flame trees
are death reversed;
they stun your eyes
on those blue days
when the sea already makes you spin

their heat is the afterglow
the fire of a people's dignified survival:
those of the fight
& powerful emotion
who rise
within these speaking wreaths
and reach again

tell me
who can know flame trees
& not grow more brave?

"flame tree time" was originally published in The Caribbean Writer, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1987, and is also the title of the volume of poems just released by the Sandberry Press, Jamaica. "on forgetting dustbins" was first published in Pathways, vol. 4 no. 7, February 1987; "the first stone" appears for the first time

THE LOCKED HEART: THE CREOLE FAMILY ROMANCE OF WIDE SARGASSO SEA - AN HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Peter Hulme

It's my belief that you remember much more than you pretend to remember. (Grace Poole’s words to Antoinette, Wide Sargasso Sea, p. 19)

1. Local knowledge

One case to be argued in defence of the term "post-colonial" would centre on its usefulness as a teaching tool, on how it quickly and not inaccurately marks out a terrain on which courses can be constructed in a way that both makes sense to students and puts onto the agenda questions of history, politics, and canonicity. The term simplifies (as does every single term), but it does not, if carefully used, do violence to the texts it designates. However, serious problems do arise when the term is pressed into service as an analytical tool. In particular, the historical relationship supposedly suggested between "colonial" and "post-colonial" remains consistently undefined. Wide Sargasso Sea is a case in point: a novel published in 1966, at a time when the general decolonization of the British Empire was well under way but before Dominica, the island of Jean Rhys's birth, had gained independence; a novel written by, in Indian terms, a member of the white colonial elite, yet somebody who always defined herself in opposition to the norms of metropolitan "Englishness"; a novel which deals with issues of race and slavery, yet is fundamentally sympathetic to the planter class ruined by Emancipation.
In a teaching context, *Wide Sargasso Sea* almost always appears alongside *Jane Eyre*, the post-colonial "vindication" read after and against one of the novels which forms the imperialist canon. This is how I teach the book, too, and there is no doubt of its effective presence alongside other revisionary couples: *Robinson Crusoe* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, *The Tempest* and George Lamming's *Water with Berries*. Nonetheless, if this pedagogical opposition of the "colonial" and the "post-colonial" is allowed to become too fixed, too orthodox a way of organising research projects on books like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then the critical enterprise risks becoming located at such a high level of generality ("post-coloniality") that the particular conditions that produced particular books can remain ignored, indeed even unavailable.

The need, as always, is for a properly historical criticism, and the problem, as always, lies in knowing just what "historical" might mean in different circumstances. The recent exchange between Fredric Jameson (1986) and Aljaz Ahmad (1987) around the former's attempt to produce a general theory of "third world" literature is instructive in this respect. Illustrating the point that "history" is not some ready-made category which can be unproblematically introduced into the analysis of a piece of fiction. Ahmad's fundamental criticism is that Jameson has set out, quite properly, to "historicize," but has historicized inadequately. The inadequacy has two dimensions. He has not historicized enough, defining the "first" and "second" worlds in terms of their systems of production (capitalism and socialism) while the "third world" is defined exclusively in terms of the externally introduced experience of having suffered colonialism and imperialism. He has historicized differentially, so that the non-western world is first differentiated from the west, and then homogenized, a procedure whose dangers Jameson recognizes and then goes on to ignore. Homogenisation is precisely the point here. Terms such as "third-world" (and - one could no doubt add - "post-colonial"), run the risk of imposing a single and simple (and usually metropolitan) label on an extraordinary variety of national and other traditions.

Post-colonial criticism does itself recognize this point. Helen Tiffin, for example, whose work has done much to popularise the ideas associated with post-colonial, talks in terms of post-colonial strategies rather than of some homogeneous realm of the post-colonial:

Post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dismantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjugated 'local' ... *Wide Sargasso Sea* directly contests British sovereignty - of persons, of place, of culture, of language. It reinvests its own hybridised world with a provisionally authoritative perspective, but one which is deliberately constructed as provisional since the novel is at pains to demonstrate the subjective nature of point of view and hence the cultural construction of meaning. (Tiffin 1987, 23)

The strategies are plural and the standpoint "local." The argument here might begin to sound like, but should not be confused with, a Lyotardian valuation of petits récits over the supposedly impossible grand narratives. If it is indeed the moment to write some petits récits - and this article might be said to offer one - then it is not because the age of the grand narratives has been left behind on epistemological grounds, but rather that the grand narrative of decolonisation has, for the moment, been adequately told and widely accepted. Smaller narratives are now needed, with attention paid to local topography, so
that the maps can become fuller. "Local" knowledge in this sense of the word is situated, particular, "native." But the small narratives do not stand by themselves - as they would for Lyotard; they are local sentences in the chapter of the post-colonial world, to be distinguished form the egregiously restricted yet endlessly self-advertised post-modern idea of "locality."

To attempt to read Wide Sargasso Sea historically is then to confront a series of quite particular questions. What history are we talking about? Is the "present" from which the book was written 1966 or 1957 (when the final version was started) or 1938 (when the first draft was apparently written and destroyed)? To what extent is the novel reworking material from childhood (1890–1907)? What of the historical period with which the novel deals (1834 onwards)? And is this a general "West Indian history," or something more specifically Jamaican or Dominican?

