gender and national identity on the level of language and within the context of other forms of cultural circulation - the circulation of both ideas and things. Particularly, the protagonist Dorothea’s relationships with written discourse and other commodities navigate issues of personal affiliation and identity. By participating in both print and material culture, Dorothea negotiates the complex expectations of her status as a young, white Jamaican creole woman. One sphere - material culture - provides a set of guidelines concerning appropriate classed and gendered behavior, while the other - print culture - provides the opportunity for improvisation around identity markers like class, gender, race, and nationality.

Critical responses to Lynch’s work frequently examine representations of slavery and slave-owning white creoles in her novels. Catherine Hall characterizes Lynch’s writing as a response to a societal context in which the “Caribbean was a place of failure and decline into barbarism” (Legacies of British Slave Ownership 182). Critics analyzing Henrietta Camilla Jenkin’s Cousin Stella position Jane Eyre as emblematic of English attitudes toward white creoles, and Hall also figures Bronte’s novel as the metric of creole culture that Lynch was pushing back against: “Lynch’s writing was an attempt to redeem the West Indian creole for an
English audience; her women were not Bertha Masons - they were represented as gentle and responsible” (182). Hall remarks on Lynch’s portrayal of slavery as both “benevolent and paternalistic,” but sees *Years Ago* as one text that interrogates this idealized version of West Indian slavery. Deirdre David’s account of the novel is slightly more detailed, also focusing on Lynch’s depiction of Jamaica as “a paternalistic paradise of benevolent masters and smiling slaves” (107).

Lynch’s novel *Years Ago* tells the story of a white Jamaican creole girl, Dorothea, and her progress from adolescence to young adulthood. Constructed from Dorothea’s journal, the novel recounts the history of her West Indian family in the months and years from July 1790 to April 1795. Doss, as Dorothea is affectionately called, is, at fifteen, the youngest of three sisters (Lucille or Louey is “not far from twenty” and Philippa or Phil is seventeen) living in Jamaica with their parents, paternal aunt Ellen (or Ellie), and close family friend Hugh Granville, a plantation owner who is the object of Doss’s confused romantic affections and who is nearly twice her age. The entries in Doss’s diary are a record of her thoughts, ranging from the mundane to the intriguing, and the tone she uses is often informal and familiar. The reader is treated to accounts of Kingston society as well as Doss’s musings on the French and Haitian revolutions. Pivotal to Doss’s narrative is the importance she places on her foray into authorship and the moral quandaries this activity raises. The novel’s dated entries reflect a young mind engaged in a range of internal and external debates and discussions. Lynch depicts Doss’s writing as grappling with serious political concerns such as the morality of chattel slavery, the role of religious practice in the West Indies, and the revolution in France at the end of the
eighteenth century. Equally significant are discussions of West Indian home life - young women’s educations, parental authority, proper English housekeeping, and the like. Each entry is an amalgamation of overlapping and intersecting topics. Like Seacole’s autobiography, Jenkin’s novel, and numerous nonfiction accounts such as Carmichael’s *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured and Negro Population* and Lynch’s *Wonders of the West Indies, Years Ago* includes major historical and political events and domestic, family affairs in the same text. This is a prominent feature of nineteenth-century Caribbean writing.

Perhaps the most frequently discussed subject of Doss’s journal is language - language spoken out loud and, more significantly, written language. The opening passage of *Years Ago*, for example, demonstrates the power Doss believes words possess:

> It is strange that my father, surrounded as he is by bushas, overseers, and bookkeepers, should retain his love of study, especially that of polite and elegant literature.

> I think, however, he is chiefly given to Natural History and Botany, of which latter he has taught me a little; and my sisters already quiz me so much that I am ashamed, as Papa says, to call things by their right names.

> Only last night, when I ventured to speak of our South Sea Rose as the Nerium, they said the discordant sound of such an appellation took away half the beauty of the flower. They did not agree with the old adage, that “A rose called by any other name smells just as sweet.”

> My father, too, has published one or two works, which have taken greatly with the English public. Some of the reviewers expressed their surprise that a West Indian wrote
so well. I do not think this was very complimentary, as the fact of being born under a tropical sun does not generally deaden the senses; and my father has a clear, quick mind, and talents far above the generality of people, though I am his own child who say so, and, moreover, a young girl of fifteen. (1-2)

In this passage, Lynch hints at ways of understanding gender and national origin from both an English and a Jamaican perspective. These assumptions about gender and nationality are filtered through the lens of language and its (language’s) potential ability to challenge particular notions of expected and appropriate behavior. Dorothea’s example of the South Sea Rose or Nerium demonstrates both the possibility in and the ambiguity of language. The text provides as an example an object that is called by two names - both acceptable - and associates the usage of each with a particular sphere of knowledge. Nerium is the scientific name, linked to traditional learning and masculinity, and the one that Dorothea has been taught by her father. South Sea Rose, on the other hand, is the name Dorothea’s sisters prefer, and this designation is better able, they believe, to communicate the aesthetic charm of the flower. It is figured in the text as the feminine appellation, and so Dorothea’s use of Nerium is the impetus for teasing from her sisters and mother. They claim, “that no gentleman would ever make love to me, when he knew I was a blue stocking” (5), an argument that stems from the notion that being too well educated and - worse yet - demonstrating that education is a breach of acceptable feminine behavior and makes one less desirable as a wife. An individual’s gender performance might be judged by which name they use - either nerium or South Sea Rose - but the conscious choice to use one or the other also suggests how the individual character wishes to be seen. Choosing one term over the other
demonstrates what that individual values and to which group or groups they wish to belong. In this case, despite being mocked by her sisters, Doss chooses to align herself with scientific, traditionally masculine knowledge, while also gesturing toward her knowledge of English literature with her reference to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

This passage also explicitly links language to questions of national and geographical origin. Here, Dorothea’s father’s writing grants him access to the English intellectual community via his presence in its written discourse. In addition, the strength of his writing pushes back against English assumptions about Jamaican (and, more broadly, West Indian) creole intelligence and capability. At the same time, the surprise that his readers express at his sharp intellect suggests that while his writing grants him access to English scientific discourse, it does not firmly ensconce him within that community. His writing might be good enough for study and discussion, but that alone is not enough to make him an Englishman. Or, it is not enough to make him *solely* English. His accomplishments are still situated within the context of his creoleness. In turn, his status as a white creole is intimately associated with the practice of slavery. Even Doss, in the opening paragraph, expresses surprise that close proximity to the apparatus of slavery (in the form of bushas - bosses - and overseers) hasn’t dampened her father’s intellectual drive. Here, Doss assumes the English point of view, complicating the distinction between English and Jamaican creole to which the rest of the passage alludes.

