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Jean Rhys Remembering the "Riot"

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Jean Rhys Remembering the "Riot"

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“I remember the Riot as if it were yesterday. I must have been about twelve,” Jean Rhys (1890-1979) writes in *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (1981, 47). That her account of it opens the vignette “Black/White” indicates its centrality to her memories of the meanings of race in fin-de-siècle Dominica. Identifying the event has proved difficult, troublingly so for some critics. Indeed, Veronica Marie Gregg, working from historical accounts of Dominica available to her, reads Rhys’s representation of the “Riot” as an invention consistent with a wider “strategy”: “suppressing names, distorting ‘facts,’ and misremembering dates” (1995, 67). Though born in 1890, Rhys often gave her birthdate as 1894. There are no records, Gregg reports, of riots in Roseau in 1902 or 1906. Drawing on the work of Michel Beaujoir in *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, she suggests that Rhys’s memory of a riot is manufactured from the “‘contested *topoi*’”¹ of her plantocratic culture and racial stereotyping of a black Other. While there is work of historical repression and distortion in the account Rhys offers, the event represented as a riot in *Smile Please* is historical, having taken place in Roseau in 1898 in the context of what the editor of a local paper, William Davies, described as “the Electoral war against the people” (1898b) to be fought on racial lines (1898a), the political manoeuvres and election in June and July through which the imposition of Crown Colony rule was effected. In general histories of Dominica by Lennox Honychurch (1995), Patrick Baker (1994) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1988, 1989, 1992) the imposition of Crown Colony rule in Dominica is covered in a few paragraphs at most. Primary newspaper sources, however, interleaved with broader historical accounts, tell a longer and fuller story of the events Rhys is processing, and complicate questions around how willful Rhys’s omissions and distortions might be. Rhys’s representation of a riot in *Smile Please* routes us back not only to local newspaper coverage of historical events, but also to her 1927 story “Again the Antilles,” which features a “‘riot’” targeting a local newspaper editor (1987, 39). The story plays on themes of knowingness in its plot, characterization and narrative, toying with readers, and of racialized cultural capital in the form of capacity to recognize accurately literary and historical allusion (Thomas 1999, 56-61).

In Rhys’s account of “the Riot,” her white Creole mother, Minna Rees Williams (*née* Lockhart), fears for the lives of her family. Her Welsh settler father William Rees Williams, a Government Medical Officer, insists that the presumed rioters, heard by Rhys from a distance as a “strange noise like animals,” though she recognizes it was “people,” are “perfectly harmless” (1981, 47). This pattern of parental response echoes that of white Creole Annette Cosway Mason and English settler Mr Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea* on the night on which Coulibri is burnt. In Rhys’s account in *Smile Please* the massed people “surged past” the Rees Williams home “howling, but they didn’t throw stones” (1981, 47). The experience, she suggests, was a rite of passage for her: “a certain wariness did creep in when I thought about the black people who surrounded me.” She explains that the “riot was aimed at the editor of the local paper. His house was near ours. He had written an article attacking the power of the Catholic priests in Dominica. The crowd was some of the faithful who intended to stone his house, frighten him and prevent him ever writing about religion again” (1981, 48). Davies reported in the *Dominica Guardian* that the home of the Royers, the neighbours of the Rees Williamses, was stoned on the night of the St. Joseph election, 23 June 1898, by a crowd “riotously and tumultuously assembled,” and estimated to be 500 strong (1898k). He identified O’Reilly Royer as a colored opponent of Crown Colony rule. Davies’s coverage of the transition from limited representative government to Crown Colony rule drew out the implication of Rhys’s father and uncle in the process by which Crown Colony rule was

¹ Michel Beaujoir (1991) *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, trans. Yara Milos, New York: New York University Press, 35. Qtd. in Gregg 1995, 67.

imposed. As with Rhys's reinscription of the 1844 census riots, the "guerre nègre," in the burning of Coulibri in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, discussed by Peter Hulme in "The Locked Heart: The Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*—An Historical and Biographical Analysis" (1993), the work of occlusion in *Smile Please* is complex.

