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"Embronzed with the African Tint": Racial Color-coding and Intergenerational Inheritance in Jamaica, St. Domingo and England in the Age of Abolition

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ABSTRACT

In eighteenth-century fiction and drama, race appears as a mutable characteristic, with skin color conditioned by culture and environment. Increasingly, and especially in the Romantic period, race came to be regarded as an inherent facet of a person's identity in certain contexts. Racialized color-charts emerged for the express purpose of generating a taxonomy of mixed-race peoples; a symptom of the vogue for classification in the natural sciences. These charts encoded a vocabulary of gradation, hybridity, and racial inheritance. Such vocabulary was mapped on charts such as those that appear in Edward Long's *The History of Jamaica* (1774), where racial inheritances are depicted as neatly linear. Other historians of the Caribbean islands, such as J. B. Moreton in his *West India Customs and Manners* (1793), betray an underlying instability. The instability of such categories only increases within late eighteenth-century literary sources and especially in the lexicon imported back into England and appropriated by novelists, many of whom held abolitionist sympathies. This paper investigates the influence of West Indian color-chart vocabulary on the representation and construction of race in John Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption; A Tale of Modern Times* (1801) and the anonymously published *Woman of Colour; A Tale* (1808).

Introduction

In a letter dated November 2, 1751, Edward Trelawny, Governor of Jamaica, wrote to Henry Pelham, Prime Minister of Great Britain, divulging his engagement to a young widow, a "relict to the late Attorney-General." More than twenty-five years older than his unnamed fiancée, and only just emerging from a serious illness, Trelawny confesses that this relationship is not yet consummated. Instead, the plan was for them to return to Bath where he would regain "strength & spirits fit to mount with vigour a widow's breach." Despite this enthusiastic amorousness, Trelawny admits with startling candor that his betrothed is "no beauty" but she has an "agreeable person & countenance" as well as "common sense." His apparent admiration for her character is, however, augmented by an ancillary quality—her

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astounding wealth, amounting to almost £20,000 in English sterling, a fortune which he frankly admits was "an inducement." Trelawny never names his future wife, choosing instead to identify her in relation to her late husband, the size of her inheritance, and his boast that he had won her despite "half the youths of the island … buzzing all this while about her." Research reveals that her name was Catherine Penny, widow of the Attorney-General, Robert Penny, who left her independently wealthy upon his death in 1750. Her maiden-name was Douce, and she was a Creole; i.e. born on the island, and baptized in Clarendon, Jamaica in November 1722 ("Jamaica" 46). She accompanied Trelawny on his return to England in 1753, but their ship was wrecked off the Isle of Wight on April 24, 1753 (both survived). These scant details refract and amplify the anonymous treatment of Catherine in her husband's letter. Trelawny's omission of his wife's name and any substantive biographical detail in his account of her and their budding romance serves as an epistolary mirror of the sublimation of West Indian women within a complex system of transmission (economic, legal, and cultural) that underpinned the relationship between Jamaica and England in the long eighteenth century.

Jamaica, as Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus have shown, was no minor sugar colony "far removed from European consciousness" during this period (1). Rather, it was among the most important and lucrative plantation societies, well-known for generating immense personal fortunes that were often exchanged in marriages between young West Indian heiresses and British husbands. Trelawny's letter positions his bride-to-be as a young and desirable heiress when he writes, "She is certainly sweet tempered & seems as if she would be contented with the little an old man can do, which is a great charm & very pleasing consideration to an old man." Indeed, Trelawny's emphasis on Catherine's sweet temper and common-sense works to distinguish his fiancée from the specter of the Creolized woman of the colonies whose Britishness (indeed, whose very whiteness) was compromised by degrading proximity to an intemperate climate and suspect culture within the plantation colony. Despite efforts to distinguish metropolitan and colonial contexts via a fantasy of insurmountable differences in sexual, social, and moral standards, England and Jamaica were in fact equally significant sites within an empire whose rapid expansion was enabled and accelerated by "webs of connection with influence traveling in multiple directions" (Livesay 11). White planters, West Indian Creoles, and free people of color traversed metropole and colony, a pattern of movement that "extended their borders into each other" (Thomas 11). In addition to migration, this blurring of national bounds occurred via imported colonial consumer goods, the circulation of popular colonial and travel writings, and the transference of property principally via the endowments and legacies left to mixed-race children.

In emphasizing Catherine's "sweet temper" and "charm," Trelawny skirts the trope of the degenerate white Creole woman, encoding a standard of femininity that accords with metropolitan sensibilities and definitions of virtue. His cautious account of Catherine's temperament aligns with Brooke N. Newman's argument that "the entangled axes of gender, sexuality and race became fused with and helped legitimate power regimes and identity processes throughout the British imperial world, as well as in Britain itself" ("Gender" 585). The fact that Trelawny and Pelham happen to be in parallel positions of power abroad and at home (colonial governor and prime minster, respectively) serves as a reminder of the insoluble connections and lines of

transmission and exchange across different locales of empire. It is for this reason we use this letter to distil the contours of our argument. From the second half of the eighteenth century, a distinctive discourse develops concerning West Indian women, a broad category that includes Creole women such as Catherine as well as mixed-race women. This language is aptly described by Carol Barash as "narratives about Jamaica [that] attest both to the importance of 'race' in the eighteenth-century construction of gender, and to the overlap between patterns of racial difference and sexual difference" (406–07). The intersection of racial and sexual politics in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was a topic fueled by a growing antislavery movement, culminating in the presentation of bills in Parliament to abolish Britain's role in the trade. On the one hand, this period witnessed the height of Britain's trafficking in enslaved people and the sugar trade's immense wealth and prosperity, while on the other it gave rise to the abolition movement with its sugar boycotts and eventual dismantling and restructuring of the legal status of slavery, principally in the form of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Critics such as Felicity Nussbaum have made sense of this contradiction by pointing out that the abolition movement, perhaps paradoxically, had the effect of solidifying racial categories and increasing fears of miscegenation (19). The accompanying fear of racial amalgamation invariably triggered anxieties about West Indian sexuality, figuring the West Indian woman, whether "Creole" or "mulatto," as "exotic" temptress, especially if she were wealthy. In short, responses to the West Indian woman's "motley" character are best understood as a dynamic of aversion and desire, lending support to Robert J. C. Young's argument that theories of race were in fact "covert theories of desire" (8).