In addition to negotiating issues of national and geographical identity, the novel engages with gender representation in a number of ways. This engagement is articulated, firstly, through discussions of women’s relationships with writing. Doss has served as her father’s amanuensis
since the age of twelve, and takes great joy and pride in being able to participate in public, written discourse. Her role in this process has led to the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge that lead the female members of her family to call her a bluestocking. A mid-nineteenth-century definition of bluestocking foregrounds one of the central points of anxiety concerning Doss’s education with respect to her gender: “BLUE-STOCKING; a pedantic female; one who sacrifices the characteristic excellences of her sex to learning” (Encyclopaedia Americana 144). In this definition, knowledge acquisition not of the domestic kind is not only outside the realm of appropriate female behavior, it also cannot exist alongside the “excellences of her sex.” Absent from this elucidation of the bluestocking is the possibility of a woman who might embody both.

Negotiating between the realms of masculine discourse and feminine accomplishment causes Doss some anxiety, but ultimately the ability to perform in both worlds is a kind of power, one that is primarily mediated through the act of writing in her diary. In this text, Doss constructs a self who can participate in English cultural making and practice in ways that are private and public, domestic and political. Her desire to harness the power of the written word comes early on in the novel: “I wished Papa very much to give me leave to write a book; for when I am copying out his sweet thoughts, the spirit of the author seems to take possession of me” (3). Her father deems her too young to write a book, but not too young to keep a record of

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37 For discussions of the bluestocking figure, see Bluestockings Displayed, ed. Elizabeth Eger; Harriet Guest’s Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810; Eger et. al.’s Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830; and Betty A. Schellenberg’s “The Bluestockings and the Genealogy of the Modern Novel.”

38 The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of bluestocking isn’t as pejorative as the definition in the Encyclopaedia Americana, but it does say that “The depreciative usage was common throughout the 19th cent., but died out as attitudes to women’s education changed in the 20th cent.”
her thoughts. Here, the journal or diary is, in her father’s eyes, a safe, age and gender appropriate genre. In reality, the journal form gives Doss unrestricted freedom to write about anything in any way that she chooses (the text gives no indication that she shares her writing with any member of her family), and her diary becomes a repository for many different kinds of writing. It includes a recording of the family’s activities and conversations, writing that, Doss admits with some embarrassment, sometimes resembles that of a novel: “It is half novel, half history - a kind of attempt at writing a book” (107). She also includes writing about the geographical features and plants of Jamaica; its history and the history of the Maroons; accounts of the news from France, Haiti, and India; discussions of religion and slavery; and her thoughts about writing and authorship. The diary itself is multi-subject and multi-generic, a fact that does not escape her father’s attention. He tells her, “‘Talk to your journal in the same innocent childlike way you talk to me. The very moment that you think of style of composition it is all over with your poor Diary, for then it will cease to be natural, and its chief charm will be lost’” (4). In his view, a lack of genre (or “style”) specifications suits his daughter’s lack of writing skill, as well as her gender and age. What her father conceives of as a limited form of writing that is “innocent,” “childlike,” and appropriate for a fifteen-year-old girl, is in reality an unruly conglomeration of writing that affords Doss the opportunity to attempt many different kinds composition.

In the novel, the public writing and discourse of her father and Hugh and the private writing of Doss’s diary are put in dialogue. When the two meet, this is the result:

This I know is only one side of the question. Some accuse him [Warren Hastings] of being a tyrant, and unfit for power, and they say death would be his just reward; but
many of our colonial men never think of giving any patient thought to this matter; they act and speak impulsively, and cry out against unlimited power, whilst they hold the scourge in their hand to wield at their will.

But what business have I, a young girl, to write on matters like these? only papa and Hugh have such frequent political discussions in my hearing, that I cannot help catching up a little of what they say. (51)

Hugh and Doss’s father’s laissez faire attitude toward her eavesdropping benefits Doss. In the first paragraph, she articulates an insightful and sharp observation of West Indian creole hypocrisy, a thought she is not entirely at liberty to express out loud. The self-admonition that follows may undermine the severity of her invective, but it also indicates a heightened state of self-awareness. Doss is keenly attuned to the limits of acceptable behavior for a girl of her age, and the private space of her diary provides the opportunity to move back and forth over that line in self-reflection and self-fashioning. In some ways, her negotiation and understanding of the contexts in which it is acceptable for her to voice her opinion and those in which it is not is reminiscent of Mary Seacole’s autobiography. Seacole demonstrates her skill in navigating the competing discourses of science and religion, as well as her ability to know when and how to critique racist discourse. Both female creole figures prove themselves to be adept at moving through competing social, political, and ideological contexts (and the discourse produced in those contexts).

Genres of writing appropriate to young women - like Doss’s diary - are not, in the novel, restrictive. Instead, they provide opportunities for self-expression and autonomy. One of the
reasons writing is empowering is because it is, in some instances, transgressive. Through writing, Doss and other female characters break free of the gender restrictions of their home lives. For Philippa, Doss’s older sister, writing is a way of circumventing parental power in a way that also transgresses class boundaries. Early in the novel Phil rejects a marriage proposal from a Mr. Paul Gilpin, a man she does not love but who her mother thinks “is not only your equal, but in every way your superior” (88). Instead, Phil sets her sights on Leonard Otway, a merchant her mother describes as a “half-educated snob” (88). Phil defies her parents’ wishes and begins a public flirtation with Mr. Otway that develops into a secret exchange of letters. Through these letters she arranges unsupervised meetings with Mr. Otway and eventually marries him in secret. Phil and Doss’s circulation within the nuptial market is largely out of their control and in the hands of their parents. Consequently, Phil’s rejection of parentally approved suitors in favor of a lowly merchant exposes her to her parents’ wrath, particularly that of her father: “It was dreadful to see my father’s anger; he who generally had his feelings under such control; he who, if he spoke angrily to any of his daughters, would ask their pardon for having done so; it was dreadful, I say, to see him strike Phil, so that she staggered and fell back on the sofa” (174). Phil’s marital rebellion enrages her father beyond reason. It’s no surprise, then, that after witnessing this outburst, Doss agrees to marry Hugh. Both Doss and Phil are bound by certain expectations with respect to marriage and are not entirely free to act in accordance with their own desires.