The fullest historical account of the 1898 election and its immediate aftermath is a long article "How Crown Colony Rule Came to Dominica by 1898," by Joseph A. Boromé (1969). Only one of the events of the night of 23 June 1898, the stoning of the Wesleyan Mission House, is mentioned cursorily by him.² He subsumes specific violence and intimidation in more generalized formulations: "[t]ension" running "high," a "highly charged election atmosphere," "a heightened feeling of the blacks against the colored," "intemperate speaking" (48-49). Drawing on this account, Gregg argues that

by inscribing the self experientially in the event of a riot, which stands as a potential and ever-present threat of black animality and violence against her family, Rhys rewrites and consciously distorts historical "facts" to produce a working invention/inventory for the self in terms of history and "black people" ... The refusal of historical concreteness and the construction of a fictional biotext that privileges memory ("I remember the Riot as if it were yesterday") inscribe the narrator as a ventriloquist's dummy made up of a repertoire of assumptions embedded in the sociotext. (1995, 67)

In my reading of *Smile Please*, Dominican newspapers of the day provide "historical concreteness" and "sociotext." The local newspaper "loomed large in Rhys's literary imagination because it played a prominent role in Dominican society during her childhood," explains Leah Reade Rosenberg (2007, 192).³ Davies, the politician editor of the *Dominica Guardian*, led the campaign against Crown Colony rule. Augustus Theodore Righton, the government printer and editor of the *Dominican*, also a member of the colored élite, would adopt a policy that episodes of violence and intimidation not be recorded and broadcast in local memory, in the interests, he thought, of restoration of public peace.

Patrick Baker describes the empowerment of a colored élite in Dominica after 1831, when a Brown Privilege Bill was passed which allowed colored men to stand for parliament, as "a stormy, fractious affair, which dominated the politics of the nineteenth century on the island" (1994, 124). It entailed

a struggle ... fought at the "élite" level between the representatives of metropolitan interests, who sought to maintain control of their world through preserving colonial relations, and the mulatto élite, who wanted to wrest away that control and centre their world for themselves. The conflict took place in the local legislature, where representatives of metropolitan interests clashed with local influentials. In this contest, the principle of metropolitan appointments was pitted against the principle of democratic process. (1994, 125)

In 1898, the Legislative Assembly comprised seven elected and seven nominated members. Male adult suffrage was based on a restrictive property qualification. Crown Colony rule would withdraw the franchise from eligible voters at island level, 612 men from a total

² Irving Andre, whose work Elaine Savory cites, has identified the events Rhys identifies as a riot as a later incident, the Catholic faithful milling to defend the Presbytery and Cathedral on 16 July. Irving Andre (1995) *Distant Voices: The Genesis of an Indigenous Literature in Dominica*, Roseau: Ponde Casse Press. Cited in Savory 1998, 8.

³ See the chapter "Jean Rhys and Dominican Autoethnography" in Thomas 1999, 9-26.

population of 26,841 at the time (Boromé 1969, 47). Trouillot points out that the “early rise” of the colored “élite opened a gap between light- and dark-skinned individuals and, for a long time, the majority of the latter (that is, the peasantry) saw politics as a reserved terrain of the more urban, more educated coloreds” (1992, 170). He argues that the élite clung “to state power as a stepping stone to larger fortunes, or often enough for its own economic rewards” (1989, 709). The campaign for Crown Colony rule effectively exploited deep class divisions between the colored and black populations of Dominica.

Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary for the Colonies in the British government, and leading advocate of the New Imperialism, was keen to make Dominica “the test case” of his policy (Hulme 2000, 110). In March 1898, he proposed that Dominica should have £15,000 for road-building “if she assured the crown control over finances by modifying her constitution to create a predominance of crown nominees over elected representatives” (Boromé 1969, 46). By April, he was pressing for Crown Colony government with further promises and hints of imperial largesse. On 13 June, the Assembly voted against Crown Colony rule by a majority of 8 to 6. The Assembly affirmed, again by a vote of 8 to 6, that Dominicans were “unwilling to barter even their present limited Status as Citizens of the British Empire for any sum of money to be named” (qtd. in Boromé 1969, 47). Non-white members, including the colored nominee L.A. Giraud, all voted against Crown Colony rule. Its parliamentary supporters were white or identified as such (Davies 1898f). The governor of the Leeward Islands, Francis Fleming, “dissolved the Assembly and issued writis [sic] of elections returnable June 28” (Boromé 1969, 48).

The *Dominica Guardian* was owned at the time by William Davies, Sholto Pemberton, Alexander Rumsey C. Lockhart (from a colored branch of Rhys’s mother’s family) and Henry Hamilton, elected members of the Legislative Assembly belonging to the Popular Party, with Joseph Hilton Steber as subeditor and manager. Davies took over the editorship to steer the campaign against Crown Colony rule. In his 1916 eulogy for Davies, Lockhart spoke of “the newspaper work which, in his position as the leader of a party, he was compelled to give himself in order to keep public opinion in the right groove and to hearten his followers.”

