



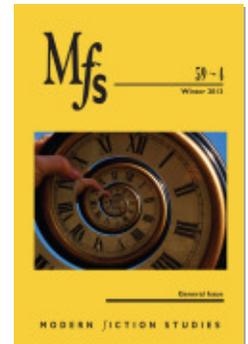
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“Who worked this evil, brought distance between us?”: The Politics of Sexual Interaction in Sylvia Wynter’s *The Hills of Hebron*

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**"WHO WORKED THIS EVIL,
BROUGHT DISTANCE BETWEEN
US?": THE POLITICS OF SEXUAL
INTERACTION IN SYLVIA
WYNTER'S *THE HILLS OF HEBRON***

Sheri-Marie Harrison

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

— Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron*

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

—Sylvia Wynter, "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk a Little Culture."

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

—Sylvia Wynter, "Creole Criticism: A Critique"

In her afterword to the first anthology of Caribbean women's literary criticism, *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Sylvia Wynter seems to repudiate gender as a conceptual category in the epistemological shifts that characterize European colonial enterprises. This is indeed a puzzling stance to offer as the final word, not the least because one of the premier goals of this anthology is the construction of a distinctively Caribbean feminist tradition. Like numerous Caribbean authors and critics, in her afterword, "Beyond Miranda's Meaning: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" Wynter uses Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to allegorize European colonial ventures in the Caribbean.¹ Through the characters of Shakespeare's drama, she maps epistemological shifts in hierarchical arrangements inaugurated by colonization and global expansion to show how race replaced gender in colonial discourse and praxis as the signal of primacy in marking human difference. Wynter further suggests that gender did not exist as a factor in distinguishing between Europeans and natives and/or humans and others in the initial stages of colonization and global expansion. This denial of gender as a conceptual category in colonial discourse is not a rejection of its significance in these discourses, however, even as it clearly reflects Wynter's characteristic rejection of the Caribbean feminist mantle.² For Wynter, more than the inauguration of a Caribbean feminist tradition, *Out of the Kumbula's* anthologizing of Caribbean feminist discourse is an occasion to ask Foucauldian questions about the function of the exclusion of gender in modern discourses. She suggests that the importance of the first anthology of Caribbean feminist writing rests in the opportunity it offers to question the larger systemic function of gendered absences, marginalizations, and silences. In noting the absence of Caliban's mate in *The Tempest*, Wynter asks, "what is the systemic function of [the native woman's] own silencing, both as women and, more totally, as 'native' women? Of what mode of speech is that absence of speech both as women (masculinist discourse) and as 'native' women (feminist discourse) an imperative function" ("Miranda's Meaning" 366)? Such questions become even more interesting when we consider that Rose, a central character in Wynter's only novel, *The Hills of Hebron*, remains conspicuously silent for the entire book. Despite the primacy of race in her theorizing, Wynter acknowledges *Out of the Kumbula's* organizing feminist

ethos and poses questions surrounding the systemic function of the silencing of native women as exemplified by the absence of Caliban's woman—both as woman and as "native." These questions become crucial when thinking about what such silences set in motion and their effects on postcolonial discourses of sovereignty.³

The attention such questions pay to the function of silence and absence in postcolonial Caribbean discourse serves dual purposes for this essay. First, they invoke the contentious debates about prioritizing race above gender that are central to postcolonial oppositional discourses. Second, they set the gendered parameters of the critical impasse between nationalism and feminism that has come to characterize Caribbean discourses. Identity—as experienced through race, gender, and/or class—appears prominently in critical explorations of colonial and postcolonial problems of sovereignty. A preoccupation with past, present, and future identity formation is central to postcolonial discourses as an integral liberation strategy in contexts where formal political independence is accompanied by ongoing problems of sovereignty. In a little over fifty years, the identity model of sovereignty has become an orthodoxy of criticism in Caribbean discourse. However, this model of sovereignty falls into some of the very inclusionary/exclusionary patterns that it seeks to combat and reproduces what now begins to feel like an interminable and questionably useful uncovering of exclusions and marginalizations. Unfortunately, this kind of critical practice more often than not conflates the achievement of identity—usually a raced national identity—with the achievement of sovereignty.

Though identity politics did much valuable work in their time, they may now limit rather than open up political discourse by incessantly privileging what David Scott calls "that moment when a new reading of this signifier offers a doubt and a disagreement about those readings that have gone before" (123). Postcolonial discursive traditions grounded in Black nationalist and feminist theories, for example, continually foreground such moments of disagreement and reinterpretation. As literary critics, we need to ask, however, if there are other ways of considering sovereignty beyond the quests for excavating and constructing identity that are central to these postcolonial discursive traditions.