These questions have been debated almost since the book’s first publication. Although Rhys, born in Dominica, had left the Caribbean in 1907 aged sixteen and returned only once, briefly, in 1936, that lack of residence in the area did not prevent West Indian critics from claiming Wide Sargasso Sea as a significantly Caribbean novel. Wally Look Lai (1968) and Kenneth Ramchand (1983) both suggested the links; John Hearne, the Jamaican novelist, argued a strong case that Wide Sargasso Sea should be a "touchstone" for West Indian fiction (1974, 323). And Louis James, in the first book-length study of Rhys, paid special attention to the West Indian context of her writing (1978).

However, less often recalled in the Rhys criticism, is that Edward Kamau Brathwaite, the Jamaican poet and historian, took time out of his wide-ranging 1974 essay called Contradictory Omens to contest the claims made for Wide Sargasso Sea. There are several different layers to his argument, but his central point is that white creoles cannot "meaningfully identify or be identified, with the spiritual world" of the contemporary West Indies (1974, 38). That spiritual world is essentially the culture of the "black ex-African majority" (30), and Brathwaite does not want the articulation of that culture, now politically independent from Britain, confused by attempts to identify its "essence" with the work of "a white creole expatriate West Indian-born novelist" (34) - whose protagonist, Antoinette, is similarly white, creole, expatriate, and "West Indian-born" - an unfortunate phrase which suggest that she is "accidentally" rather than "really" West Indian. Brathwaite’s argument may be crude and essentialist, but at least he problematises any easy identification of Wide Sargasso Sea as a post-colonial novel - or makes us think more clearly about the true parameters of the term "post-colonial."

Other critics, among them Gayatri Spivak, alert to the kind of argument that Brathwaite presents, direct attention - properly enough - to the character of Christophe, Antoinette’s black maid, seeing her as a kind of “excess” that "cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text … in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (1985, 253). Spivak’s argument is much subtler than Brathwaite’s, but her use of the word "native" suggests an underlying difficulty: in the West Indies the "native" is either the most part absent - if what is meant is indigenous - or "creole" - if what is meant is "born in the West Indies." Claims to post-colonial authenticity, for India or Africa for example, will tend to ground themselves on that native terrain: to distinguish between black creole and white creole is already to be the desired distinction. The term "creole" seeps across any attempt at a manichean dividing line between native and settler, black and white. Interestingly enough, the small indigenous population of the Caribbean does impinge on Wide Sargasso Sea, though it is that category of the creole which
permeates the book's narrative and becomes the embodiment of its radical instability. Post-colonial theory, if it is to develop, must produce "native" terminology; which is why I put at centre stage the Caribbean notion of the "creole," the local name, if you like, for what the "general" theory calls "hybridization" (see the second part of the quotation from Tiffin), but one which has the twin advantages of a long history in the Americas and a constant usage by Rhys herself.

2. Remembering the family

What follows makes no pretence of being a full historical reading of Wide Sargasso Sea: one of the hallmarks of work at Essex has been the insistence that the historical work needs to be done, not invoked through anecdote as seems nowadays so often the "new" approach to history. This then is a sketch of a project now under way to study how the "materials" that went into the writing of Wide Sargasso Sea might be reconstituted so as to throw light onto the dense particularity of that novel. That these materials are "historical," in the full sense of the word, rather than a merely anecdotal and familial adjunct to a "proper" colonial history, is part of the point I want to make. Wide Sargasso Sea is a post-colonial novel, if that term is used carefully enough; it is counter-discursive, if the dominant discourse is taken as a kind of received Englishness, but attention to its local circumstances suggests that it also needs reading as a reworking of the materials from Jane Eyre inflected by the received traditions of a planter "family history." In other words, literary production is viewed here less as a matter of individual creativity than as a trans-generational formation from "event" to "family memory" to "literary text."

On the first page of Wide Sargasso Sea Antoinette recalls hearing her mother talking to Mr. Luttrell, her only friend, and saying "Of course they have their own misfortunes. Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed. Some will wait for a long time" (1968, 15). One of the families that waited in vain for compensation after the 1833 Emancipation Act was the Lockharts, Jean Rhys's mother's family. Rhys's great-grandfather had bought Geneva, one of the largest plantations on Dominica at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Geneva never recovered after losing its slave labour force, and was in genteel decay by the time of Rhys's childhood at the turn of the century.

Wide Sargasso Sea, as a writing out of that family history, a kind of extended autobiography or creole family romance, is offered as in some sense a 'compensation' for the ruin of that family at the time of Emancipation, a compensation, though, which also serves to occlude the actual relationship between that family history and the larger history of the English colony of Dominica. This paper tries to comprehend something of that work of occlusion.