We trace a lexical influence on the naming of racial difference, imported from the Jamaican colony into the metropole. This semiotic transmission occurred primarily in the genres that have a longstanding place within colonial contexts, namely geography, history, and natural history, as well as in the epistolary forms that bridged the distance between different regions of Britain's empire, such as letters and diaries. This essay turns to fiction to interrogate the influence of colonial color-chart vocabulary, codified by authors such as Edward Long, J. B. Moreton and Baron de Wimpffen, on the representation and construction of the West Indian woman. We also analyze the ways in which the language of the period constructs West Indian heiresses in relation to Englishness in order to reinscribe and rehabilitate their image. We offer a close analysis of John Thelwall's *The Daughter of Adoption; A Tale of Modern Times* (1801) and the anonymously published *Woman of Colour; A Tale* (1808). These novels center on two West Indian heroines: Seraphina Parkinson and Olivia Fairfield. Seraphina is a white Creole whose birth in Jamaica gives her a mixed, hybrid character. Olivia, also born in Jamaica, is a free woman of color, the daughter of an enslaved African woman and a white planter. By focusing on the ways in which the West Indian lexicon of race and complexion was imported into the so-called imperial center, this essay reveals the complex development of language both within and across national bounds.

Imported lexicon

Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774) looms large in the corpus of colonial writing, yoking history and geography to the authority of "local knowledge" (Young 7).

Immediately following its publication, the *Monthly Review* published two positive reviews. The first commended Long for "transporting Jamaica to England," an achievement which brought "strangers together" ("Art. IX" 129). The implication is that English readers had a keen interest not just in the Caribbean itself but in how a particular colonial vocabulary constructed families, bodies, and fortunes imported into England. Long's influence on British perceptions of Jamaican society and of racial difference and hybridity endured into the age of abolition. The merchant Robert Renny, for example, reproduces Long's title in *An History of Jamaica* (1807), naming him together with Dr. Patrick Browne and Bryan Edwards as authorities on Jamaica. He notes that although these earlier works are "valuable," they are nevertheless prohibitively expensive, and it is "these considerations" that inspire Renny in the "publication of the following pages" (ix). While Long's *History* spans three volumes, Renny offers a more accessible single volume text to readers, ensuring that much of Long's vocabulary is amplified.

This widespread and ongoing interest in Long's *History* can be productively thought of as an "intimate collision," Newman's suggestive phrase for describing how the constant proximity in the Caribbean between English-born whites, Creoles, free people of color, and enslaved black peoples "endangered … British national identity" ("Gender" 586). Here, we extend the term to examine the ways in which the language of Long's colonial history, within which a specific planter's lexicon is preserved, imported not just a set of attitudes about race but a racialized vocabulary, albeit an unstable one, into England. Long's work brings the colonial outpost into the metropolitan center, instigating a commerce of racial language and tropes that are subsequently taken up in English novels, texturing the local lexicon with a racialized color-code. This "organizing grammar" of an expanding imperial world (Stoler 27) can be seen in Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), which begins with the description of a Bath assembly "opened by a Scotch lord, with a mulatto heiress from St Christopher's" (49). Similarly, Elizabeth Helme's *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* (1796) features a subplot in which African lovers, "a mulatto boy and girl," the latter "remarkably handsome notwithstanding her complexion," are sold into slavery (186–87). This subplot retraces the early slave tragedy, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), but Behn's noble and "beautiful black Venus [and] Mars" are supplanted by mulattoes (16). These semantic transactions, occurring across the bounds of nation, collapse the narcissism of minor differences that might otherwise sustain a strict difference between metropolitan subject and colonial object. The perceived hard boundary between center and outpost is exposed as porous, a frontier that expands and develops along both sides of the fault.

Of course, in one sense, this resituating of the colony is precisely what Long desires. On first blush it might seem unlikely that the notoriously racist Long would hope for such an intimate collision, especially as his writing decries the sexual, familial, and kinship collisions delineated by Newman. However, Long's project entails, at least in part, the repatriation of the West Indian planter to his perceived birthright: mother England. In fact, Long's insistence on the colonist's proximity to and connection with the metropolitan mother is an extension of his anxiety about the "domestic problem" of the colonies (Wheeler 225), namely an anxiety about black maternity and lineage. We see traces of this anxiety throughout his *History*, which uses geographical methodology (a

key colonial apparatus in this period) to orient the planter in relation to the metropole. He opens the second volume with a series of geographical coordinates that locate Spanish Town in terms of its proximity to the metropolitan capital: "It is situated in about 18° 1′ North latitude, and in 76° 45′ longitude, West from London" (Long, *History* 1–2). This technique of orientation is maintained throughout, repeated for every parish. In charting Jamaica within a logical geographical system, transposing it from something far-flung, alien, and unknowable, to something plottable, familiar, and known, Long seeks to overcome the perceived distance between Jamaica and England.