In this essay, I propose that sexuality in *The Hills of Hebron* offers a more useful medium for exploring the function of gendered absence and silence. Using sexuality rather than race or gender to examine the imperative function of Caliban's woman's absence from and silence in colonial discourses allows us to consider issues of community beyond the discourses of nationalism and feminism. Sexual interaction among characters is a significant mode of literal

and figurative connection that helps us to understand the systemic function of various gendered silencing and racial marginalizations in the construction of community in the immediate postemancipation period. As such, the lens of sexuality also provides the opportunity to gain a more complex and nuanced understanding of sovereignty in postcolonial Caribbean discourses.

Fewer than a hundred pages into *The Hills of Hebron*, Rose discloses to her husband, Obadiah, how she got pregnant despite his vow of celibacy. It takes the rest of the novel for the reader to discover the identity of her rapist, but the story that unfolds centers on this act of violence against Rose, her pregnancy, and their effect on Obadiah. In my discussion of the novel, Rose's rape functions as a bridge between Wynter's fiction and theoretical writing that makes more explicit the connections between sexual violence, conscious creation, "Caribbean man's" becoming, and the work of postcolonial Caribbean literary criticism ("Creole Criticism" 22). I posit the illustration of this connectivity as an attempt to answer the questions Wynter poses in "Miranda's Meaning" about the systemic function of gendered absence/silence and also to highlight how this connectivity in Wynter's novel provides an opportunity to move beyond the impasse produced by the dominant nationalist and feminist readings of Caribbean literature.

The Hills of Hebron is set in Jamaica during the 1920s and 1930s amid regional labor uprisings among the working class. It is a roman à clef that is loosely based on the establishment of a utopian and isolationist religious community in the hills of Kingston by the charismatic early twentieth-century preacher and prophet, Alexander Bedward.⁴ Wynter chronicles the founding of the community of Hebron and its struggles for survival in a depressed economic and politically disenfranchised environment, against the backdrop of Obadiah coming to terms with what he originally sees as his wife's betrayal.

The Hills of Hebron was published in 1962, a watershed moment in West Indian history when nationalist struggles begin to bear fruit with wide-scale independence celebrations across the region. The 1960s also marked a particularly prolific and definitive period in the development of West Indian literary discourse. Wynter's novel is contemporaneous with such seminal works of West Indian literature as C. L. R. James' *Beyond A Boundary*, George Lamming's *The Season of Adventure*, and V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*.⁵ Though Wynter is better known for her critical theories, her novel appears as one of her first forays into the relationship between West Indian literature and the societies it depicts. *The Hills of Hebron* is set and published during the crucial moments that historically mark the beginning and end of nationalist struggles for political sovereignty. Thus,

it is unsurprising that in the 1960s the text would be read through nationalistic lenses.

Ultimately, Wynter's contemporaries were dismissive of her novel. As Victor Chang explains, for the 1960s critic of West Indian literature, the concerns of the West Indian writer and the woman writer were too much to grapple with in one text (500). Furthermore, early Caribbean nationalists were deeply suspicious of what they read as feminist agendas. In Caribbean societies where economic resources especially are scarce, feminist prioritization is stigmatized as partisan, foreign, unnecessarily divisive to more universal emancipatory aims, and ultimately threatening to the establishment of national communities in the Caribbean region. For Wynter's novel to seem divided in its priorities, particularly with regard to gender, explains in part why *The Hills of Hebron* is not ranked among early canonical West Indian fiction. Nonetheless, if nationalist priorities that characterize 1960s Caribbean discourses sideline Wynter's novel for its gendered politics and its lack of adherence to contemporary aesthetic preferences, the inauguration of a Caribbean feminist tradition in the 1990s—as marked by texts like *Out of the Kumbla*—recognizes Wynter and the novel as progenitive.⁶ Conversations about this novel, across the historical landscape of Caribbean literary criticism, illustrate how emancipation, sovereignty, and empowerment continue to circulate around terms of identity.

I focus on Rose's rape to propose a relational theory of sovereignty that I argue Wynter allegorizes via sexual interaction between her characters. I use this theoretical model to illustrate how a shift in critical focus from the politics of identity to the relationships between actors may bring us closer to addressing some of the problems of sovereignty that remain from colonial times as well as new ones formed in postcolonial contexts. Today, politically sovereign nations remain subject to stark and deepening economic crises imposed by neocolonial forces of empire, and radicalized versions of nationalism fuel genocide and civil war among internally competing citizenries. Quests for inclusion pose new challenges for sovereignty, and our self-understanding as postcolonial, politically independent citizens and communities does not automatically equate to solutions to these and even more longstanding problems. Our contemporary moment requires a new set of retrospective questions, slanted more toward how contemporary reality is organized than toward who else needs inclusion in it. Wynter's questions about Caliban's woman in "Beyond Miranda's Meaning" model what this new set of questions might look like, particularly in their focus on systemic and imperative functions of silence and absence in colonial and postcolonial discourses.