In Phil’s case, however, private written discourse allows her to exert control over her body and life in ways that put her at odds with her parents’ expectations. Prior to her marriage to
Mr. Otway, but after their clandestine correspondence begins, Phil’s parents discover Mr. Otway’s letters. It is not only Mr. Otway’s social standing that upsets her parents. That those letters tie her affections to a mere merchant certainly contributes to their anger, but it is the unsanctioned circulation of writing that enrages her parents the most. Upon discovering her correspondence with Mr. Otway, her parents remove her writing desk from her room, a gesture both symbolic and practical. Doss has, in the past, assisted Phil in her romance with Mr. Otway - by keeping the couple out of her parents’ line of sight at social gatherings, for example. It stands to reason, then, that Phil could procure paper and pen from Doss. So, while the removal of the writing desk does make letter writing more difficult, it would not be impossible. Confiscating the desk, however, is emblematic of her parents’ disapproval and the ways in which Phil’s use of writing defies familial expectations. It also demonstrates how the apparatuses associated with the labor of writing - in this case the writing desk - symbolize the power of writing.

In light of her parents reaction to Phil’s inappropriate use of the written word, Doss’s reluctance to write freely about politics seems perfectly rational. Yet this reluctance does not prevent her from doing so. Her writing continues to engage with the tensions between feminine and masculine kinds of learning and accomplishment. Eventually, Doss discovers a way of combining the two that allows her to outwardly fulfill the expectations of her gender while also allowing her to intervene (if only privately) in masculine, public discourse. Perhaps nowhere in the novel is this confluence as clearly articulated as in the passage in which Doss’s father and Hugh engage in a conversation about William Wilberforce while she surreptitiously listens in:
After this, the conversation glided on into other matters; and I had been so busy plying my fingers over my lace-cushion, (a pleasant work, in which I am making rapid progress), that they never once suspected I had been attentively listening to all their converse, so that I might note it down in my journal. (188)

This short paragraph layers domestic work on top of political discussion, situates a young woman’s labor in the midst of male intellectual discourse, and pairs a male expectation of disinterested silence (from Doss) with her purposeful taciturnity (so that she may later make a record of their words). The realm of the private and domestic intrudes into the realm of public and political discourse and vice versa. More importantly, it is because of a domestic task that Doss can observe her father and Hugh’s conversation. Political discussions are, in the novel, “a thing men always do when there are not ladies enough in the company to keep the discourse on lighter matters” (156). Perhaps if Doss had not been otherwise engaged, the discussion would have fallen to other topics, particularly since the “prevailing idea” is “that women cannot understand politics” (207). But because she appears to be deeply engaged in her sewing, the political conversation continues. Doss acquires knowledge that is characterized as decidedly not feminine in a way that diverges from traditional, masculine methods of learning. In this case, that specifically means indirectly participating in the conversation with her father and Hugh.

Domesticity, then, functions not as a delimiter of female behavior, but as a point of ingress into particular spheres of masculinity. The products of domesticity - her lacework - provide a valuable tool with which Doss crosses the boundaries of gender expectations.
The novel does not figure political concerns over domestic ones. Rather than prioritizing feminine domestic concerns over masculine political debate or vice versa, Doss finds a way to experience and participate in both. While her participation in the political sphere may be limited (at this point) to covert observation and transcription, the act of writing provides a less-direct means by which she might participate in that discourse. Doss not only transcribes these conversations, she embeds them within a framework of her own thoughts and opinions, even as she sometimes dismisses her own analysis of those issues. Through written discourse she brings into being a self who might participate in the public sphere, if only in a limited fashion. She is able to do so even while engaged in a traditionally feminine domestic activity. That this labor is not merely a ruse Doss employs to listen in on the conversation is significant. She calls it “a pleasant work” and marks her “rapid progress” in perfecting the art. There is no rejection of the traditionally feminine, merely a reworking of its circumstances to suit Doss’s needs. It is not “just” through politics or through feminine refinements that she develops her identity. Instead, both provide a means of fashioning a self in which feminine refinement is as valued as knowledge of current events.

The genres of diaries and letters are remarkably transformative in the novel. Unlike legislation or journalism, genres with, perhaps, a more overt impact on the world, these forms of private writing exert a power that is subtle and more limited in scope. Yet they bear significant importance for the individuals who participate in those forms of writing. In the novel, writing is power. Doss acknowledges this, but continues to express her ambivalence about her ability to wield it:
What a wonderful power is that of writing! taking hold of men’s minds in a magical way, and leaving your influence behind you, so that being dead you are yet speaking.

Papa says authorship is a serious responsibility - a talent held in trust for the Great Master - and that it should never be connected with caprice or frivolity.

I do not think I shall ever have courage to write a book. Perhaps I shall be answerable even for my journal, for I am afraid some frivolity has crept in on its pages. However, it is not likely that my private memorandum of our household life will ever influence the world. (209-210)

The likelihood that others will see her journal is slim, yet Doss feels the need to take great care with her words. The statement that “it is not likely that my private memorandum of our household life will ever influence the world,” however, doesn’t ring entirely true, largely because Lynch has published a novel in the form of a “private memorandum.” Doing so suggests that Lynch sees value in this genre and the subjects it explores. Regardless, Doss’s trepidation here is representative of an anxiety of gender performance. The role of the author is still very much a masculine one, and while Doss is anxious about invading other circles of male-dominated discourse, here she seems to be fearful of not being masculine enough.

Doss’s talk of “leaving your influence behind” is an interesting complication to traditional modes of feminine influence. Lynch imbues her protagonist with a significant

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39 The fraught relationship between gender and writing has been the focus of much literary scholarship in the past several decades. Critics like Gilbert and Gubar explore how women’s writing complicates the traditional association of masculinity with authorship. Women have been able to write, they argue, “despite the fears of sterility and the anxieties of authorship from which women have suffered” (44). These anxieties stem, in part, from what was, to
degree of awe at the power of language, thus endowing Doss with some of that power when she
begins to write. For her, the potential influence of writing is both exhilarating and terrifying. The
role she takes on while transcribing her father’s thoughts is clearly defined. As an amanuensis
she isn’t expected to offer suggestions or critique; she considers herself a mere instrument of her
father’s intellect. The giddy fear she experiences when she begins to capture her own thoughts is
indicative of the lack of guidance she has within the world of original written discourse. It is not
surprising, then, that a significant portion of her diary is filled with the text of others’
conversations, most often her father or Hugh. Just as Doss receives little guidance when she
writes, she finds herself bound by few rules; this produces both excitement and anxiety.
Particularly, Doss is concerned that her writing might contain “frivolity,” and that the opinions
she expresses, while perhaps appropriate given her age and gender, are inappropriate for the
serious task of writing. Despite this, she continues to record her opinions about significant
historical and political events, as well as her thoughts on social engagements and courtship.
Through the medium of her diary, Doss can, ironically, privately participate in public discourse.
Writing is not only a method that tests the boundaries of traditional femininity, but also a way to
reconceptualize what being a young creole woman means.