Long's desire for the colony to be enveloped by the metropolitan mother is even more pronounced in his earlier anonymous pamphlet *Candid Reflections* (1772), where he writes as a West Indian "planter" but insists that he is still a child of his mother country, concerned with the health of her offspring after Lord Mansfield's decision to whiten black skins through a toxic legal "lotion" (iv). Playing on the fear that the nation will be overrun by freed blacks as a result of the Somerset decision, Long lets loose the West Indian bogey of widespread racial intermixture in Britain. With the lower orders of white women drawn to black men, the nation is at risk, he argues, of becoming "embronzed with the African tint" (Long, *Candid Reflections* 55). Likewise, in the *History* Long urges the white man to

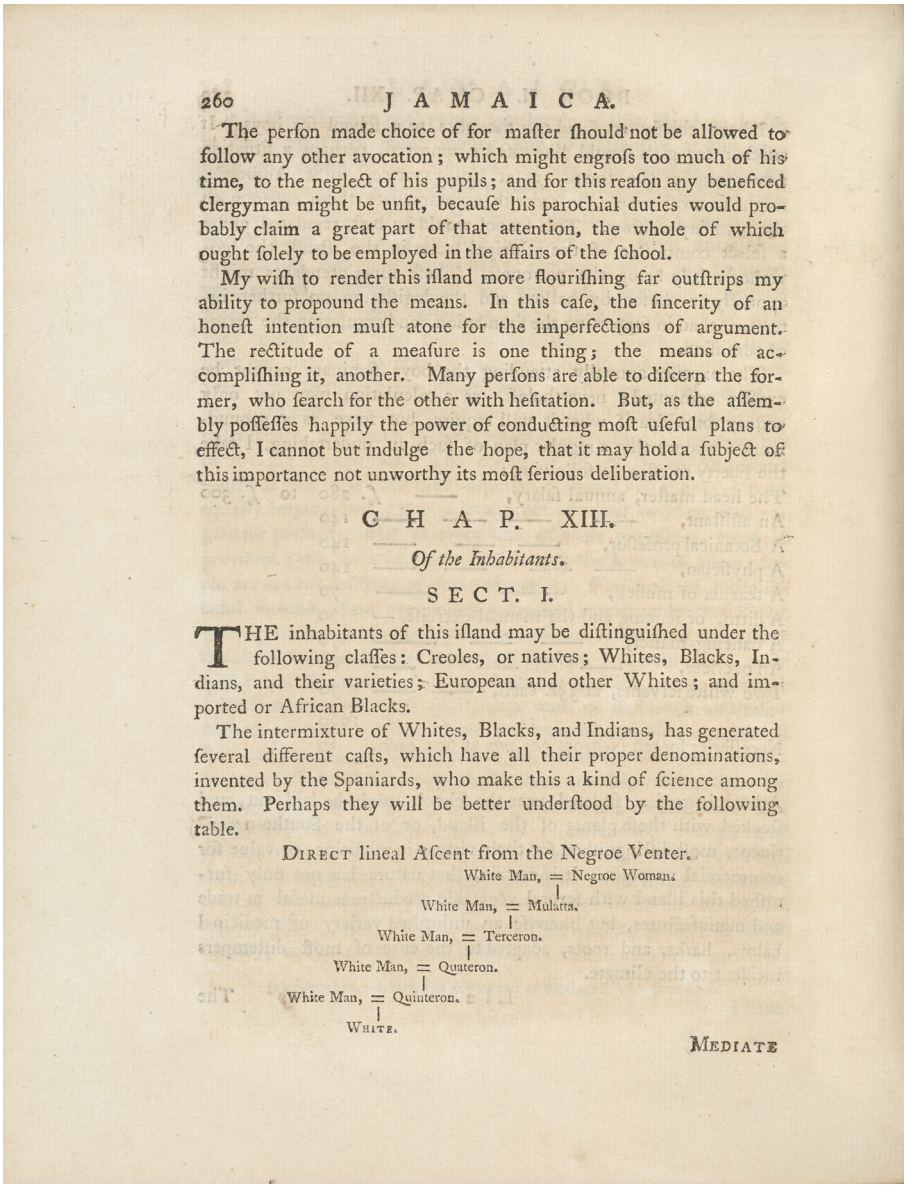
> [T]urn his eyes to the Spanish American dominions, and behold what a vicious, brutal, and degenerate breed of mongrels has been there produced, between Spaniards, Blacks, Indians, and their mixed progeny; and he must be of the opinion, that it might be much better for Britain, and Jamaica too, if the white men in that colony would abate of their infatuated attachments to black women, and, instead … perform the duty incumbent on every good citizen, by raising in honourable wedlock a race of unadulterated beings. (327)

The image of "unadulterated beings" (legitimate, white children) invokes their opposite, illegitimate, mixed-race children, a group Long heavily theorizes. His *History* features a chart titled "Direct lineal Ascent from the Negroe Venter" that follows the Spanish tradition of sorting mixed-race children into castes or "proper denominations" according to "a kind of science" (260). Such charts were important to the development of a gradation vocabulary in the West Indies. These charts aimed to pin down racial inheritance, treating it as neatly traceable across discrete and stable categories (see Figure 1). This lexicon was, in effect, a means of color-coding mixed-race children, indexing them according to the degree of non-white blood they had inherited.

However, as Patricia Mohammed argues, this gradation vocabulary cannot help but produce "an aesthetic" of skin color that necessarily "expresses the ambiguities of desire" and, by extension, a dynamic of aversion and attraction (28). So although Long strives to maintain scientific precision in his tabulation of racial difference, he cannot help but note that these categories are impossible to preserve in practice:

> These distinctions, however, do not prevail in Jamaica; for here the Terceron is confounded with the Quateron; and the laws permit all, that are above three degrees removed in lineal descent from the Negro ancestor, to vote at elections, and enjoy all the privileges and immunities of his majesty's white subjects of the island. (*History* 261)

The *History* is itself a hybrid form, an amalgam of scientific and social observation and analysis. When Long turns his hand to proto-anthropological accounts of the island's customs and peoples, the clarity of the charts eludes him. While striving to distill the



260 JAMAICA.

The perſon made choice of for maſter ſhould not be allowed to follow any other avocation; which might engroſs too much of his time, to the neglect of his pupils; and for this reaſon any beneficed clergyman might be unfit, becauſe his parochial duties would probably claim a great part of that attention, the whole of which ought ſolely to be employed in the affairs of the ſchool.