Rhys may have started writing Wide Sargasso Sea as early as the late 1930s, soon after her return trip to Dominica in 1936. An early version may have been destroyed (Angier 1990, 223). That return to the Caribbean in 1936 certainly seems to have initiated, or at any rate intensified, the collection of West Indian material and memories which Rhys later refers to as "Creole." The final stage in the writing of Wide Sargasso Sea began in 1957, although it took nine years for her to complete the book. In 1958 she wrote:

For some time I've been getting down all I remembered about the West Indies as the West Indies used to be. (Also all I was told,
which is more important). I called this "Creole" but it had no shape or plan - it wasn't a book at all and I didn't try to force it.

Then when I was in London last year it "clicked in my head" that I had material for the story of Mr Rochester's first wife. The real story - as it might have been. (Rhys 1985, 153)

By far the longest and most interesting of Rhys's letters about the composition of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written in April 1964 to Francis Wyndham, explaining how she had overcome the blockage which had prevented her completing the novel. It is an unusually long and full letter, which contains a poem called "Obeah Night": "Only when I wrote this poem - then it clicked - and all was there and always had been" (Rhys 1985, 262).

The poem is signed by Edward Rochester or Raworth (she was still toying with the explicitness of the connection with Jane Eyre), as "written in Spring 1842" - and therefore in England. The poem is awkward and not always easy to construe, but focusses on the night of passionate and violent love between Rochester and Antoinette following her administration of the "love-potion" supplied by Christophe.

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How can I forget you Antoinette
When the spring is here?
Where did you hide yourself
After that shameless, shameful night?
And why come back? Hating and hated?
Was it Love, Fear, Hoping?
Or (as always) Pain?
(Did you come back I wonder
Did I ever see you again?)

No. I'll lock that door
Forget it.
The motto was "Locked Hearts I open
I have the heavy key"
Written in black letters
Under a Royal Palm Tree
On a slave owner's gravestone
"Look! And look again, hypocrite" he says
"Before you judge me"

I'm no damn slave owner
I have no slave
Didn't she (forgiven) betray me
Once more - and then again
Unrepentant - laughing?
I can soon show her
Who hates the best
Always he answers me
I will hate last
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(Rhys 1985, 265-6)

"History" is here in ways which take some untangling. Rochester seems to suggest that he will (symbolically) lock his door against Antoinette's return, before remembering her family motto written on the patriarch's gravestone.
("Corda serrata pando," "locked hearts I open," was the motto of Rhys's mother's family, the Lockharts, as she recalled in her conversations with David Plante).

She will have ways of opening his heart again if she so desires. But Rochester moves quickly to an imagined address he hears from the gravestone, which seems to defend the slave-owning families against the kinds of criticism that Mason and Rochester both voice in the novel. Rochester chooses to make the connection with his wife, suggesting that she is no "slave" since she has betrayed him more than once. Two "clicks in the head" connect Jane Eyre with the personal memories and oral histories. This is what enables the next stage of the composition. If one factor were especially important, it might well be the coincidence of names: Edward was the name of Rhys's grandfather, a significant figure in her family story, as well as the name of Rochester, Brontë's hero in Jane Eyre.

My particular interest here, however, is in the significance of the changes which Rhys made to the chronology, topography, and family relationships given by Jane Eyre once the decision had been taken to work with that narrative material. The crucial point about the chronological changes can best be gauged by quoting a letter Rhys wrote in 1962 when she sent the first two parts of Wide Sargasso Sea to her editor:

The typed (and heavily corrected) part is the most important - it's the story of an old West Indian house burned down by the negroes who hate the ex-slave owning family living there. The time 1839, the white creole girl aged about 14 is the "I." (Rhys 1985, 214)

It was very unusual for Rhys to be that precise about dates. Jane Eyre is unspecific about its dates, although internal evidence would seem to set the West Indian episodes before 1820: they certainly take place before the watershed of Emancipation in 1833. So, for all the extraordinarily close connections and parallels that exist between Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys has adapted the chronology in order to bring it in line with her own family history: 1825 is, for example, the approximate birth-date of Rhys's great aunt Cora, one of the models for Antoinette (though the name Cora is transferred to Antoinette's aunt, who corresponds to Rhys's great aunt Jane). The dramatic events in her family history to which she wanted to relate Jane Eyre, are post-Emancipation, so the time-scale is adjusted accordingly.

The topographical transpositions in Wide Sargasso Sea work in the same direction. That the first part of the story should take place in Jamaica is given by Jane Eyre. Rhys had never been in Jamaica: the Cosway plantation, which becomes the property of the Masons, is based upon the Lockhart plantation of Geneva, though in Wide Sargasso Sea given the name of Coulibri, the next estate along the south coast of Dominica. Mention of Spanish Town, then capital of Jamaica, is also given by Jane Eyre, but there are no attempts to "transfer" the Dominican references that pervade the early part of Wide Sargasso Sea. The honeymoon island, home of Antoinette's mother, is also attended by Dominican references, although the island itself remains unnamed in the novel: the couple arrive at Massacre (a village just north of Roseau), there are persistent references to the Caribs, who are only found on Dominica, and Antoinette's house is clearly based on Rhys's father's estate, Amelia, though called in the novel Granbois, like Coulibri the name of another Dominican estate. More circumstantially, the surrounding topography relates to Dominica which has, for example, plenty of traffic with Martinique, unlike Jamaica. When Rochester writes to the Spanish Town magistrate, Mr. Fraser, he gets a reply "in a few days" (118), which would be good going from Roseau, but inconceivable from Jamaica.
Let me use this example of the topographical references to try to clarify the argument. A fully "autobiographical" reading - of the kind not being suggested here - would take all this as evidence that the "Jamaica" of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is really Dominica. An aesthetic reading would say that it did not matter, that the "Jamaica" of both novels exists in the parallel world of art, so that it makes no difference what topographical features are attached to it. What I am suggesting is that proper attention to the production of *Wide Sargasso Sea* would investigate the intertwining of "Jamaica" and "Dominica" in the novel, the Dominican materials produced from memory and family history appearing under some of the toponyms provided by Jane Eyre.