eighteenth and nineteenth-century women writers, a conflict between the act of writing and expectations of gender:
“The masculine authority with which they construct their literary personae, as well as the fierce power struggles in
which they engage in their efforts of self-creation, seem to the woman writer directly to contradict the terms of her
own gender definition” (48). Elsie B. Michie echoes Gilbert and Gubar’s contention that writing was widely
considered a masculine act (2). Furthermore, Michie argues, the woman writer “was excluded from a realm
implicitly defined as masculine because she was imprisoned within a limiting definition of femininity” (4).
Catherine Delafield narrows her focus on women’s writing to the genre of the diary. Diary writing, Delafield claims,
was an “authorized occasion for writing” that “helps to define women’s private, domestic and relational status. It is
ostensibly a form of writing without an addressee and creates a type of female writer somewhere between a ‘friend’
and an ‘authoress’” (14). The diary, then, is a genre that, in some ways, mitigates the conflict between the
“masculine authority” traditionally associated with authorship and the demands of eighteenth and nineteenth-century femininity.
As she engages in the act of authorship, the narrator is attempting not only self-fashioning with respect to her gender. She is also negotiating issues of West Indian creole and British identity. Dorothea proudly asserts her Caribbean birth while also affirming her ties to England. She is Jamaican (13) and West Indian (52, 197, 255), but calls England “my dear ancestral land” (207). Nothing in her diary suggests that Doss necessarily considers this layering of national allegiances contradictory or anxiety inducing. Like Mary Seacole, Doss moves easily between identities, sometimes seeming to wear them simultaneously. Her concept of what constitutes national and/or cultural identity is malleable, a fact that is reflected in the sense of self she constructs within the framework of her diary. There are qualities she considers particular to West Indian creoleness and to Englishness, certainly, but those individual characteristics aren’t easily mapped as a coherent field. The line between the two cultures is at times unclear. While the mere existence of more than one cultural identity may not be a source of trepidation, how those identities overlap, merge, and interact can be. In other words, the conflict arises not in the presence of both English and West Indian creole qualities, but in which of those qualities does or does not take precedence in specific contexts.

Lynch’s description of Doss sometimes blends both English and West Indian creole characteristics, but that description also makes clear the differences between the two. In some cases these differences are scorned while in others they are extolled. For example, Doss claims that because “ladies in the West Indies have no money cares” (9), they fail to meet English expectations for housekeeping: “How can girls brought up this way, ever become what is called in England, good managers? How can they prove careful and economical English wives?” (10).
Here, as in Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella*, English domesticity is set as the standard that must be met. In the characters of both Doss and Stella lies anxiety concerning the housekeeping capabilities of West Indian women. Yet while this anxiety, for Doss, stems from a hypothetical failure, for Jenkin’s character, failed domesticity already exists in her father and stepmother’s home. Both texts acknowledge that white West Indian creole culture is, with respect to household management, deficient. Later, however, Doss’s father criticizes “English school girls, ready for mischief, and up to any nonsense,” claiming that his daughters have none of “that sheepishness about her which is observable in English girls” (39). In this instance, the Jamaican mode of behavior is more favorable. What’s at stake here is when and where a creole approach is superior to an English approach and when it is not. The text suggests that in the private sphere, the English style is usually preferable while in the public, social sphere, the creole fashion is often superior. In fact, what the text implies is more forceful than simple preference. Young women in the West Indies aren’t just less economical than English women; they “have no money cares” at all. English girls in social situations aren’t merely shy, they’re “ready for mischief.” The figure of the young woman is, then, always a potential site of domestic and social failure.

Doss also takes great pains to demonstrate the lineage that connects her family to English families of note, tracing their roots back to England - her father to Thomas Fairfax and her mother to Edmund Waller. The two historical figures Lynch associates with her fictional family present an interesting complication of the novel’s general declaration of loyalty to England. The two men represent competing loyalties and varying degrees of allegiance to England and the Crown. Fairfax aligned himself with Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War, yet he
refused to participate in Charles I’s trial and eventually resigned his commission. Waller, on the other hand, was a supporter of the king and part of the conspiracy known as Waller’s plot, though he eventually reconciled with Cromwell. The history associated with each man suggests that the role these figures play in the text is layered, doing more than simply linking Doss’s family back to England. By including a scene in which her father reads Waller’s poems aloud, Lynch attempts to call attention to Waller’s literary accomplishments and eventual reconciliation with Cromwell rather than his part in political and historical intrigue. The invocation of his name is enough to bring the latter details to the fore:

All this week papa has been reading Waller’s Poems to us while we worked, and even mamma has joined us, though she is not over-fond of poetry, giving up her afternoon sleep for this purpose. My mother’s family is distantly related to Waller; this binds her to him; and then he was an intimate friend of Cromwell’s, which mamma says is enough of itself to make my father think him a very fine fellow. (22-23)

Doss’s father’s regard for Cromwell (as well as the fact that his family descends, he claims, from Cromwell) suggests admiration for those who would stand up to the authority of the Crown. This isn’t terribly surprising given the friction between English Parliament and West Indian planters at the end of the eighteenth century. As England moved toward the abolition of the slave trade, significant strain developed between the English and colonial governments. Doss’s father

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40 After his part in the conspiracy to take London for the king was uncovered, Waller confessed and apologized to Parliament. He was fined and exiled for a time, while his co-conspirators were hanged.

41 See Kenneth Morgan’s Slavery and the British Empire (2007), which also references several contemporary planter accounts of the abolitionist movement. See specifically An Appeal to the Candour and Justice of the People of England in Behalf of the West Indian Merchants and Planters (1792). For other accounts focusing on West Indian planters see David Ryden’s West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783-1807 (2009) and Trevor Burnard’s
claims, “such a question [the abolition of the slave trade] being mooted in the House of Commons is sapping our colonial security at its foundations” (135). This statement dramatizes the conflict between anti-slavery voices in England and pro-slavery voices in Jamaica, highlighting questions of Parliamentary authority and colonial independence. The family’s origin story, then, becomes more than just a claim to lineage. It also suggests that Doss’s father considers his readiness to disagree with the British government to be an English quality. Lynch’s description of Doss’s roots has larger political implications, linking the drama of the domestic to the drama of the political. These public and private spheres overlap and intersect in ways that are sometimes troubling, but always productive.