My wiſh to render this iſland more flouriſhing far outſtrips my ability to propound the means. In this caſe, the ſincerity of an honeſt intention muſt atone for the imperfections of argument. The rectitude of a meaſure is one thing; the means of accompliſhing it, another. Many perſons are able to diſcern the former, who ſearch for the other with heſitation. But, as the aſſembly poſſeſſes happily the power of conducting moſt uſeful plans to effect, I cannot but indulge the hope, that it may hold a ſubject of this importance not unworthy its moſt ſerious deliberation.

CHAP. XIII.

Of the Inhabitants.

SECT. I.

THE inhabitants of this iſland may be diſtinguiſhed under the following claſſes: Creoles, or natives; Whites, Blacks, Indians, and their varieties; European and other Whites; and imported or African Blacks.

The intermixture of Whites, Blacks, and Indians, has generated ſeveral different caſts, which have all their proper denominations, invented by the Spaniards, who make this a kind of ſcience among them. Perhaps they will be better underſtood by the following table.

DIRECT lineal Aſcent from the Negroe Venter.

White Man, = Negroe Woman.
|
White Man, = Mulatta.
|
White Man, = Terceron.
|
White Man, = Quateron.
|
White Man, = Quinteron.
|
WHITE.

MEDIATE

Figure 1. Edward Long's color-chart in *History of Jamaica*, Rare Books Collection, State Library Victoria.

color of complexion with scientific pedantry, laying out a taxonomy of human difference on apparently stable foundations, these charts and their gradations nevertheless give way when brought into social circulation. Jane Austen's *Sanditon* (1817) appears to be attuned to their limits. This final unfinished novel is famously idiosyncratic in its use of the term "half mulatto" to characterize the West Indian heiress Miss Lambe (202), a coinage which is likely satirical (Coleman, "Creole Identity" 178). Thus, with signature archness, Austen interpolates the new-fangled and highly specialized planter's lexicon into her novel, lampooning the absurdity of quantifying and narrowly defining the inheritance of racial color.

Notably, Long's chart reveals a particular concern for relationships between white men and non-white women. His anchoring of the birth of mixed-race children to a non-white mother betrays colonial anxieties about the perceived sexual threat posed by these to the fantasy of a race of "unadulterated beings." Triggering Long's anxiety is the enslaved black mother whose fertility interrupts white lineage and whose children become the living proof of the "ambiguities of desire" felt by England's "second-sons" in the colonies (Mohammed 28; Ward 3). As is well known, the West Indian family was rarely a white one. Instead, married planters generally left their white wives in England and took black mistresses in the colonies, or single men perpetuated pseudo-marriages with their housekeepers or house slaves. Such relationships resulted in mixed-race children whose legitimacy was vexed, rendering equivocal their place within patrimonial lines of inheritance.

Despite Long's calls to end bequests to mixed-race children (*History* 326–27), research on West Indian planters' wills has revealed many such bequests, governed by a complex range of motives. Generosity was not unheard of, but discrepancies between the amounts left to legitimate and illegitimate children were often glaring. Madge Dresser tells us that Samuel Delpratt left £5000 each to his four white children, but only £200 to each of his "free quadroon" daughters (76). Robert Duckinfield generously bequeathed money, land, and slaves to his free black partner, Jane Enugson, and to their three mulatto children, but his bequests came with strings attached. While no conditions were laid on the two sons, his daughter's gift of £1000 depended on her marrying a white man. Failure to do so would oblige her to live on the annual interest of this sum for the rest of her life (73–76). This whitening project could even be seen in bequests to those who were sexually enslaved. Jacob Rickett of Westmorland decreed that, should his "Negroe Amelia, now big with child" give birth to a mulatto, she should be freed (76), the mixed-race complexion guaranteeing the child's white paternity. Bizarrely the sex of this unborn mulatto child is imagined as a "son," also to be freed when he turns twenty-one. Thomas Hibbert, prominent slave factor in Kingston, fathered two mixed-race girls, both of whom he sent to England for their education. The elder, Jenny Harry, deserted the established Church of her youth to join antislavery Quakers, an act which displeased her wealthy father. According to the poet Anna Seward, he threatened her with two choices: an inheritance of £100,000 if she returned to the religion of her youth, or £2000 if she persisted in her Quakerism. In the end, most of the inheritance went to her three male cousins instead (Green 582; Donington). There were also local constraints affecting bequests. After Tacky's Revolt in Jamaica, the assembly passed an act to curtail the inheritances of mixed-race children, believing that the uprising had been triggered by free people of color. Robert Cooper Lee, a wealthy merchant with four children by Priscilla Kelly (a woman of "questionable antecedents" who passed for white) was determined to ensure there would be no impediment to his children's inheritance. To this end he re-located the family to London and married his long-standing partner (Newman, *Dark Inheritance* 126–27; Coleman, "Creole Identity" 176–78).