In the West Indian family relationships the changes again involve alterations that inflect the materials closer to the Lockhart family history. In Jane Eyre the Mason family of Jamaica consists of husband and wife and three children, including Bertha. The black population of Jamaica is not directly mentioned, though arguably "present" in some of the descriptions given by Jane of Betha's "thick and dark hair..." and "discoloured face" (1934, 282-3). In addition, Bronté's use of the term "creole" - as in Rochester's "Her mother, the Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard" (291) - carries at least a hint of "tainted" blood. What "suits" Rochester, he says, must be the "antipodes of the Creole." whom he now - as he tells Jane the story of his marriage - associates with "the loathings of incongruous unions" (311), a phrase that echoes the Book of Ezra's warnings about the dangers of taking "strange wives." Rhys makes several changes to this story. The basic structure of two parents and three children remains, but this new family is a combination of two earlier family units, with the result that Antoinette (Bertha from *Jane Eyre*) is not a Mason by blood, Richard, her brother from *Jane Eyre* becoming her step-brother, and her father in *Jane Eyre* becoming her step-father in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The dead father, Cosway, Antoinette's mother's first husband, is therefore introduced into *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and with him another set of at least possible relatives, Daniel and Alexander Cosway, presumably half-brothers to Antoinette - though she and others later challenge the relationship, and Alexander's son Sandi, a kind of half-nephew whom Antoinette calls cousin, and with whom she is presumed to have at (cross-generational) affair. The lack of clarity about these relationships is deliberate: Bronté's category of "creole" is here being opened up and confronted. At one moment in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester thinks that Antoinette looks like the servant-girl Amélie: "Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place" (105). The "reality" or otherwise of these family relationships remains unexplored in the text.

The significance of these shifts in the familial relationships is multiple. In one way they obviously connect with the change in the dating of the story, the Cosways becoming the old planter family destroyed by Emancipation, the Masons representing new capital from England, scornful of slavery but ignorant of the West Indies; a division entirely absent from *Jane Eyre*. As a result, Antoinette becomes a much more marginal figure even within her own society, a victim of historical forces rather than of inherited lunacy. The racial and cultural dimensions, ideologically dense in *Jane Eyre*, are unpacked in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The white English "norm" is still present, represented by Mason as well as Rochester, but the creole otherness to that norm is no longer the undifferentiated realm of the alien tropics - lunacy, sexuality, excess, so memorably articulated in the story that Rochester tells to Jane Eyre (Bronté 1934, 307-8). Instead "creole" is broken down into black, white, and coloured, and further subdivided with Annette and Christophine coming from Martinique and being therefore alien to the "English" creole of "Jamaica." Some interesting discussions of the novel have indeed turned on the character of Christophine, the
black French creole. My suggestion is that the really troubling figures "in the margins" of Wide Sargasso Sea are the coloured Cosways, Daniel and Alexander.

"Old" Cosway, Antoinette's father, has clear parallels with the old Lockhart whose portrait still hung in the dining-room at Rhys's family home. Like Cosway, old Lockhart's official family resulted from his second marriage. The founding father has his memorial in Wide Sargasso Sea, described in bitter tones by the illegitimate and coloured son Daniel:

All I get is curses and get-outs from that damn devil my father. My father old Cosway, with his white marble tablet in the English church at Spanish Town for all to see. It have a crest on it and a motto in Latin and words in big black letters. I never know such lies. I hope that stone tie round his neck and drag him down to Hell in the end. (101)

The "old" Lockhart (James Potter Lockhart d. 1837) was commemorated with just such a marble plaque until the hurricane of 1979 destroyed the Anglican church in Dominica.

Daniel's bitter words about the man he claims as father provide a troubling chorus to Rochester's doubts about the creole family relationships. Something of the highly mediated anxiety with which the offspring of these kinds of unofficial liaisons is invested can be gauged from the exchange between Rochester and Antoinette when they arrive for their honeymoon at Massacre, where Daniel Cosway lives. "Who was massacred here?" Rochester asks, "Slaves?" "Oh no," Antoinette replies, "Not slaves. Something must have happened a long time ago. Nobody remembers now" (55). Antoinette, like Rhys, would have known very well that the "massacre" here was the killing in 1674 of Indian Warner, the half Carib son of one of the foremost English colonists in the West Indies, Sir Thomas Warner. Indian Warner and his Carib allies were killed by this half-brother, Philip, the legitimate son of Sir Thomas.