Despite these relatively strong claims of cultural superiority and inferiority, and the importance placed on family lineage, the negotiation between the benefits and drawbacks of both English and West Indian culture becomes more ambiguous as the novel progresses. This is demonstrated most clearly in a passage that references women’s education in the West Indies. Doss’s father takes great pride in having not sent his daughters to England for their education, even though this was generally the custom. Phil, however, criticizes the value of this education:

“I do believe, Doss,” Phil continued in a kind of timorous way, “my education has been greatly in fault. We West Indian girls have such a foolish family pride instilled into us, that we begin almost from our cradles to think ourselves better than those who very often are far superior to us. Colonial life is calculated to make one narrow-minded. We give more weight than is due to colonial employments, colonial honours, &c; and I have been

feeling all this time...that a West Indian planter’s daughter was too noble forsooth to be the wife of an English merchant’s son.” (255)

Phil’s marriage to Mr. Otway is comprised of, at first, a series of arguments and misunderstandings often stemming from their different class positions. After her husband falls ill, however, Phil quickly learns to appreciate Mr. Otway’s good qualities, and the couple seems to be relatively content at the end of the novel. This passage locates the source of her marital trouble in education, particularly the type of education one receives in the British West Indies. It instills the “foolish family pride” that prevents Phil from fulfilling her role as a wife. During Phil’s childhood, the foregrounding of, or the importance placed on, colonial life interferes with her ability to be an ideal spouse. What is suggested here is the notion that loyalty to a West Indian creole identity is problematic when that identity isn’t placed within the larger context of the British Empire as a subsidiary rather than an equal. When Jamaica, for example, is placed the referential center, there is no sense of proportion and colonial “employsments” and “honours” take on an inflated sense of significance. The family’s socioeconomic status and their history as a longstanding Jamaican family can’t nullify the power of Englishness. National origin - her husband Leonard is the “English merchant’s son” - trumps class. Doss receives the same education as her sister and manages to find contentment in her own marriage to Hugh, however, suggesting that something other than the mere presence of a sense of West Indian creoleness is the root of the problem. Phil locates the source of conflict in her marriage not just in her education and upbringing, but more specifically in her own arrogance. Again, this representation situates England and its culture at the top of the hierarchy of national identity. It is the degree,
then, to which this cultural and familial self-worth is expressed rather than its mere presence that is problematic.

Doss’s diary has, thus far, two major functions with respect to identity. One, the act of writing itself is a process through which she explores the expectations of her age and gender. Two, her journal captures the negotiations Doss and her family engage in with respect to their national and cultural identity. Both the physical journal and the labor of writing are value-laden “things” that allow the narrator to reimagine and represent her sense of self. Much of this reimagining and representing is done with a degree of self-consciousness. Doss engages with her internal dialogue in the pages of her diary, questioning her role in both her family and in Jamaican and English society. Other value-laden “things” in the novel appear and circulate in, perhaps, less deliberate ways. These more traditional commodities - clothing and household goods, for example - are also essential to the novel’s deployment of identity categories. The relationships Lynch constructs between people and the things they wear, buy, make, and sell reflect the importance of commodities and commodity culture to representations of race and class.

This is especially true when Lynch writes about slavery. Despite the essential role enslaved labor plays in Doss’s family’s wealth and day-to-day existence, the mentions of the institution and the people bound to it are notably infrequent. Lynch only sometimes depicts enslaved people as individuals, choosing instead to depict groups of people or “slaves” in a general sense. This is true of the women who scrub the floors of the family home, a procession of enslaved men and women mourning the death of a friend, and the groups of slaves celebrating
Christmas on the plantation. The novel is vaguely and superficially anti-slavery, but the casual way in which enslaved people appear in and disappear from the narrative suggests how deeply ingrained into colonial life slavery was, and how generally unconcerned the white characters are for the lives of enslaved individuals. And yet, these casual, almost offhand, representations of slavery manage to draw clear racial distinctions between white and black Jamaicans.

The limits of the novel’s support for abolition is reflected in how enslaved peoples in the novel are placed in relation to commodities. Some of the characters in Lynch’s novel - including Doss - engage in a critique of slavery, albeit in a paternalistic fashion that does little to recognize the equal humanity of enslaved peoples. Nor do these characters hold white West Indian creoles responsible for their participation in the practice of chattel slavery. For these characters, their “sympathy” for the cause of abolition extends only so far. That’s made clear through direct conversations about abolition, but also through how slavery and enslaved people are woven into the background of the story. Anonymous groups of slaves materialize in the narrative in order to perform some sort of service for the white characters with no mention of the fact that their labor is forced and uncompensated. The privileged and comfortable life Doss leads is and has been supported by this labor, so it’s easy to see why this character might take that labor for granted. Lynch describes Doss as possessing an anti-slavery perspective, however. The character’s inability, then, to connect the horror she expresses about the institution of slavery to the people who are enslaved, demonstrates the limitations of Doss’s abolitionist sentiment.

The integration of slavery and enslaved people into the novel often takes place in the context of commodity culture, and demonstrates how central commodities are in understanding
the novel’s construction of racial difference. Domestic culture in late eighteenth-century Jamaica is overwhelmingly produced by forced labor. West Indian creole domesticity is supported by the practice of slavery; goods brought into the home are purchased using the profits accrued from enslaved labor and various domestic tasks are performed by enslaved persons. As slavery became increasingly controversial in England and elsewhere, and as the English government increased their involvement in questions of the legality of the slave trade, the political sphere’s influence on the West Indian domestic sphere increased. It was more than just the economic and labor system of Jamaica that was up for debate. The integration of enslaved labor into the home and domestic culture meant that West Indian domesticity found itself at the heart of those conversations. Fictional representations of West Indian domestic practices, then, are also representations of race and the moral and political values embedded within slavery. One of the most frequently repeated motifs of Caribbean domesticity is the breakfast or dinner table. Seacole’s autobiography defines British culture in part by describing the recreation of a holiday meal in Crimea. Cousin Stella’s critique of English domesticity is rooted in a depiction of teatime, and Jenkin communicates the immorality of slavery in the excess and disorder of a breakfast table. Each of these scenes helps define a particular facet of cultural identity. Similarly, Lynch’s description of breakfast is integral to how the novel defines whiteness and blackness:

We are obliged at this season to have three or four little boys, during breakfast-time, to stand round the table, continually waving orange boughs over it to keep off the flies. These children wear nothing but an Osnaburg frock, a neatly-made shirt of coarse German linen, reaching a little below their knees. My parents had a discussion yesterday
on this matter, papa asserting that these boys ought to be habited in trowsers of the same material, and mamma declaring that such a fashion would be preposterous for them, and uncomfortable also, besides much time being wasted in the making, mending, and washing of the extra articles of clothing.