Rose's rape and Obadiah's response to it also serve as a useful point of inquiry for exploring Wynter's retrospective questions about systemic and imperative functions of silence and absence. Obadiah's "new awareness of himself and of Hebron" occurs after he comes to terms with another man's rape and impregnation of his wife (*The Hills of Hebron* 283). Rose's violation and his subsequent stint with madness force Obadiah to rethink his existence as the head of a struggling self-exiled religious community. Once her pregnancy is revealed in church to the entire community and an unwitting Obadiah, Rose is unable to defend herself against the accusation of adultery. Despite the congregation's emphatic appeal for her to "answer" the charges of adultery (25), and even Obadiah's enraged "Answer me. You don't hear me talking to you," Rose can neither look at her husband nor answer the charges against her—these options are beyond the narrative limits of the novel (26). Instead we read about Obadiah's outrage. For him, the pregnancy is the embodiment of betrayal, not simply by his wife, but by another man taking what was meant only for him as Rose's husband. In a subsequent bout of raving, he accuses the phantom adulterer as follows: "Man, what you did was to take away from me the one thing that was private to me . . . private from my neighbor, private like what was between the wood and me when I was shaping it in my hand" (74). Obadiah sees the husband's relationship to the wife as akin to the woodworker's private internal process of creativity.

It is tempting to read this metaphor solely as a problematic equation of the woman to a malleable object in male hands, but this lands too quickly on a critique of gender politics while ignoring larger complexities of intimacy, relationship, and creation. The relationship he imagines here between the exclusive intimacy of carving wood and sexual interaction with his wife offer us a key to understanding Rose's inextricability from Obadiah's new "awareness of himself and Hebron," despite her silence (283). Once Rose's pregnancy is revealed, Obadiah publicly excommunicates her and curses her with death. She flees to her mother's isolated hut, atop a hill away from the rest of the village, while he becomes consumed by his quest for the adulterer. But what he finds instead is life changing for both himself and Hebron: "for in searching for the adulterer, he had stumbled on himself" (82). A retrospective and revelatory narrative unfolds over the course of two hundred pages between this moment and the moment when "for the first time in his life [Obadiah] created consciously" (283). It becomes clear that finding himself is contingent on returning to Rose. His equation of marriage and woodworking is, it turns out, not so much descriptive as hopeful, for it is finally his tentative recognition of his complicity in a lineage of violence against women

and his return to the pregnant wife he had cursed that allows him to attain in his carving the awareness he seeks.

Obadiah's ability to create consciously rests on this recognition of a history of patriarchal exploitation and is central to his sense of his own subjectivity. Obadiah's discovery that Rose did not commit adultery, but was raped, shifts his quest from finding the adulterer to redefining himself, specifically within the context of a man who is betrayed by another man. He breaks away from Hebron and moves into Rose's hut atop the hill, where he seeks alternative methods of providing for his family. The creative processes he engages in while preparing for the baby provide the occasion for his first existential contemplations: "As he worked he sought for a reason for the grass that lived and died, for hurricanes and droughts that outraged the land, for the briefness of the life of a man, for Hebron, its meaning and purpose; for the long years of his blindness in which he had slept and eaten, and made gestures of belief, unthinking, unquestioning" (283). Obadiah considers the lifecycle of nature, man, and the community, and ponders his own lack of introspection. While he does so, he also carves a doll for his wife's unborn child. Thus, Obadiah's new self-awareness is intertwined with the experience of creating consciously for the first time. The carving not only comes to embody Obadiah's new conceptualization of himself and his community, but also eventually provides a source of economic viability. For Obadiah, "this object which had been dredged out of his anguish, his search for a sense of being had become an extension, not only of his living body, but of Hebron" (298-99). Obadiah's process of "stumbling on God" through conscious carving thus comes to embody the ways artistic projects are akin to self-creation (283). Crafted consciously and from a new sense of self-awareness gained over the course of the novel, the doll symbolizes Obadiah's new awareness of himself and his place in an individual and collective past and present.

In Caribbean discourse more generally, creative and critical impulses have more often than not followed this view of creating and articulating self. Six years after her novel's publication, Wynter continued to explore through criticism the relationship between creative processes and postcolonial formulations of self. In "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections of West Indian Writing and Criticism," she critiques an early trend in West Indian criticism that unfavorably received representations of local culture and politics in West Indian writing. At its simplest, this particular debate circulated around preferences in modes of critical practice: new criticism versus deconstructive criticism. In a more complex sense, this extended conversation among influential critics of Caribbean literature served as a vehicle for a contentious debate

about the role of literature and literary criticism in the politics of decolonization. Wynter sees creative ventures (including criticism) as part of a revolutionary project of reinterpreting colonized realities. For her, "the play, the novel, the critical essay, are means to this end—not ends in themselves" (33). As such, creative endeavors, especially writing, are central to the "Caribbean man's" processes of becoming. Discourses of becoming in the postemancipation and postcolonial periods hinge on this process of identity formation and the best creative and critical practices through which it can be achieved. Obadiah's journey toward self-awareness illustrates that what is at issue here is not simply the choice of an appropriate identity at a political crossroads, but rather the processes of becoming through which identity might in fact produce new politics. The reconciliation between Rose and Obadiah and his assumption of her child as his own symbolizes the possibilities of this new politics.