These matters of race are negotiated by the novel in ways which take some unpacking. The dramatic events in the novel are those that deal with questions of race through confrontation, especially when the estate house, Coulibri, is burned down by black rioters, an event usually taken by Rhys herself, and by commentators on the novel, to be based on an incident from Rhys's family history, the burning down of her grandfather's estate house in the years after emancipation. As Rhys writes in her autobiography, with reference to Edward Lockhart: "It was during my grandfather's life, sometime in the 1830s, that the first estate house was burnt down by the freed negroes after the Emancipation Act was passed. He was, apparently, a mild man who didn't like the situation at all" (1981, 33).

What interests me about this incident, and why it can become an emblem of the fraught relationship between literature and history, is that, because of Wide Sargasso Sea, this burning down of the estate house has passed into the history of Dominica as a fact. The argument has to be careful here because Wide Sargasso Sea is a fiction which makes no necessary historical claims itself; rather, readers and critics of the novel have wanted, too readily, to take Rhys's own marks at face value and to install Wide Sargasso Sea as an "authentic" and "historical" response to the "inauthentic" and "fictional" version of West Indian creole life offered by Jane Eyre. What tends to be lost sight of in this view is the way in which Wide Sargasso Sea itself offers a certain kind of negotiation of its nineteenth-century materials, a "vindication" in Rhys's own word, or perhaps a "compensation" referred to on the opening page of the novel as so slow.
in coming to the Dominican estate owners. In fact, one could say that the very family history reworked in Wide Sargasso Sea already offers a negotiation of that material; so the work of production has at least two distinct stages to it.

The events to which the novel "refers" were the 1844 census riots in which a series of disturbances ensued after the rumor took hold that the census was a prelude to the reintroduction of slavery. Threats were made to whites, a few stones were thrown, a few houses ransacked - but none burned down; as a result, the militia was called out, several protesters were killed and one had his head cut off and displayed on a pike to discourage others. Three hundred people were arrested, four were charged with capital offences, and one, Jean Philip Motard, executed after a trial in which the accused was given no defence. He was convicted of attempted murder for throwing a stone at a white planter; the planter received a graze on his forehead. These incidents brought the simmering personal and political tensions on the island to a boil. The Colonial Office pressed its local officials for clarification; the Anti-Slavery Society became involved and demanded an inquiry. As a result of this furor the intermittent rioting of these three days in June 1844 became known as the "guerre nègre" and is recalled as one of the salient incidents in nineteenth-century West Indian history.10

Fire has symbolic power, as both Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea demonstrate, but there was no fire at Geneva: Mitcham House was stripped of its furnishings and some damage may have been done to its fabric, but none of the reports, either those sent to the Colonial Office or those kept in the local Minute Books mention that the house was burned down. Statements of the value of property destroyed in the rioting, drawn up by William Ellissonde of Stowe, Henry Bellot of St. Patrick, and Jane Maxwell Lockhart of Geneva were forwarded to London by the local administrator, Laidlow. The Lockharts’ list referred to furniture at Mitcham House: tables, chairs, glass-ware, pianos, books, pictures, and a jewel-case, to a total value of £202. 19s. 5d. (House of Commons 1845, vol. 119). It is inconceivable that a fire could have occurred and not been mentioned.11

So the Lockhart family memory produces a fire that - as far as can be told from written evidence - did not happen, but which becomes the key scene in a work of fiction, and is then reported by critics as an historical incident in nineteenth-century Dominica. The "memory" of something that did not happen is usually a screen-memory to occlude what did. It is clear from the documentation that Geneva Estate played an important part in the disturbances. Charles Leathem, its attorney, was, in turn, a proponent of violent response and a defender of the rights of the imprisoned peasantry (and in the course of this defence called Theodore Lockhart, probably the coloured son of James Potter Lockhart, as witness). It was on the road to Grand Bay (where the Geneva plantation was situated) that the incident occurred which led to the execution of Motard and, indeed, unusually, the execution was carried out at the scene of the crime, the better to impress its lesson upon the peasantry in the south of the island. The involvement of two Lockhart brothers was also substantial. Brade Lockhart, Jean Rhys's great-uncle, does not appear at all within the memories, but the initial Census Proclamation was issued in his name, and he played a significant role in the judicial procedures as Motard's executioner, claiming expenses for taking the tools of his trade by boat to Point Michel scene of the crime.13

Another brother, Edward, Rhys's "mild" grandfather, was the subject of investigation that went as far as the Colonial Office in London. Reports of disturbances were dispatched by FitzRoy, Governor of the Leeward Islands.
Stanley, the Colonial Secretary, in London. On 1st July 1844 FitzRoy's despatch enclosed the results of two particular investigations undertaken by Laidlaw, the acting Administrator and himself a prominent planter. The attorney for the Geneva estate, Charles Leathem, "has been guilty of most wanton and outrageous acts of cruelty" (House of Commons 1844, 247). He had apparently apprehended two people who were both pinioned when he stabbed one in the groin with a bayonet and struck the other a violent blow on the head with a musket. Laidlaw reported to FitzRoy that proceedings would be instituted against this man by the Attorney-General. The other incident, referred to by FitzRoy as "the matter of Mr. ---," he had to explain to Stanley because it referred to something not previously mentioned in the correspondence: a complaint made directly to FitzRoy by the labourers at Geneva that one of the census commissioners had "wantonly broken into several of their cottages on finding them deserted by their owners" (246). Laidlaw's comment on this case had been brief: he had had the charge investigated "and I am happy to be able to acquit that young gentleman of any wilful intention of injuring them in the slightest degree" (247). The "young gentleman" was Edward Lockhart.