The daughter of adoption

John Thelwall's novel, *The Daughter of Adoption*, is animated by the racial and sexual politics of its time, especially the first two volumes set on the revolutionary Caribbean

island of St. Domingo, plagued by civil war and slave revolts throughout the 1790s. Thelwall's novel reflects contemporary obsession with the islands' mixed-race societies, so much so that his white characters are also represented as mixed. Since he had never visited the West Indies, Thelwall turns to the gothic novel, re-casting its Catholic, medieval settings into a grotesquely cruel society of white planters exercising tyrannical dominion over their enslaved workers. His most complex and compelling character is a woman called Morton who poses as the companion of her illegitimate daughter, the white heroine Seraphina, with whom the likable rogue hero, Henry Montfort, falls in love. The novel is strongly antislavery, with conspicuous tributes to Mary Wollstonecraft's radical feminist politics, particularly her frequently mobilized parallel between slavery and the oppression of white women. We see this in the novel's opening account of the marital fates of two young English women. Amelia Montfort is sold by her father as a "matrimonial bargain" to Percival Montfort, a violent and unstable man whose "contemptuous tyranny" in marriage reduces her to a slave (Thelwall 54–55). Having killed a man in a duel, Montfort flees to the West Indies where he changes his name, acquires sugar plantations throughout the islands, and enters enthusiastically into "new scenes of riot and profligacy" (60). Amelia's best friend Louisa is also sold off, married to a stereotypically old and ugly nabob, "as wealthy as the plunder of the east could make him" (56). Fortunately, diseased from the Indian climate, the nabob dies within a year but not before stipulating, as a condition of Louisa's inheritance, that "she should never marry again" (56). In this case, the determination to hold exclusive rights to women's bodies extends beyond the grave.

Thelwall's title flags adoption as a key focus of the novel. The heroine Seraphina, a poor Creole orphan, is not simply an adopted daughter but "the daughter of adoption," a designation which points to the shaping influences of her upbringing and education without kin. That she and other characters are ignorant of to whom they "belong" to leads to one of the novel's key themes—incest—with no less than four sibling and filial scenarios canvassed. The threat of incest (and rape) is, of course, a key element in the sexual horror of the gothic novel, but the topic also fits well with Thelwall's feminist critique of white patriarchal privilege and the holding of property in women. Incest, defined by Samuel Johnson as the "unnatural and criminal conjunction of persons within degrees prohibited," is a pungent topic in the racially mixed plantation societies of the West Indies precisely because there was often considerable uncertainty and confusion as to what constituted a "prohibited" relationship. Incest and miscegenation were also linked in the imagining of how the problem of race might be solved, as can be seen in *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob* (1787), in which a planter boasts that, over four generations, he had incestuously washed his enslaved progeny white (72–73). The frequent scenes of "debauchery and libertinism" in Thelwall's novel, together with its obsessive focus on incest, was noted by one contemporary reviewer who complained about the "palliating arguments" made on incest's behalf ("Monthly Review" 534–35). These arguments (that incest might be allowable where true love prevails and the couple are ignorant of their transgression) were particularly unsettling because they were made by an "amiable character" and thus stood "unopposed" in the novel (534–35). Three of the novel's four incest scenarios are averted in the end, but their threat to society's

reproduction of "unadulterated beings," both in Britain and in the West Indies, is pervasive (Scrivener, Solomonescu, and Thompson 15).

Thelwall's novel has been praised by its editors as anticipating the modern concept of creolization in its validation of "cultural, social, and racial mixture" as well as its championing of "inclusiveness and equality in place of rigid hierarchies and 'purity' of blood, behaviour, and identity" (15). But while the terms "Creole" and "Creolean" occur frequently throughout the novel, they are not universally positive. Similarly, the adjective "motley," meaning mixed or incongruous, is an ambivalent term. The novel's hero Henry Montfort, supposed son of Percival Montfort, epitomizes the "motley" character, combining bad as well as good traits thanks to an "inconsistent mode of education" at the hands of a virtuous mother and a brutal slave-owning father (Thelwall 65). When he travels from England to the West Indies, Henry's motley character chimes with the multicolored bustle of this new environment:

> If his eyes were little gratified by the buildings of Port au Prince, they were powerfully attracted by the novel effect of the motley population. Whites, Blacks, and people of colour, in all the infinitudes of shade—planters, in garments of callico, lounging in lazy lordliness, and negroes, male and female, in a state of nudity, bending under their loads, or leaning on their pitchers, and mixing in noisy gabble, at the brink of the aqueduct, were fruitful sources of amusing—and of painful meditation. (126–27)

In particular Henry is drawn to the colorful and erotic spectacle of Afro-creole women performing the chicca, a syncopated dance of African origin. So aroused is he by the dancing that he is about to join in when prevented by his white planter companions who argue that participation would degrade the dignity and honor of the "European complexion" (135). This conforms to Long's observation that, whereas in England people might socialize with the "yellow brood" of West Indian creoles, in the West Indies "so great is the distinction kept up between white and mixed complexions, that very seldom are they seen together in a familiar way, though every advantage of dress or fortune should centre with the latter" (*History* 329). In describing the strict demarcation of whites from non-whites in the West Indies, Thelwall borrows the Baron de Wimpffen's phrase ("He has relations on the coast!") to serve as a warning that "a single drop of African blood has found its way into the veins of a white" (Thelwall 76; Wimpffen 42), an early instance of the later American "one drop rule." Thelwall also borrows Wimpffen's taxonomy of the slave colony's mixed-race population, with its "progression of colour:"

> The white and the female negro produce the mulatto; the mulatto and the female negro the Grif; the white and the female mulatto the Quarteron; the white and the female Quarteron the Tierceron; the white and the female Tierceron the Métis, the white and female Métis the Mamelouc. (Wimpffen 61)

These attempted measurements of blood mixing, based on natural history classification and systemization, resemble the vagueness of Johnson's definition of incest as occurring "within degrees prohibited." But while Henry is obliged to uphold racial boundaries in public, a private mixed-race or black mistress is of course *de rigeur*, for "where every thing else is enslaved, love, at least, is permitted to riot in unbounded freedom" (Thelwall 129).