Through this couple's handling of the fallout after sexual violence and victimization, we can see how *The Hills of Hebron* allegorizes epistemological negotiations of sovereignty in newly independent nations and offers a narrative context for how contemporary reality is organized. Sexual interaction acts as a dually functioning lynchpin in both the narrative itself and in its relation to the prioritizations of race or gender that have governed decolonization discourses. Further, sexual interaction is the cornerstone for various significant events that are not only exclusive to individual and collective identity formations, but also include the establishment of community and the maintenance of patriarchal lines. The central male characters in the novel are all linked to each other through sexual transactions. Likewise, power and the implements of the exchange of power (land, for example) are transferred and passed down through literal and implied sexual exchanges. Hebron's lineage is traceable back to Miss Gatha's great-grandfather, Cato Randall, and his English master. The homosocial dimension of this lineage is symbolic of the ways power is structured and exchanged through male hands throughout the course of the novel.

For Miss Gatha, her great-grandfather's closeness to his master, is what gives the name Randall legitimacy and respectability, despite Cato's violent exploitation of this relationship. Cato's "master thought him loyal, especially when he revealed details of a rebellious plot that, unknown to Randall, Cato himself had fomented amongst the field slaves" (85). This revelation gives Randall a false notion of Cato's allegiance that proves fatal when Cato "lure[s] Randall into an ambush," where "the other slaves slashed red ribbons from Randall's curling white flesh" (84). Cato's treachery does not end here, however. Once Randall is dead, he tells a neighboring white planter

of the rebellion "and of his vain efforts to defend his generous master who had only that day granted him his freedom" (84). This leads to the capture and execution of the revolt's leaders, and Cato's reward of his freedom and a substantial gift of money. With this money, Cato buys land and builds a shop on it, both of which Gatha inherits. According to the narrative, Cato Randall "was determined to found a dynasty" (84), but he had no sons to inherit this legacy. Thus he "left all his possessions to his son-in-law on the condition that he adopted the name Randall and passed it on to his children" (85). Miss Gatha therefore inherits her grandfather's "dynasty" matrilineally through her mother. This matrilineality extends into the founding of Hebron and designates this community as matrilineally founded, even if grounded in patriarchally brokered homosocial contracts. This first homosocial brokering—between Cato, his master, and other plantation owners—also occurs with a homoerotic dimension, and in turn introduces us to the centrality of violence and sexuality in similar contracts throughout the narrative.

Wynter foregrounds the power relations inherent in such exchanges and the kinds of community that they inaugurate, rather than focusing on gender or sexuality as identity categories. Gatha's husband, Moses Barton—the character modelled from the twentieth century revivalist preacher, Alexander Bedward—founds Hebron. Moses's connections with women in the early stages of his ministry provide the seed for the establishment of this utopian religious community. The symbolic accouterments of his ministry are purchased with Gatha's money: "She had exchanged her shop and plot of land in Cockpit Centre for that very shirt and trousers, for the swallow-tailed coat of fine broadcloth, the expensive boots. A quarter of the money that she received from the sale of her property had gone to purchase these 'vestments of the office' for her husband Moses. After his death they passed on to Aloysius and after him to Obadiah" (81). These "vestments of the office" signify Miss Gatha's place in a lineage that stretches back to the cunning Cato, whose desire in founding a dynasty is to have "an identity of his own, a line of ancestors that he could trace" (82). Figuratively then, Hebron is Cato's dynastic and traceable lineage. Likewise, if Gatha's inheritance paves the road to Hebron, the body of Rose's mother, Gloria, secures the community's literal establishment. It is worth noting that like her daughter, Gloria is never given direct speech in the novel.

Gloria is the product of a union between Martha and her Chinese "husband" Chin-Queen, who "night after night . . . crushed her flesh" (193). After her father's death, Gloria, who has been raised as Chinese, becomes a house girl for Reverend Brooks and his wife. It is in this capacity of servitude that her "docility filled [the Rever-

end] with a sense of power and mastery that he had never before experienced." Predictably, his experience with power is ultimately corrupting for the Reverend, but Gloria's easy acquiescence to his commands to "take off [her] clothes" and "lie down" problematically seem to provoke the rape that produces Rose, and Gloria dies in childbirth. In a traumatic repetition of the cycle, Moses' son, Rose's stepbrother Isaac, rapes Rose.⁷ The baby at the end of the novel thus results from a sequence of rapes. He nonetheless represents the reality of plurality that exists in Caribbean contexts. Within Rose's and Isaac's child runs the blood of a black father, a white grandfather, and a Chinese great-grandfather. Though not representative of every ethnicity present in Jamaica, the three ethnicities the child does represent are significant when seen in light of the violence of rape enmeshed in its lineage. The baby Miss Gatha cradles at the end of the novel is the product of the "monumental groaning and soldering of worlds," in the sense that Derek Walcott describes it in "The Muse of History" (64).⁸ In its embodiment of racial mixing, the baby also symbolizes the possibilities for new plural politics more in keeping with Caribbean realities. The baby, and the rain that falls, ending the drought that persists throughout the novel, signify this shift for Hebron, which is also brought about by Obadiah's personal quest to redefine his being. Nonetheless, it would be irresponsible to lose sight of the fact that Obadiah's individual quest is problematically paved by the violation of women.