FitzRoy, under pressure from Stanley, was forced to pursue the matter of Edward Lockhart's behaviour. The two Justices of the Peace charged by Laidlaw to investigate the matter seem only to have collected an affidavit from Henry Hardcastle, schoolmaster of the Protestant school at Geneva (and therefore presumably an employee of the Lockhart family), who had been appointed enumerator for the census by Lockhart and who accompanied him on his rounds on 3rd June. According to Hardcastle, Lockhart had merely rapped on three doors and windows with a small stick to see if people were home. Unfortunately the houses were so badly made that the doors and windows had fallen off. This may have convinced the J.P.'s and Laidlaw, but it did not cut any ice with FitzRoy. He acquitted Lockhart "of the charge of intentional violence on this occasion; but I cannot acquit him of having acted with very great indiscretion ... I have, therefore, to request you [Laidlaw] will caution Mr. Edward Lockhart to act with greater consideration on any future occasion" (1845, 104). Stanley's response focuses on the behaviour of some of the commissioners "and especially of Mr. Lockhart" as "highly indiscreet" (114). In the petition drawn up by many of the people imprisoned after the disturbances and supported by Leathem and by Charles George Bonner, the prominent radical politician, Lockhart's wanton forcing of the doors and windows "of our little dwellings" is particularly mentioned. Most of the 300 persons seized were guilty only "of having fled in terror when they saw armed men coming towards their houses" (123). A "mild man" Edward Lockhart may have been; but not many British citizens in the West Indies received a personal letter from Lord Stanley for their role in breaking down the houses of the people whose census details they were supposed to be collecting: *corda serrata pando*, indeed. It is presumably no more than a coincidence that the MS original of *Jane Eyre* says that Mr. Rochester "never was a mild man," whereas the printed editions ended this to "never was a wild man" (Brontë 1969, xxii).

* Jean Philip Motard was executed for throwing a stone at the head of a white man called Bremner. The following year (1845) Bremner's son married Cora Lockhart, daughter of the "old" Lockhart who, as the original for Cosway, stands father to Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. During the burning of Coulibri in the novel, Antoinette's erstwhile black friend Tia throws a stone at her, cutting her head open. The compensations at work here, both discursive and ideological, are extremely complex, but they all work towards displacing the discursive injustices of colonial violence with the story of an innocent childhood of friendship shattered by the realities of a racially-divided society.
“Even the dead will not be safe,” Walter Benjamin warned (1970, 257). The death of Jean Philip Motard, savagely and illegally executed in 1844, was hardly noticed at the time, so he could not exactly be said to have been “forgotten”; but if a novel like Wide Sargasso Sea is going to be deprived of its “locality” by the institution of Anglo-American literary criticism and made to replace and obscure a whole history of anti-colonial struggle in the smaller islands of the West Indies, then the effort of remembrance is necessary - for the better understanding both of colonial history and, ultimately, of Wide Sargasso Sea itself.

3. Across the seas

Wilson Harris, one of Wide Sargasso Sea’s most perceptive critics, makes the point, very much in line with what has been argued here, “that Jean Rhys, intuitively rather than intentionally, is attempting to compensate a historical portrait of the West Indian creole” (1970, 10). Harris offers what he calls a “limbo” perspective, using the name of the dance developed on the middle passage to suggest a “gateway” or “threshold,” a “dislocation” which allows the creole experience in its widest sense to be taken as “a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of culture” (8). Wide Sargasso Sea is willy-nilly a West Indian novel from this perspective. For Harris, the colour of its author is irrelevant as even is her intention in writing; indeed it seems as if Wide Sargasso Sea is West Indian to the extent to which regional myths have “secreted themselves ... to the unaware” (1980, 142) into the fabric of the novel.

There exists in the narrow indirections of Wide Sargasso Sea that peculiar blend of opacity and transparency that alerts us to the force of the intuitive imagination in building strategies of which it knows yet does not know ... The blend of opacity and transparency as figuration of groping consciousness backwards and forwards in time tends to be overlooked in fiction and in particular in a work such as Wide Sargasso Sea, which follows a deceptively straightforward narrative line broken by intrusions of abrupt fantasy populated by non-existences, non-existent voices, reappearing yet vanishing pathways and ruins pointing to the ancient estates within a succession of empires (Spanish, French, British), and to new wealth or legacies in great halls and museums of history in Europe across the seas. (1985, 115-116)

The movement in this passage is exemplary: from individual consciousness and fantasy along pathways to ancient estates and finally to the museums of history across the seas. The local and the particular, even, I have suggested, the familial should be validated as appropriate and necessary areas for post-colonial research: after all, if one of the strategies of colonial discourse is the homogenisation of cultural differences, then counter-strategies must include the affirmation of those differences, the insistence that the local and the particular do matter.