Despite enjoying several mistresses from a planter host's "sable seraglio," Henry nevertheless shocks his companions by denouncing the "arbitrary distinctions of races

and of colours" produced by "accidents of climate" such as a "too fervid sun" (129, 137). These distinctions strike him as "shallow pretexts for trafficking in human gore" (137). He emphatically includes "Creolean Females," both white and mixed race, in this denunciation of West Indian society. In his eyes, both lack "the finer sympathies of the soul," caring for little apart from their beauty (139). His mistresses come in for severe judgement, with Henry soon tiring of "the exuberant symmetry and sable softness of the beautiful negress Nannane" (129). Waking with a hangover to the groans of the enslaved, whipped by a cruel black overseer, Henry is shocked by Nannane's insensibility to the suffering of her fellow Africans, a defect he attributes to "the secondary consequences of the systems of oppression" (131). Despite this excuse, Nannane's encircling black arms are likened to those of the devilish overseer creating mayhem outside, and he looks on her as "the naturalist regards some curious and enigmatical monster" (131). Here Henry is the Linnaean taxonomist puzzling over a natural history specimen which, in defying classification, gets ranked outside the category of the human, a *lusus naturae*. Another lover called Marian, a mixed-race woman, lasts a little longer but ultimately her physical beauty fails to satisfy Henry, being no more than "a piece of statuary to gaze upon" (139). As for white Creole women, these are dismissed by Henry for devoting "their whole care and ingenuity … to preserving the sickly delicacy of their complexions, and repelling, by masks and gloves, by curtains and umbrellas, the dreadful influence of the tropical sun" (Thelwall 139; Coleman, "Janet Schaw" 169).

There is one exception to Henry's blanket dismissal of white "Creolean Females," however, and that is the "daughter of adoption" and heroine of our tale, Seraphina, with whom he falls in love (Thelwall 76). Given Thelwall's lively account of St. Domingo's febrile and revolutionary atmosphere, it is disappointing that his novel does not feature an interracial romance, but while Seraphina is a white Creole, with no suggestion of "relations on the coast" (76), she is introduced to us in hybrid terms. For instance, despite being the daughter of a prostitute, later revealed as her woman companion, Morton, Seraphina is highly virtuous, prompting her adoptive father to speculate that such purity of morals might be due to "some incongruous mixture of atoning virtues in the vicious disposition of her mother" (154). Renowned for her beauty, Seraphina is also an accomplished intellectual and moralist. Her adoptive father describes her as "a sort of phenomenon—a literary Creole—a female philosopher" (152). As the novel's editors note, in all these ways Seraphina resembles Mary Wollstonecraft, self-described as the first of a new genus, and presented by William Godwin in his memoir as an incongruously mixed Amazon, combining "masculine" opinions with "a trembling delicacy of sentiment" (Scrivener, Solomonescu, and Thompson 30–32; Godwin 38–41). In her resemblance to Britain's foremost "female philosopher," Seraphina qualifies as a member of St. Domingo's motley "Creolean Females" (Thelwall 152, 136).

Central to the gothic story of St. Domingo is Seraphina's biological mother, Morton, the beautiful daughter of a London laundress who becomes a courtesan. Morton's trade provides a twist to Wollstonecraft's denunciation of masculine privilege because no character in the novel is as cold-bloodedly transactional as she is when it comes to the sexual sale of women. Her gender-neutral name reflects her masculine behavior but the name Morton may also be linked to J. B. Moreton, author of a vicious account of

Jamaica's mixed-race population, described by him as "Mongrels," i.e. "any thing that is engendered or begotten between different kinds" (123). Moreton is particularly nasty about artful "Mongrel women" who "dispose of their ware to the greatest advantage," posing as virgins "though their arms have been as common as the chairs of barbers" (124, 125–26, 126). Taught from youth to be whores, they also prostitute their daughters (Moreton 124–26). Although born white in London, Morton exemplifies Moreton's characterization of the "Mongrel." She repeatedly tries to sell her daughter Seraphina to the highest bidder, regarding female chastity as no more than "a bubble of bubbles—a commodity in which she would have trafficked, at any time, wholesale or retail, with as little remorse as though she had been a West-Indian by birth, and all womankind had been negroes" (Thelwall 230).

Traveling first to Jamaica, Morton is immediately piqued to see that wealthy planters much prefer the sexual company of "mulatto women" to "the more delicate charms and boasted accomplishments both of the European ladies, and the native whites" (76). Determined to vindicate "the honour of white and red, against the triumphant voluptuousness of the olive complexion and tawney-coloured votaries of the West-Indian Venus," Morton sets about adopting their dress and learning their erotic dances (76). She even copies their distinctive Afro-creole headwrap but stops short of a full imitation of it. Keen to preserve her white identity and racial privilege, she adopts only "the form" of the headwrap, carefully choosing colors that flatter her own complexion rather than "the complexions of those whom she imitated" (77). In her strategic appropriation of this racialized and sexualized headwrap to support her mulatta performance, Morton avoids the garment's trap. According to the Baron de Wimpffen the headwrap was "the envy and despair of the white ladies" because they did not see that "it is impossible for strong and glaring colors, calculated to animate the monotonous and livid hue of the mulatto, to harmonize with the alabaster and the roses of Europe" (114). While the Afro-creole headwrap has recently been read as symbolic of the revolutionary power and creativity of the St. Domingo "tropical temptress" (Willson 88–90), Thelwall's representation of it stops short, keeping his focus instead on the rivalry of skin color and a more general critique of the sale of female sexuality.