The establishment of a Caribbean feminist tradition in the 1990s sought to address this problem by identifying Wynter as one of the first Caribbean women writers to explore the issues faced by women in emancipatory and independence movements. If the 1960s and 1970s marked a moment when the more traditional critics of West Indian literature unfavorably received the novel, the inauguration of Caribbean feminist discourse in the 1990s marked a new conflicted moment of critical reception for the novel, this time with gender at its center. Leota Lawrence's "Paradigm and Paradox in *The Hills of Hebron*" sees the novel as initiating a Caribbean feminist paradigm. Lawrence also observes that "when Wynter's novel was published, instead of being hailed as a literary milestone, as the significant achievement that it was, its alleged flaws instead of its strengths were highlighted" (88). She suggests that this reception was too much for Wynter and caused her to "never publish another novel" (88). Nonetheless, in defense of Wynter's groundbreaking novel, Lawrence proposes "that this work serves as a literary paradigm by giving birth to an African Caribbean female literary tradition which gives voice to the voiceless" (88). Lawrence's observation that Wynter inaugurates a paradigm for representing African Caribbean⁹

women carries weight; however, the description of this paradigm as inaugurating Caribbean feminism is problematic. Wholly celebratory feminist perspectives, without careful attention to possible variations and nuances, prove to be problematic. Lawrence's suggestion that "on the Caribbean literary landscape in the 1960's, the absence of women was blinding; their silence deafening" illustrates first, the temporal contingencies of Caribbean feminist discourse. Second, this suggestion conflates Caribbean and African Caribbean women's writing by problematically eliding non-black ethnicities. These slippages are replicated all over the foundational discourse of Caribbean feminism. The introduction to *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* begins as follows: "The concept of voicelessness necessarily informs any discussion of Caribbean women and literature. . . . By voicelessness, we mean the historical absence of the woman writer's text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonization, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social cultural issues" (1). Despite this gendered pronouncement of voicelessness and absence, as early as 1831, an enslaved woman named Mary Prince related her own positions on all but one of these issues in *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*. Thus, the critical insistence on historicizing Caribbean women's writing as emerging from a silent void in the 1970s elides a significant corpus of progenitive writing that does not fit into the prescribed temporal and racial categories.

Caribbean feminist historiographies almost requisitely begin with some pronouncement of Caribbean women's writing emerging in the 1970s and 1980s. Phyllis Shand Allfrey's *The Orchid House* was published in 1953, and Jean Rhys published three novels before Wynter published *The Hills of Hebron*, and her fourth and most successful novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in 1966. Both Shand and Rhys are white, but their work is nonetheless also evidence of the existence of Caribbean women's voices in writing prior to the 1970s. There may have been just a handful of African Caribbean women writers in comparison to the male cohort, but women were nonetheless present and writing. There are inequities, but such discourses of voicelessness and absence obscure some issues in the service of illuminating others.

In contravention to its own egalitarian ethos, Caribbean feminism constructs its own points of inclusion and replicates patterns of exclusions, particularly along the lines of race and gender.¹⁰ Lawrence's criticism illustrates this, as she further suggests that in Wynter's novel "the paradox is that what should have been a male-centered text turns back on itself and evolves into a work that features women who subvert their assigned roles and transform themselves into self-motivating individuals who ensure the survival of their com-

munity" (88). What is problematic here is not only the impermeable gender binary, but also the manner in which the analysis of gender necessarily occludes other, nonfeminist issues. In fairness, Lawrence is writing in response to the prioritization of racial above gendered concerns that accompanied the decolonization process. Nonetheless, one wants to ask if we can move beyond this zero-sum game and address the novel's concern with how women subvert their traditional roles in a way that does not require us to ignore other forms of domination. Wynter in fact depicts a world in which the lives and struggles of men and women, while partially separate and sometimes at odds with each other, are ultimately inextricably bound together.