This last argument seemed to have some weight with my father, for nothing more was said on the subject; and indeed I think their glassy black feet look brave as our polished leather shoes. (9)

The breakfast table is a nexus of household activity, the physical site of familial congregation and conversation, and a tangible manifestation of the plantation’s abundance and wealth. Encircling this domestic center is forced child labor. West Indian domestic culture is, in this scene, literally framed by the act of enslavement.

This commonplace breakfast scene illustrates how slavery is integrated into and supports colonial domesticity while also demonstrating that enslaved labor is made separate from white domestic culture by being made visibly different. In this case, that visible difference is rendered through material culture, specifically through clothing. The amount of fabric the family is willing to use to clothe the bodies of these enslaved children is relative to how much worth their enslavers are willing to give them. Quality and quantity of dress becomes a negotiation of degrees of humanity. In this instance, the lack of “trowsers” is a visual indicator of how much freedom and power these boys possess. Doss’s observation that “their glassy black feet look brave as our polished leather shoes” collapses commodities and human beings, blurring the line between the thing worn and the wearer. This configuration blurs the distinction between the
commodity - shoes - and the body. Commodified human being’s bodies become, in the eyes of the white commodifier, indistinguishable from other pieces of material culture. A body that does not “require” clothing and that is “like” an article of clothing is a commodified one. By restricting how these boys’ bodies are clothed, and by likening their feet to shoes, the text constructs a world in which one’s relationship to material goods - particularly clothing - is a significant determining cultural factor of his or her place in the racial hierarchy of Jamaican life.

In the novel, what clothing characters wear and how they wear it constructs racial difference. Early in the narrative, Doss details a visit to Hugh’s plantation. Alongside a more general account of his grounds and stores, Doss includes a related, more specific anecdote:

In the clothing stores were piles and piles of Osnaburg linen, many rolls of blue baize, and a vast quantity of striped linen for petticoats for the women. Then there were pieces of colored check for shirts; and hundreds, I could almost say thousands, of handkerchiefs of varying hues for turbans.

Hugh tells me he is obliged to have an abundance of these, and indeed it is necessary, for the moment a negro has an ailment of any sort - if his foot or arm be in pain, he immediately wraps his head in one of these kerchiefs.

Sometimes they will put two or three on. The other morning, our old nurse Sukey came with three on her head, each rising a little above the other, till the pyramid is complete. Papa laughed till the old soul got into a great passion. She had a swollen knee, and this was the cause of her head-wrapping! (32)
Here, Doss characterizes the way slaves use kerchiefs as a point of amusement and ridicule. In the passage from the breakfast table, clothing is pared down to the smallest amount required for some degree of decency. Pants for the little boys who stand around the table are an unnecessary expense. In both descriptions, then, the relationship between articles of clothing and enslaved people incorporates excess. Certain articles of clothing are, from the white West Indian perspective, superfluous. Taken together, these two examples reinforce the notion that what the novel thinks of as civility in dress is either unnecessary for or ineptly performed by enslaved people.

Compare those representations with the ways in which white women in the novel interact with their own clothing. When Doss fusses over whether or not she can tie the sash of her dress in the front or the back - each position signifying something different in terms of her age and marital status - the novel suggests that this is a very real concern with significant social consequences (even if it is not of grave importance). For white West Indians in the novel, then, even minor, seemingly superficial adjustments of clothing have significant effects on a person’s standing within society. Even if we took Lynch’s character’s interpretation of the practical and cultural meaning of enslaved people’s use of kerchiefs (and there are many reasons not to), the characterization of these kerchiefs versus that of Doss’s musings on her own sartorial choices implies a double standard. The adjustment of Doss’s sash serves no practical purpose, yet is taken seriously as an expression of age, marital status, and gender. The donning of
handkerchiefs, however, is judged according to its practical purpose, ignoring any social or cultural significance it might have.\footnote{Steve O. Buckridge’s \textit{The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890} (2004) explores in detail the different cultural and social meanings of the head wrap in Jamaican slave society.}

The presence of commodities other than apparel also factors into representations of race in a significant ways. In Lynch’s description of Hugh’s grounds and buildings, there is little distinction made between the humans forced to labor in the fields and other mechanisms of slavery. She mentions the overseer’s home, but not the overseer himself. There is “a large hospital for the sick negroes; and joining this is a sort of prison, a large dark room, for confining disorderly negroes” (32), but no doctor and no jailkeeper. In her pages of description, the only people who appear amidst the buildings are enslaved. After recounting the story of Sukey and the handkerchiefs, Doss’s description segues into a detailed recitation of the plantation’s stores: “There were nails, and cattle-chains, and hoes, and bills, and hoops, and hogsheads; lamp-oil, and large copper ladles and skimmers for boilers; a quantity of small iron pots for the negroes, and several large grindstones” (33). In this description, slaves simply become another commodity - like Osnaburg linen, copper ladles, or boxes of soap. The type of description that does not differentiate between the barrels of nails and the human laborers, in terms of their relationship to the functioning of the plantation, attempts to normalize slavery while at the same time dehumanizing the physical labor behind that function. If clothing serves as a way of distinguishing black from white, the abundance of commodity description seen in this entry endeavors to equalize enslaved individuals with the objects that sustain chattel slavery. In doing so, the novel attempts a kind of erasure of people of African descent.
Another form of erasure appears when the novel describes certain commodities in an attempt to gloss over the conditions of chattel slavery. In her description of Hugh’s plantation, Lynch includes a description of the slave quarters, the possessions therein, and how Jamaican slaves utilize the Sunday marketplace. The enumeration of the kind of furniture within the slave quarters sets up a comparison meant to minimize the severity of the conditions: “Hugh says they are far better than many of the Irish cabins which he has seen; and then these rough houses are only for the newly-arrived African negroes; they soon become more civilized, and learn how to satisfy their increasing requirements” (34). First, Lynch takes care to outline what masters do give their slaves: a bedstead, table, stools, a pan, clasp-knife, clay jars, and wooden bowls (34). Second, Lynch reasons away the meager and “rough” nature of these accommodations by making a claim about newly enslaved people’s degree of civility. Over time, Lynch argues, with increased exposure to European values (one presumes), persons of African descent will improve their accommodations accordingly. The quality of the novel’s slave quarters, then, rests not on how white West Indians value the humans they’ve enslaved for personal profit. Rather, the novel argues, the sparse, dirt-floored cottages built from sticks and thatch are an accurate reflection of how civilized enslaved people are or are not. This characterization fits into a larger pro-slavery or slavery apologist narrative that claims that the state of being enslaved is somehow less of a burden for particular races, and that exposure to European culture and values is somehow a gift to those who labor as slaves.