But once the local has been fixed, once the materials out of which a text has been made have been located and studied, the critical movement has finally be outwards, towards the large picture of which the locality forms only a part for too easy a contrast between Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea would risk missing that Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys do finally belong to the same world. Readings that focus on the counter-discursive strategies of Wide Sargasso Sea vis-à-vis Jane Eyre, though often carried out with impeccably radical motives, have tended to set the categories of “colonial” and “post-colonial” in stone.
failing to see the multiple ways in which Jane Eyre is, in its production of its materials, already negotiating matters of West Indian slavery, even if the figure of Bertha is the only obvious textual residue of this negotiation. This is not to collapse differences, but to argue for the need to understand the complex trafficking that exists between texts (and their authors) in the world, even those that seem to invite consideration in terms of oppositions. It involves, for example, seeing the importance of the vast critical enterprise – starting in the case of Wuthering Heights with Charlotte Brontë herself – which produced the novels of the Brontës as works of genius unconnected with the conditions of their production and sheered from the materials which went into the making of them, materials already shot through with colonial colours. The Atlantic world is a useful concept here, long a staple of slave-trade studies, recently given a cultural twist in Paul Gilroy’s notion of a “black Atlantic,” and intriguingly already present in the deeply meditated title of Jean Rhys’s novel, which names that which slows down (and therefore makes more palpable) the channels of communication which criss-cross the Atlantic: “I thought of ‘Sargasso sea’ or ‘Wide sargasso sea’ but nobody knew what I meant” (Rhys 1985, 154).

NOTES

I would like to acknowledge the helpful comments made on an earlier draft of this paper by the other participants in the symposium, and the assistance given me in beginning to trace Jean Rhys’s “local history” by Ena Williams, Lennox Honychurch, Patricia Honychurch, Janet Higbie, Daphne Agar – all of whom were interviewed in Dominica in November and December 1990, and by Carole Angier, whose consistent encouragement and generosity with her own research materials are much appreciated.

Cf. “The mad wife in Jane Eyre has always interested me. I was convinced that Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it. Otherwise, why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature? I hadn’t really formulated the idea of vindicating the mad woman in the novel but when I was rediscovered I was encouraged to do so” (Jean Rhys, in Carter 1968, 5).

On creolization, see Brathwaite 1971 and Glissant 1981.

What I refer to in this paper as “family history” means the stories that Jean Rhys herself recounts in her letters and autobiographical memoir (1981 and 1985); the information contained in Carole Angier’s biography (1990), which is drawn principally from Jean Beck (who had as her main source Jean Rhys’s younger sister Brenda) and from a memoir written by Jean Rhys’s brother Owen; and the family tree supplied by Norman Keith Lockhart in support of his claim for government compensation after Mitcham House was burned down in the political turmoil of 1932 (CO 152/438/9 and 444/10). This “family history” therefore belongs to the generation born between 1883 and 1896, who would have learned about the family from their mother (or in Norman’s case aunt) Minna (1853-1928), their aunt Brenda (1853-1934), and their great-aunt Jane (d. 1907), sister of Edward Lockhart’s wife, Julia Woodcock. Additional information, some of which contradicts the “family history,” is drawn from a number of printed and manuscript sources, amongst the most important of which are the Morne Rouge Register of Baptisms (Dominica 1883-1952), papers laid before Parliament after the 1844 “disturbances” (House of Commons 1844 and 1845), transcriptions of monumental inscriptions (Oliver 1927), local records (Dominica 1844), and local newspapers. My contention – only sketched here – is that the contradictions between the two
versions form a significant aspect of the local particularity needed to give a fully historical reading of Wide Sargasso Sea.

Recent criticism alert to matters of colonialism has been subtle in its readings of Wide Sargasso Sea: for example, O'Connor 1986, Emery 1990, Howells 1991. On memory in Wide Sargasso Sea, see Mezei 1987.

An important element in the post-colonial dispensation has been the re-writing of history that has gone on from school text-book to major new interpretations of the colonial period. One of the most prominent West Indian politicians at the time of independence, Eric Williams, was also the historian of his island, Trinidad, and of the whole Caribbean region. The materials to forge these new versions of the past are housed in the Special Collections rooms at the University of the West Indies campuses in Mona, Jamaica, and St. Augustine, Trinidad, which provide, if not counter-discourses in any simple sense, then at least the documents supplementary or superfluous to the requirements of the metropolitan records in London, and which can therefore be used to assist the re-reading of the imperial story and the production of a narrative more appropriate to post-colonial times. In Dominica the "national archive" is housed in the unlit cellar of the Police Traffic Department Offices, a room about six metres square. The archive is uncatalogued, unordered, and virtually unusable, ravaged by weather, lack of attention, and lack of resources. There is, in other words, a gross and material process of occlusion, which should not be lost sight of while attention is directed to the "absences" that inform literary and historiographical production at the more minute, textual level.