Undeniably, the prominent roles that women play throughout the novel do not translate into their empowerment. Nowhere is this more evident than in the pregnant bodies and silences of the two women whose rapes both secure new beginnings for Hebron. Obadiah's discovery of self, as with all the significant shifts in the novel, is tied to sexual violation. After he loses the eldership of Hebron because of Rose's clandestine pregnancy, Obadiah's short stint of madness allows him to clarify the confusion of his life. Problematically, the narrative casts Obadiah here as the victim, displacing Rose's body as a site of violation. Since Rose never speaks in the novel, we learn that she was raped from the omniscient narrator in a scene where only Obadiah speaks. In response to his question, "'What happened Rose? Who worked this evil, brought distance between us?'" the narrator provides her answer: "speaking quietly, she told him how she had been raped" (82). The narrative seems to deliberately trap Rose in silence, displacing her trauma and making Obadiah's self-righteous anger the central focus: "He heard her voice echoing inside his head, until it became the rushing hurricane wind. He felt himself felled with daemonic furies, wanted to sweep away Hebron and the hills that had witnessed the defilement of his love, this betrayal of his friendship" (82). Obadiah's anger stems not from the violence Rose reveals she has suffered, but rather from what he sees as *his* defilement, a betrayal of *his* friendship. He is not concerned with Rose's betrayal, but with his own. But so far from questioning this process, the narrative is complicit with it, placing the emphasis on Obadiah and marginalizing Rose's suffering in the process.

Yet while Obadiah's struggles for ontological sovereignty seem to take narrative precedence, as Lawrence and others suggest, the novel does depict formidable characters in the persons of Kate and Miss Gatha.¹¹ I agree with Shirley Tolland Dix's assertion that Wynter leaves "the development of alternative counter-hegemonic womanist/feminist discourse to the next generation of native women intelligentsia" (76), a task the editors of anthologies like *Out of the*

Kumbula wholly and productively embrace. But the novel also positions the marginalization and violent exploitation of women as intricately enmeshed in problems of sovereignty. As we should expect from a novel, *The Hills of Hebron* presents more an articulation of a complex and multifaceted problem than a neat and readily deducible solution. But it does suggest that issues associated with women provide a potential basis for a solution, and it resists the urge to consider these issues as somehow separate from negotiations of sovereignty.

Thus the self that Obadiah realizes, far from some autonomous entity, links his own connection to this line of sexual exploitation to new possibilities for Hebron's economic survival. In the novel, this patriarchal line begins with Cato Randall—that is to say with the implied homosexual relationship between Cato and his master—and with Cato's eventual betrayal of his master to rebelling slaves and with his subsequent betrayal of the rebelling slaves to the other plantation owners in exchange for his freedom and gifts in cash and kind. The line continues to Moses (husband to Cato's great-grand daughter Gatha), Chin-Queen, and Reverend Brooks. Chin-Queen is connected to this line of patriarchal violence because he inculcates in his daughter Gloria an unconditional deference and obedience to patriarchal authority. Reverend Brooks is tied into patriarchal manipulation of the female body through the rape of a young girl who has learned too well the lesson of unconditional obedience to patriarchal figures. Moses' connection resides in his brokering of land for Hebron in exchange for removing the pregnant Gloria from Cockpit Centre to spare the Reverend's reputation. As the Elder of Hebron, Obadiah inherits this legacy of homosocial power brokering that transcends race and is undergirded by the sexual violation of women.

A feminist commitment to view this novel as a "male centered text" that "turns back on itself" (Lawrence 88), in order to establish a paradigm of Caribbean feminist critique, nonetheless problematically elides the novel's poignant representation of the forms of violence and mixing that underlie the achievement of ontological sovereignty.¹² Thus while Lawrence observes that at the end of the novel "the women remain. As the two old women cradle the newest life in Hebron, the drought ends" (93), the women cradle a baby whose gender isn't identified in the novel. Indeed, "the women remain," but in the absence of gender and by virtue of its ethnicity, the baby comes to symbolize the entire community in a manner evocative of Obadiah's carving. In neither case, however, does this role require some ontologically pure representation of racial, gendered, or national identity. On the contrary, the child is the product of multiracial mixing produced through rape and racial exploitation. It is worth pausing here to make explicit that Wynter offers us a model for thinking through problems of sov-

ereignty by foregrounding relationships forged among a plurality of characters (antagonistic or cooperative, equitable or inequitable). Rose's baby offers a comprehensive symbol through which we can explore the possibilities of this kind of critical approach.

To grasp completely the symbolism of her baby, however, we must return again to Rose and to how she allows us the opportunity to think about the different modalities through which collective identity is voiced and practiced. Rose's silence, though problematic, forces us to explore the relationships that surround her and her pregnancy, rather than rely on what she says, and conveys to us a more complex sense of how community and power are organized. For Natasha Barnes, "That Rose, who is one-quarter Chinese, and we find out later, half white, is not racially marked in the all-black Hebron community is testimony not only to the success of Moses' radical nationalism but to its progressive possibilities" (149). Rose's inclusion in this all-black community is a testimony to the progressive possibilities of Moses' heavily raced vision, but her body is racially marked as different from the other Hebronites. Obadiah notes that it is Rose's "brown body" that links him to the adulterer who impregnates Rose (74). Admittedly, Rose is described as "brown" only once in the novel, but she is the only Hebronite not described as black. Thus, I concur with Barnes' argument, but I disagree with the notion that Rose's lack of racial marking testifies to the success of "Moses' radical nationalism" and its "progressive possibilities," to propose instead that it is precisely her diverse racial marking that testifies to the other possibilities of Hebron. That Wynter only once describes Rose as brown illustrates the ways blackness sublimates other races and ethnicities within Caribbean nationalist discourses. But in a heavily black-conscious narrative, Rose is never described as black, and as Barnes herself suggests, "the materiality of her mixed-race and gendered body and the colonial meaning ascribed to it . . . make possible the founding of Hebron in the first place . . . a gendered cartography emerges nonetheless from the book's thematic and ideological concerns in which women are center stage" (146). Where Barnes "show[s] how the institutional success of Moses' vision of Hebron—the creation of a 'black heaven on earth'—appears to depend on a gender hierarchy for its implementation, its organization, and its very survival" (148), I would argue Wynter also makes the plurality produced by sexual violation and victimization explicit within this matrix.