Furthermore, the way the novel depicts the relationships between enslaved people and commodities does less to suggest something about how slaves use commodities to define
themselves (as Doss and other white West Indians do in the novel), and more to suggest how Lynch envisions the relationship between white landowner and black, enslaved laborer (from the landowner’s perspective). In other words, the way Lynch uses commodities to explore racial difference positions whites as the determiners of both the difference between white and black as well as what it means to be white or black. Doss’s journal contains a long litany of the different crops and household goods that slaves sell and trade in the market on Sundays. She remarks “that very little labor suffices for the growth of corn and vegetables” (36), and that slaves “always dispose profitably of their fruits and vegetables” (36). She also comments on what “a pretty sight it is, people pouring down from the mountains” (36) and that “the scene itself is a cheerful one” (37). Rather than highlighting that the work done to produce these goods is done in addition to laboring in the fields, that the market takes place on the one day enslaved people are not required to work on the plantations, or that this selling and bartering is done to complement the rudimentary supplies provided by white landowners, Doss constructs a picturesque scene enabled by the magnanimity, rather than the cruelty, of whites enslavers. The scene does demonstrate the agency and ingenuity of enslaved people in terms of marketing and profiting from their own skills and labor, but the framework provided by the novel downplays that agency in favor of presenting a “gentle” form of slavery that elides the conditions of forced labor. The commodity relationships Lynch highlights advance this particular view.

Clothing in the novel also serves to represent race with respect to gender and appropriate gender roles, particularly for white women. Engaging with the commodity culture of dress
highlights class distinctions as well. The mastery of traditional expressions of femininity and upper-class standing is, in the novel, a major preoccupation:

Mamma says nothing shows more plainly real high breeding than carrying the long sea of muslin easily and gracefully. I am sure I ought to be well skilled in this accomplishment, for our dancing mistress, a French lady, always finished her lessons by making me practice in mamma’s train. (10-11)

It is not just the presence of muslin that demonstrates “high breeding.” Doss’s actions, how she carries this material, is equally if not more important than simply appearing in it. Wearing such a fashion yet lacking the cultural education that dictates how it should be worn would very clearly distinguish a white creole woman’s socioeconomic status. Value is determined not just through cost but also, perhaps more significantly, through use. The presence of certain objects might indicate wealth, but they cannot attest to level of refinement or familial lineage. As with the sash on Doss’s dress, the seemingly trivial detail of a muslin train carries with it a burden of classed behavior. It can signify both belonging and not belonging.

White creole women’s clothing also reflects differences in labor burdens. In Years Ago, the circulation of commodities makes visible the work of enslaved peoples (even as it downplays the demands of that work). Lynch’s description of Doss’s own accoutrements, however, highlight not only their opulence, but also the lack of labor required on Doss’s part to acquire them. An entry on October 5th, 1790 opens with:

The box, the ardently expected box, has arrived from England.
Mamma says, she believes that all over the Island there is not such another liberal father as ours.

Our supply of finery is abundant, and such as to satisfy the most requiring and fastidious children. (42)

These commodities are given, not earned, and they are, by Doss’s own admission, lavish. Here, a confluence of gender, class, and race is embodied in the presence of a box of dresses and shoes from England. Femininity is expressed through a preoccupation with appearance as well as an expectation of beauty, and Doss eagerly participates in this gender role. Doss and her sisters need not work to earn these commodities. An absence of labor somehow transforms into material goods, making clear the family’s wealth. This transformation also distinguishes the lives of white and black women by burdening or unburdening their respective bodies with labor.

The arrival of the box also provides a link to English culture, as well as an opportunity to highlight what about their dress is still in a West Indian creole style. Doss and her sisters take their fashion cues from England, and aspire to be like “lovely English girls of noble rank” (43-44), though Doss doubts her ability to live up to those standards. Through her father’s money and permission, the household is able to maintain a connection to and be a part of English commodity culture, even living remotely in Jamaica. While this connection is important to the family, the extent to which English fashions are “allowed” in the home demonstrates the family’s West Indian-ness. For example, Doss’s father will not allow his daughters to powder their hair, despite it being the current fashion.
Creole class distinctions are also reinforced through objects of dress. The British West Indies had, for centuries, given English not of the ruling elite the opportunity to accrue capital beyond what was available to them in England, and this wealth muddied the distinctions between classes. In the novel, the character of Leonard Otway exemplifies this phenomenon. Mr. Otway, whose father accumulated wealth through work rather than inheritance, is himself a successful tradesmen. The limited range of society in Jamaica and Mr. Otway’s wealth (modest as it may be in comparison to the narrator’s family) grant him access to certain West Indian creole social circles, yet the society keeps him at arm’s length. The general disapproval of Mr. Otway from the top of Jamaican society is expressed through specific commodities of dress. In one instance, a group of married women express their dismay over Mr. Otway’s presence at a social function by “using their large painted fans with great vehemence” (53). In another, a colonel’s wife turns her nose up at him after “[peering] at him through her eye-glass” (57). These small details describe methods of making class distinction *through* material culture. Class may be indicated by the presence and through the use of certain adornments, but active expressions of marking difference - in this case between the island’s elite and Mr. Otway’s merchant class - are also articulated through these objects. As with other commodities in the novel - written discourse and clothing, for example - it is not only what the thing *is* but also what it *does* that signifies cultural, racial, and social status. Commodities make meaning and have value not only while circulating, but also when the function as tools of meaning and value making.

Objects of dress, however, are not only used to demonstrate difference. The novel also uses these objects to demonstrate connections, including familial ones. For example, when
Doss’s older sister Louey becomes gravely ill, Doss describes in her journal some gifts of jewelry she receives from her (now) husband, Hugh. At first, her description of these objects seems frivolous and strange in the midst of describing the sickness that will eventually claim her older sister’s life. Admittedly, there is a degree of frivolity in her writing, particularly when she lists the many items of fine clothing her husband has gifted her. However, Doss segues from that description into another that illuminates how certain commodities commemorate and strengthen familial ties:

> Over and above the things I usually have, he has given me a dove-coloured silk cloak, and a bonny beaver hat, with a feather in it; also a dozen pairs of white silk stockings, with the stocks beautifully enwrought. Oh me! I cannot take pleasure in all this finery now.