Rhys ms. b, folder 2. Rhys's great-grandfather was the cousin of the Lockhart who became Walter Scott's son-in-law and biographer. The story behind the family name is recounted in Scott's Tales of a Grandfather: "... there was one of the brave knights who was in the company of Douglas, and was appointed to take charge of the Bruce's heart homewards again, who was called Sir Simon Lockhard of Lee. He took afterwards for his device, and painted on his shield, a man's heart, with a padlock upon it, in memory of Bruce's heart, which was padlocked in the silver case. For this reason, men changed Sir Simon's name from Lockhard to Lockheart, and all who are descended from Sir Simon are called Lockhart to this day" (Scott 1851, 41).


The place I have called Coulibri existed, and still does. It is now owned by a Syrian called Ayoub Dib (I'm not making this up - it's true). He is very fond of champagne it seems - and so am I. So I only grudge it a very little.... It was this Part II which was so impossibly difficult. I had no facts at all. Or rather I had one - the place. Again a real place. It was a small 'estate' my father bought. 'Coulibri' was, for Dominica, an 'old' estate - about 178-179 something (I rather think before that too) on sea level very fertile and so on. It had that feeling too of that time. The place my father bought was way up mountains, forest - oh incredibly beautiful but wild - I do not like writing about places much. Still - a great effort and I could be back there, remember it there. The characters though had to be imagined - not one real fact" (Rhys 1985, 276-7: letter to Francis Wyndham; and cf. Rhys 1981, 33).

Cf. the somewhat parallel argument about the setting of The Tempest (Hulme 1966, 106-7).

See the materials reproduced in Hulme and Whitehead (eds.) 1992, pages 99-106. On the occasional but significant presence of the indigenous Caribs in Rhys's...
work see Hulme 1990. On Dominica the white Lockharts were also shadowed by their unacknowledged coloured relatives. One of old Lockhart's coloured sons was elected to the Dominica House of Assembly in 1846, the same year as Edward Lockhart, his half-brother and Jean Rhys's grandfather. His son was Alexander Lockhart, a prominent politician and journalist, who in name and relationship corresponds in Wide Sargasso Sea to Sandi Cosway, the man to whom Antoinette feels closest and who helps protect her from the threatening albino boy at the beginning of the novel. In all probability it was also this Alexander Lockhart who wrote to offer financial help to Rhys's mother following her husband's death in 1910, not long after Jean had left Dominica (Rhys ms. a, 31). After Emancipation it was the coloured Lockharts who prospered, while the original white family sank into debt.

10House of Commons 1844 and 1845. Any post-colonial history of Dominica has to be gleaned from the margins and footnotes of regional studies, and from reading against their grain the colonial records which, although chosen and cut according to certain criteria, are still far from monologic. In this instance, for example, the narrative that emerges from the papers laid before the House of Commons in 1844 and 1845 is by no means neutral, but it does consist of a polyphony of different voices and interests: the Dominica administration, the so-called "mulatto ascendancy," the local colonial authorities, the Colonial Office in London, the Anti-Slavery Society, and even, in heavily mediated form, at least some of the black "rioters" themselves.

See also Nicholls 1893 for views contemporaneous with Jean Rhys's parents' generation (Nicholls was Rhys's father's superior); Honychurch 1984 and Chace 1989.

11The jewel case is intriguing. During the fire at Coulibri Cora presumes that Annette has gone back into the house for her jewel case, when in fact she has gone back for the parrot (35). In one of Freud's most famous case-histories Dora dreams of being woken by her father because of a fire: "Mother wanted to stop and save her jewel-case; but Father said: 'I refuse to let myself and my two children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case'" (Freud 1977, 99). Freud then explained the symbolic meaning of jewel cases to Dora (105).

12According to Louis James, "Geneva estate was looted and burned" (1971, 47), an event Teresa O'Connor speaks of as "recast in Wide Sargasso Sea" (1986, 20). The estate house at Geneva was burned down in 1932 during a period of unrest in which the incumbent Lockhart was very unpopular. This happened just four years before Jean Rhys returned to the island for a brief visit, and stories about the incident may have been transposed to the older family stories about the post-Emancipation riots.

13A Minute Book of the 1844 House of Assembly records: "That there be granted to W.B. Lockhart Esqr, Provost Marshall the sum of £13. 3. 4. sterling for extra expenses by him incurred in the Execution of a Criminal at a distance from the usual Place" (Dominica 1844, 27).

14Charlotte Brontë, introduction to Wuthering Heights.


Different kinds of connection might also be made. One of the very earliest pieces of Charlotte Brontë's writing to survive describes a childhood game in which she, Emily, and Branwell each chose an island and then decided who they
would like to live there, tiny fictional utopias occupied by their favourite
characters from the contemporary world. Emily’s choices were Walter Scott, James
Gibson Lockhart (his son-in-law and biographer), and Johnny Lockhart, Scott’s
grandson to whom the Tales of a Grandfather were directed, including the story of
how the Lockharts had got their name (Brontë 1987, 6). Rhys’s family was already
part and parcel of the Brontës’ childhood.

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