Creative processes, such as woodworking, help us grasp subjectivity, as when Obadiah tries to imbue his first conscious creation with a sense of the self-awareness he garners from Rose's rape. The carved doll represents an assumption of the totality of the past; that it was "dredged out of [Obadiah's] anguish" mirrors a sense of living

imaginatively through the furnace of the past (298). This creative manifestation of anguish produces an object that both embodies Obadiah's consciousness of himself and, according to the stranger, bears resonances of an African heritage of which Obadiah himself is unaware. Its value and symbolism to him makes Obadiah reluctant to show the carving to the stranger modeled after Janheinz Jahn who asks to see it.¹³ He urges Obadiah to "tell [him] what legend did [he] carve this doll from," and eventually explains when Obadiah responds in confusion that the "carving looks like one that [he] saw in Africa" (298). The foreigner eventually gives Obadiah a five-pound note for the doll, linking the discovery of self in the creation of wooden crafts to self-sustainability and economic viability. Here Wynter clearly links Afrocentricity to the formation of sovereign black Caribbean identity.¹⁴ But this is no less important than Obadiah's realization that the stranger's five-pound note "would mean food and water for Rose and the child" (300), a realization that—crucially—does not depend on Obadiah sharing the stranger's Afrocentric vision of the carving's meaning. When Obadiah returns to Hebron, he tells the community the following: "first thing we are going to do, starting tomorrow, is build a good road, a broad road out into the world! . . . And up and down this road we will walk carrying the work of our hands to exchange for a man who will teach us how to read" (312). For Obadiah, the carving embodies not so much the stranger's vision of the carving's Afrocentric lineage as a reconceptualization of self and a means of survival for both Obadiah and Hebron, one that involves new economic possibilities produced by abandoning their isolationist position.

By the end of the novel, Obadiah comes to a more complete awareness of himself and his position in relation to his and his community's past, present, and future. By confronting what belies Rose's silence, he sets his journey toward ontological sovereignty in motion. If we look at this couple through the paradigm of *The Tempest* in Caribbean discourse, we can begin to see the possibilities for sovereignty inherent in a meeting between Caliban and his mate. Caliban/Obadiah's ontological sovereignty is contingent on his reconciliation with the violence his mate/Rose historically suffers in the service of securing a variety of sovereign realities. This reconciliation between spouses forces us to rethink how we understand the function of silence and absence in not only the establishment of sovereign communities, but also in the establishment of critical orthodoxies in postcolonial literary discourses. Silence and noiselessness are not synonymous, and neither is neglect and absence.

If abandoning their isolation brings the Hebronites the possibility for a more economically viable—and by extension, more

sovereign—reality for Obadiah and his community of Hebronites, perhaps shifting our own focus from identity might also bring us to more precise understandings of the possibilities for ontological sovereignty. Despite Wynter's own prioritization of Black nationalist concerns above gendered ones, her only novel represents a complex network of relationships that nonetheless provides an opportunity to work in between the impasses of West Indian literary criticism, and thus to imagine new forms of prospective and plural community. Twenty-first century problems of sovereignty are perhaps not best served by the continued elaboration of new, previously excluded identities, but rather by cultivating "an ethos of antagonistic respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference" that constitutes our present reality (Scott 223). In practice, what I have outlined here illustrates that rather than the deployment of encampments of identity based on critical orthodoxy, our realization of sovereign realities rests in considerations of the relationships forged between camps, whether they are cooperative, antagonistic, or otherwise.