> I seem to have grown ten years older since Louey has been fading away before us. Far more than all the dresses, I prize my mother’s likeness, which my dear husband has given me, beautifully set in pearls, as a brooch; and I have shed tears this morning over another present of Hugh’s, a small gold locket, with a real diamond on the back, in which Louey’s hair and Phil’s are lovingly entwined. (262-263)

Doss’s claim that she can’t “take pleasure in all this finery now” seems somewhat disingenuous considering her eager recitation of her new possessions, but the passage does make clear differences between certain kinds of commodities. The first set - the cloak, hat, and etc. - demonstrate Hugh’s wealth and class standing as well as his position as husband to a (financially) dependent wife. In other words, both class and gender expectations are
communicated through the first list. The second set of commodities - the brooch and locket - are again indicative of wealth, but they also indicate Doss’s continuing connection to the women in her family. Those relationships are reflected in and strengthened by the jewelry Doss wears.

Lynch’s novel imagines a Jamaican creole society in which the circulation of texts and other material commodities becomes an opportunity to create, reinforce, examine, and resist expressions of national, cultural, gender, racial, and class identity. Through writing, Doss tests the boundaries of traditional femininity and explores what it means to be a white creole woman in the late eighteenth century. At the same time, she finds personal satisfaction in engaging in activities typical of young women (both English and creole) - particularly the arts of needlework and costuming. Written discourse also functions as a tool that can negotiate national and cultural identity. In the novel, writing can produce a sense of English identity that crosses the Atlantic. At the same time, the written word is a means of distinguishing creoleness from Englishness. Lynch’s use of clothing produces and reflects assumed racial and class difference in Jamaican society. What these commodities make clear is the interdependence of different categories of identity. Expectations of gender, for example, cannot be divorced from understandings of racial difference. What is also made clear is how these commodities allow a female white creole character to inhabit different aspects of her identity in complex ways. Doss neither wholly accepts or fully rejects Englishness, creoleness, or traditional gender roles. In the end, Doss marries Hugh and her role as wife and mother supersedes her role as author. However, unlike her sister Phil, who excels at feminine accomplishment but finds herself in an unhappy marriage, Doss finds a suitable match in a husband who values the intellect that has been honed by her
writing. In this way, the novel turns a critical eye toward traditional gender expectations for young women, offering instead a female subjectivity that is both traditional and modern. The text’s understanding of national and cultural identity operates in a similar fashion. One need not be only English or only creole. The characters in Lynch’s novel, much like Stella Joddrell in *Cousin Stella*, select which pieces of metropolitan culture they wish to incorporate into their lives, claiming that some situations call for an English approach, others a creole perspective. The novel’s views on race (and to a certain extent class) are not nearly as complex. There are limitations, then, to the flexibility and possibility of white creole society.
Conclusion

When considered together, the three texts analyzed in this dissertation demonstrate the contributions nineteenth-century creole women’s writing make to understandings of English and creole identity and culture in the 1800s. These writers’ status as creole women gives them a unique perspective on the relationship between the domestic sphere and broader cultural understandings of Englishness. These writers and their creole characters share the experience of being represented as figures who exist in and among multiple identity positions. Their literary responses to this ambiguity and multiplicity demonstrate how creole identity can be simultaneously confining and liberating. The creole characters in the examined texts negotiate the expectations of English culture and the geographical realities of their births. In doing so, these texts challenge other literary representations of creole women that embody or threaten cultural degeneration.

My first chapter, “Self-Fashioning Within and Without in The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands,” argues that Seacole’s narrative responds to and challenges dominant scientific and cultural discourses concerning the bodies of women of color. By emphasizing the depth and breadth of her intellect, focusing on her maternal characteristics, and directly attacking racist ideology, Seacole becomes a sympathetic and likeable character. In the text, her status as a creole woman - an interstitial figure - allows her to move in and out of different identity positions, giving her access to a wide range of self-representations. My use of the word creole in this dissertation is not racially specific, but Seacole’s text demonstrates how important discussions of race were to the experience of being creole. Perceived by the English as
already culturally deficient or failing, Seacole’s creole woman of color cannot use some of the rhetorical strategies available to white creole women to affirm their moral and cultural status.

In my second chapter, “Marriage, Slavery, and the Domestic Ideal in Henrietta Camilla Jenkin’s *Cousin Stella; or, Conflict,*” I argue that the novel critiques not only English culture, but also the notion that culture can exist in a consistent and coherent state. The main character’s status as a creole woman with an English education places her, I contend, in a unique position with respect to domesticity, giving her the opportunity to pick and choose which elements of English culture to recreate. In doing so, the novel resists a narrative of creole cultural degeneration by demonstrating that a female creole character can not only successfully reproduce Englishness in a colonial setting, but that she can be a moral character even when she chooses not to adhere to English cultural norms.

In my third chapter, “Books, Bluestockings, and Lace: Print and Commodity Culture in Theodora Elizabeth Lynch’s *Years Ago: A Tale of West Indian Domestic Life of the Eighteenth Century,*” I argue that the circulation of commodities - from written discourse to articles of clothing - is the process by which creole characters negotiate their national, cultural, gender, racial, and class identities. Objects like books and dresses become tools that demonstrate belonging or not belonging. The relationships between characters and “things” makes clear the interdependence of these different identity categories, and shows how the main character is able, because of her status as a creole woman, to take on more than one of these categories at once.

Mid-nineteenth-century texts written by Jamaican creole women expand our understanding of the nature and role of domestic culture in a colonial milieu. This dissertation
participates in critical conversations carried out by scholars like Ann Laura Stoler, Radhika Mohanram, and Jenny Sharpe (among others) that analyze the mutually constitutive relationship between domesticity and colonialism. These conversations engage with the ways in which race and gender impact expressions of colonial domesticity. My dissertation adds a less-familiar perspective - the nineteenth-century British Caribbean - to these discussions, demonstrating that the domestic sphere continued to play an important role in West Indian creole life well into the nineteenth century. Seacole, Jenkin, and Lynch’s texts represent a larger body of literature written by creole women, and this literature expands the role creole women writers played in the formation of both English and West Indian identity not only in the nineteenth century, but into the twentieth century as well.

My analysis demonstrates that the figure of the creole woman in these texts resists how creole women were often represented in writing by English authors. In those texts, these characters are sometimes depicted as sexually depraved and violent, irrevocably tainted by their association to slavery, and/or at risk of cultural degeneration due to their proximity to the practice of slavery. Seacole, Jenkin, and Lynch resist this characterization, representing creole women as moral, industrious, and culturally productive (rather than just culturally reflective). These texts suggest that to be creole is to be creative and creating. They also suggest that creole characters are particularly adept at negotiating different identity categories. Texts written by creole women acknowledge the slipperiness of identity, but rather than depicting this ambiguity as an anxiety or a form of cultural degradation, creole women writers rewrite the narrative to suggest that ambiguity is productive, creative, and - perhaps most importantly - possible.


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