Given Morton's performance of racial otherness as a way of luring wealthy planters, it is fitting that Thelwall names her son by Percival Montfort "Moroon." Deserted as a child and neglected by those of his own "class and complexion," Moroon's adoption by a mulatto couple firmly racializes him, with Thelwall mistakenly calling him "Maroon" in his rush to finish the novel (Thelwall 208, 193). At the age of sixteen Moroon embarks on an incestuous relationship with his adoptive mixed-race mother, a relationship which combines endogamy with exogamy, incest and miscegenation. Upon the wealthy husband discovering their affair he is murdered by his wife, but this is a matter of no legal interest in the West Indies: "So long as the negroes are kept in orderly obedience, and the subordination of classes and complexions is duly preserved, Juridical Polity is satisfied" (209–10). From this point onwards mother and adopted son live together "in the most open and undisguised intercourses of criminality" (209). Later, Moroon pursues his unbeknown sister Seraphina but his incestuous rape of her is averted at the last moment. Similarly, the fear that Henry is Seraphina's brother is dispelled. The novel's long series of mistaken identities throws

the categorizations of race, gender, and sexuality into confusion, underscoring the mongrelization (and confusion of sameness and difference) so feared by Long and Moreton.

The woman of colour

The Woman of Colour (hereafter *WOC*) is a short epistolary novel that tells the story of the beautiful, single Olivia Fairfield, the mixed-race daughter of a recently deceased West Indian planter who makes her his conditional heiress when he leaves her his entire fortune of £60,000. His condition is that she relocate to England and marry her white English cousin Augustus who must, in turn, take the patrilineal name of Fairfield. This economic inheritance is intended to offset Olivia's complexion, "tinged … with jet instead of ivory," an inheritance from her mother (*WOC* 53). This legal proviso is reminiscent of Frances Burney's better known heiress novel *Cecilia* (1782), in which the titular heiress's husband must take the name Beverley if she is to inherit (Dominique, Introduction 40; Salih, *Representing Mixed Race* 73). This parallel is an important one because it suggests that *WOC* consciously gestures to the popular tradition of the English heiress narrative in order to forge a reflexive link to Burney's delineation of the violence enacted upon women's gendered bodies as they enter the marriage market. However, *WOC* is also formative in the way it urges a consideration of the particular intersection at which the gendered and racialized body of a woman of color experiences such violence. This is not to say that it was the first text of the period to represent black womanhood; however, Romantic writers typically structured non-white womanhood to "provide 'dark relief' against which the sufferings of white women are emphasized and accentuated" (Salih, "Her Blacks" 304–05). In sharp contrast, *WOC* unflinchingly articulates the specific violence incurred by a mixed-race woman in English social space, while also imagining a possible triumph beyond heterosexual marriage (she returns to Jamaica to agitate on behalf of enslaved blacks), rather than reducing her to a tragic or grateful end. In short: *WOC* can be read as a crucial intervention in the heiress genre because, as much as the novel consciously gestures to a form that typically narrates a white heiress's entry into and navigation of fashionable society, it ultimately assumes these valences in order to recast them.

Olivia's equivocal status is rendered via her titular identity as the "woman of colour," a term that implies her freedom, although this freedom is itself conditional. As Sara Salih points out, terms such as "woman of colour" were highly contested legal categories, dependant as they were upon a complex series of conversions (*Representing Mixed Race* 1–3). First and foremost, the term hinged upon the "epidermal conversion" (to borrow Lyndon Dominique's compelling phrase) that comes with being a mixed-race subject (*Imoinda's Shade* 241). This initial conversion was subsequently supported by the conversion of naming, that is, taking on the patrilineal name via formal adoption and open acknowledgment, itself enforced via the most recurrent expression of conversion: that of surrendering to the colonizer's religion. The complexity of mixed-race character and subjectivity is of central concern in this novel. Mixed parentage complicates Olivia's skin as she is forced to negotiate her identity between the categories of black and white. Her exact lineage is never made clear, mainly because the color-chart which exists to define her gets undermined by social realities.

Initially she vaguely describes her complexion as "olive," suggesting that she is a light-skinned heiress distant from the blackness of the "negroe venter," her mother Marcia (*WOC* 53; Long, *History* 260). Once she has crossed the Bristol Channel she can afford to be even more distant from the categories reified by Long's scientific charting of West Indian racial difference. Accordingly, in her first letter, she opts to emphasize her likeness to both parents. In particular she aligns her "sensibility" with her white father's "feeling heart" (*WOC* 55, 53), emphasizing what was then regarded as a nominally white subjectivity in order to distinguish herself from the sexualized trope of the "mulatto temptress."

Nevertheless, Olivia goes on to describe her mother as both "a negro" and a "sable heroine," and that she herself is the "illegitimate offspring" of her father's "slave" (53–55). In conversation with Augustus she explicitly describes herself as a "mulatto West Indian" (92). The revelation that Olivia is the daughter of an African mother calls into question not just her "olive" complexion but threatens her very identity as a free "woman of colour." Her status as "free" is precarious in both Jamaican and English society because the degree of blackness inherited by a mixed-race child often determined their eligibility for manumission and other rights, such as inheritance and voting. As Long notes, children generally had to be baptized and "three degrees removed in lineal descent from the Negro ancestor" to secure these rights (Long, *History* 261; Dominique, Introduction 21; Gerzina 79; Salih, *Representing Mixed Race* 2). In contrast, a first- or even second-generation mixed-race child, especially a daughter, might well find herself enslaved in the plantation house. It is significant that Augustus is the person to whom Olivia reveals her possible "mulatto" status. She initially interprets the marriage clause in her father's will as an act of benevolence for securing her "a proper protector in a husband," and yet it is during a conversation with her so-called "protector" that she names herself as a mulatto, thus undermining whatever security she possessed as a light-skinned heiress (*WOC* 55). Olivia's twin conversions—her English sensibility and Christian faith—are destabilized by her self-confessed proximity to blackness.