Notes

1. Select works that engage *The Tempest* as an allegory for the colonial experience in the Anglophone Caribbean include George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* and *Water with Berries*, Kamau Bratwaite's "Sycorax's Book" in *Barbajan Poems*, and Elizabeth Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter*.
2. For discussions of Wynter's reluctance in embracing the feminist label, see Natasha Barnes "Reluctant Matriarch" 135–73, and Jonathan Goldberg's "Caliban's Woman" 39–114.
3. My use of sovereignty here and throughout is two-fold in its reference to individual autonomy and liberty at the personal level, and to emancipation, enfranchisement, and independence and self-government at the political level. In the chapter from which this article is extracted, *The Hills of Hebron's* exploration of the sovereignty of being or ontological sovereignty is central. The political and economic implications of self-governance are obvious and known to postcolonial subjects, but knowledge, power, and control over our sense of being is still under negotiation and invention in Caribbean discourse. For Wynter, ontological sovereignty requires an understanding of how epistemic constructions of being human and being human other served the colonial system of dominance in the New World and continue to act as blocks to sovereignty in contemporary contexts. Reinterpreting colonial realities necessarily involves interaction with the past. Thus the necessity for Obadiah "to assume [his] past: slaves, slave masters and all. And then *re-conceptualize* the past" (Wynter, "The Re-Enchantment" 148).

4. For further information on Alexander Bedward and the Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church see: A. A. Brooks's *History of Bedwardism*, Marta Beckwith's "The Revivalists," in *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life* (157–175), and Roscoe M. Pierson's "Alexander Bedward and the Jamaica Native Baptist Free Church," in *Black Apostles: Afro-American Clergy Confront the Twentieth Century* (1–10).
5. Wynter's novel was unfavorably received for the most part because, according to contemporary critical standards, its mixture of raced, gendered, and critical concerns was too overwhelming for its form. Karl Sealy criticizes the novel for an "abundance of political, racial and other abstractions," that are "sometimes provocative, sometimes ill sorted" and Wynter for being "first a thinker and then a story-teller" (292). For Kenneth Ramchand the novel "is clogged-up by the author's wish to handle too many West Indian issues in the one work" (24). Even Wynter describes it as "inept" ("Creole Criticism: A Critique" 31), "confused," and "ill-made" ("Little Culture 2" 29). The novel's thematic concentration is undoubtedly copious and more concerned with presenting the issues rather than the structural packaging of the issues. Instead of a celebratory defense of the novel's structural integrity I find it to be more productive to explore further the larger binary in West Indian literary criticism illustrated by the novel's critical reception and what it reveals about the role of literature and criticism in negotiations of sovereignty in Caribbean contexts.
6. Donette Francis identifies Wynter as "the progenitor of a 'gendered feminist' critique" in Caribbean literary discourse (81). See as well Kenneth Ramchand's for a discussion of Caribbean literary aesthetics framed by contemporary criticism's preference for craft over political content.
7. My discussion here is a part of a larger chapter in my forthcoming manuscript that includes Isaac in this consideration of the ways sexual interaction mediates in negotiations of sovereignty in Caribbean discourse. Isaac is an integral part of what I read as a triangular relationship that also includes Rose and Obadiah. Consideration of his role as rapist is, however, beyond the scope of this particular medium.
8. In "The Muse of History," Derek Walcott privileges both the African and European traditions as those that give birth to the New World theorist, artist, writer and poet by "[giving] the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds" (Walcott 64). Acknowledged here is the painful yet beneficial paradox of a joint European and African heritage created by a history of colonialism. This heritage is seen as a gift, and the essay suggests that a poetics that imagines suffering as beneficial rather than as loss is a sign of victory over a history of servitude and exploitation.
9. Readers in the field of Caribbean studies will recognize that the preferred term here is "Afro-Caribbean," which designates a racial rather than a geographical or national identity—a subtle but important distinction.

10. See Alison Donnell's discussion of "double agents" in *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature* for a comprehensive discussion of how black Diasporic criticism has informed feminist scholarship on Caribbean women's writing, in ways that eclipse other concerns, like more inclusive considerations of race and sexuality. Donnell tackles, for example, how "the splicing of African-American history and theory into the narrative of Caribbean women's writing has seemingly licensed the denial of a literary past and the invocation of the resonant trope of the invisible, voiceless ancestor" (137). Donnell deduces that one of our most persistent challenges within Caribbean feminism is "how to positively address the need for constant redefinition and renegotiation of the demands of gender politics *alongside* those of ethnicity, class, nationality, and sexuality" (145).
11. See Janice Lee Lidell's "The Narrow Enclosure of Motherdom/Martyrdom" *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* 321–30.
12. Again, this is not meant to detract from the troubling fact that Obadiah's individual quest to redefine his being, thus restructure Hebron, is foregrounded, while considerations of the trauma suffered by these women is backgrounded. What it is meant to point out is that one centralized concern does not preclude or stand in opposition to others.
13. The resemblance to Janheinz Jahn or "shades of Jahn" is noted first by Kenneth Ramchand in the first edition of *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (121). Jahn's interest in literatures from African and the African Diaspora increased after meeting the Senegalese poet Leopold Sedar Senghor. As a collector, editor, translator, critic and historian of literature, Jahn strove to mediate what he termed "neo-African literature." Wynter's inclusion of him in the novel as the individual who reveals to Obadiah the economic potential of his carvings indicates her own position on the arts, namely Africa's place of prominence in New World creative imagination.
14. A move that she is taken to task for by Ramchand in the first edition of *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* 121–23.

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