WOC consistently refuses to absolve England from the brutality of colonial law, language, and customs, instead pointing to the ways in which the imperial center is complicit in racist violence generated by white fears of the black female body. The novel suggests a sharp proximity (an "intimate collision" [Newman, "Gender" 586]) between the two. Although Fairfield initiates this violence with his will, exercizing control over Olivia beyond the grave and attempting to "obliterate blackness from his hereditary line" (Dominique, *Imoinda's Shade* 228), his will, both literal and figurative, is enthusiastically taken up and endorsed by the Mertons, Olivia's English white relatives whose surname yet again invokes Moreton. The Mertons' reactions to Olivia's skin color and inheritance undermine the myth of a liberal-minded England that rejects the hardened out-of-sight/site racism of the colonies. Rather than absolving the imperial center of the atrocities of the colony, *WOC* suggests that complex and often hostile attitudes towards non-white subjects exist across the frontiers of empire. To the Mertons, Olivia is a symbol of the monetary value of black skin, obliging her to submit to a whitening marriage. Her father's decision to invest his money in her literally places a price on her skin, thus insinuating the essential compatibility of black skin and the marketplace.

Olivia's encounters with her white relatives play out as overt hostility. For instance, when Olivia meets her future sister-in-law Letitia, the latter recoils in disgust. Olivia relates: "I believe I held out my hand, and that lady was *very near* taking it in hers; but I fancy its *colour* disgusted her, for she recoiled" (*WOC* 71). To Letitia, Olivia's complexion is contagious; her recoil brings to the (corporeal) surface anxieties of amalgamation and racial degeneration associated with empire. Since Letitia had once desired Augustus for herself, Olivia also represents "a rivalry of complexions" wherein the exoticized and eroticized mixed-race female body secures the desired white man (Burnard and Coleman 38). Moreover, this tension between future sisters-in-law signals "British fears of the entanglement of race, disease, and degeneracy in the *threat* of interracial romance" (Nussbaum 129–30, my emphasis). In its presentation of the interracial marriage, *WOC* suggests that the so-called hardened racism of the colonies can be epidemiologically traced to the heart of English private, domestic life.

Olivia does not just attract Letitia's hostility. She is also subject to the perverse attraction of the men that comprise the fashionable society of Clifton, Bristol's Georgian spa resort. Once more, following the fictional conventions set out by Burney, Olivia finds herself attending a ball in a spa town. Reflecting on the evening, she writes, "I was an object of pretty general curiosity, as I entered the room … *My* colour, you know, renders *me* remarkable" (*WOC* 84, original emphasis). She describes herself as attired "in the mode" but with "no ornaments but a large string of corals round my neck" (84). Once more she simultaneously claims likeness to, and distance from, English womanhood. While her dress resembles English fashion, she is distinguished by her skin color and jewelry, the latter coding her as exotic and, in an echo of the novel's opening passage, ties her to the sea. Olivia's ongoing connection to the ocean underlies her liminal status between whiteness and blackness, free and enslaved. It is not long before male observers begin to crowd around her: "they walked up in pairs, hanging one on another's arm, and, with a stare of effrontery, eyed your Olivia, as if they had been admitted purposely to see the *untamed savage* at a shilling a piece!" (85). Here Olivia is viewed as a "skin show," to use Jack Halberstam's term (1), a spectacle that recalls Henry Montfort's arrival in Port au Prince and enthusiastic immersion in the dance halls and seraglios of St. Domingo. The energy and meanings of the "motley" colonial scene is transposed onto the ballroom of an English spa town, once more eroding the distance between center and colony. It is no accident that *WOC* chooses Clifton over its rival spa town of Bath since Bristol, a symbol of the intersection of global slavery and local fashion, pleasure, and consumption, cements the connection between black skin and profit. Accordingly, the evening leaves Olivia utterly "disappointed in England: [she had] expected to meet with sensible, liberal, well informed and rational people;" instead, she finds "a compound of folly and dissimulation" (*WOC* 88). Notably, Olivia appropriates "compound," a term used by writers such as Long to denigrate racial amalgamation, redeploying it to characterize English fops (Long, *History* 372). In yet another reflexive gesture to the heiress novel, the beaus of the ballroom are exposed as ironic hybrids themselves, throwing the category of gender into disarray. The very nature of the Clifton ballroom, built as it is upon the intersection of fashion and taste on the one hand, and the slave trade's mercantile profits on the other, undoes the notion of a superior metropolitan generosity. Olivia's account shows how fashionable hubs,

especially those built on ports (the nation's porous contact zones) produce the very hybridity that the metropolitan fears in the colonial subject.

Conclusion

Race, gender, and sexuality are fraught in colonial settings. In an attempt to discipline these unruly categories, writers such as Long and Wimpffen chart strict gradations of color, designed to sort mixed-race children into discrete castes. However, the very existence of a mixed-race child overturns these rules of categorization. Indeed, in moments of racist fervor, even Long's rhetoric slips when he declares of black blood: "twenty or thirty generations, perhaps, would hardly be sufficient to discharge the stain" (*History* 261). While the quasi-technical language of the color-chart asserts scientific objectivity, when writers like Long and Moreton veer into qualitative anthropological description, the intensity of their racist ideology is made clear: "mulatto" gives way to "mongrel." Try as they might, the nature of imperial expansion, with its ever-increasing traffic of bodies, generates collisions (sexual, social and domestic) and complicates categories of difference, thwarting those who try to inscribe them. In moments of intense racist fear and disgust, Long and Moreton unwittingly collapse these distinctions, but the fiction we have traced is much cannier in its application, interrogation, critique, and even satire of this lexicon and its systems of difference. Austen's "half mulatto," Thelwall's "motley" Creolean Females, and *WOC*'s deliberate veering between "olive" and "mulatto West Indian": instead of clarity and fixity these terms invoke the instability and at times absurdity of West Indian color-coding. While color-charts strive to make race inflexible, Romantic-era prose fictions, produced within novels and arguably anthropological description too, reveal it to be "motley," unstable, and unfixed.

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