The election was bitterly contested. Davies described the “atmosphere” of Roseau as “that of a powder magazine. A spark may at any moment kindle a blaze” (1898k). Honychurch notes briefly that the government (governor Fleming, administrator P.A. Templer and the Executive Council) “sought the help of the church. Father Branchereau of the Catholic Church and Reverend Jones of the Methodist Church were entrusted with the task of converting the people of Vielle Case and Wesley to Crown Colony. For his part in the matter, Reverend Jones was asked by the Methodists to leave the colony” (1995, 133). Davies urged non-white Dominicans to maintain boycotts of Catholic and Wesleyan church services and collection boxes because priests and parsons were betraying the legitimate aspirations of their congregations for measures of representative government.⁴ Despite early Christian religious training in Dominica and Britain, Davies himself was a freethinker in matters of religion (1898o). In the election, Davies, the sitting member for the electoral district of Roseau in the Legislative Assembly, was returned to office. The anti-Crown-Colony campaign was lost in St. Andrew on the strength of nine votes, forty-five votes in total having been cast in that electorate. On 29 June, Davies had attributed the election of Colin Macintyre there to the racist influence of “parsons and priests,” pork-barreling, and the power wielded by religious leaders, dubbed “professor[s]” and “operators,” over “credulous” followers of superstition (1898c). In his argument, superstition includes both obeah and Christian faiths.

⁴ See, for instance, the following pieces in the *Dominica Guardian*: 1898a, 1898d, 1898e, 1898f, 1898h, 1898j, 1898k, 1898n, 1898o, 1898p and 1898q.

Rhys's memory of the disturbances script them as having been produced by a local newspaper editor having "written an article attacking the power of the Catholic priests in Dominica" (1981, 48).

In the *Dominica Guardian*, Davies (1898i) offered a detailed version of the events of 23 June. He was outraged at a charge of disorderly conduct laid against Aubrey Romeo, a young black chemist from Antigua, at the imposition on him of the maximum fine of £5, and at police inaction over the assault of Royer and the stoning of his house. Returning to Roseau after the election, Romeo, he related, became involved in an altercation with Father O'Brien, who was accompanied at the time by the Provost Marshal, Christopher Musgrave, Musgrave's clerk Mr Sharpe, and L.A. Giraud. The priest, who was drunk according to Davies, ordered Romeo to ride either ahead of or behind his party, and "[t]o this Romeo replied that he was on a public road and would do as he pleased." Father O'Brien struck Romeo's horse several times with a riding whip. Romeo swore at the priest, Musgrave remonstrated with him over his language, Romeo defended his right to speak in such a manner, O'Brien struck Romeo on the leg with the whip, and in retaliation Romeo attempted unsuccessfully to hit O'Brien with his umbrella. In Roseau, Romeo chased O'Brien on horseback to the Roman Catholic Presbytery, and Musgrave incited a local Catholic man outside the Presbytery to assault Romeo for having beaten the priest. The crowd that gathered "began to stone Romeo," who escaped on foot to the Wesleyan Mission House, with the allegedly Catholic crowd in pursuit. The Mission House was stoned. To effect a safe passage to prison for Romeo a police sergeant "disguised him in Police clothes." Davies describes the Catholic crowd at one point as "the Roman Catholic rabble," and at another as "the loose women of the town." Through his marriage, Musgrave was distantly related to Rhys.

Davies wrote that "[t]he appetite of the mob being thus whetted for an outburst, it had to be appeased by the sacrifice of a victim." That victim was, in his account, O'Reilly Royer, manager of Goodwill Estate, who was beaten on the Goodwill bridge, escaping further injury with the assistance of employees of the Estate

who forced him into an adjoining yard. Baulked of the pleasure of killing Mr. Royer, the mob made for Mr. Royer's house which they began to stone, his unprotected wife and children being inside. During this outburst of playfulness His Honour the Administor [sic] [P.A. Templer]; [sic] his private Secretary and the Inspector of Police were moving among the crowd; but no arrests were then made, nor have any subsequent charges been preferred against any of the rioters, although some of them must be known to the Police[.]

Davies highlighted official condoning of the intimidation and attributed the inaction to Royer being "one of those anti-Crown Colony mulattos" (1898i). As a journalist he would use the word "mulatto" to cite racism. In a 1906 obituary, Royer would be praised as "one of Dominica's foremost planters," who had "served on several of our best estates as manager," "a man of strict integrity," "a staunch patriot."⁵ Rhys's father William Rees Williams was one of the leaders of the movement for Crown Colony rule;⁶ her uncle Acton Don Lockhart stood (unsuccessfully) for election on a pro-Crown-Colony platform (Davies 1898g). Rees Williams reportedly described the attack on the Royer home as locals "amusing themselves," "the mob was enjoying itself" (Davies 1898i). Davies described Rees Williams's allegedly nonchalant response as "inhuman" given that "defenceless women and children were

⁵ "The Late O'Reilly Royer."

⁶ On Rees Williams's political career, see Thomas 1996.

cowering inside" the Royer home (1898i). Romeo was convicted of disorderly conduct and fined £5, while a European man who had assaulted a black boy was fined 5 shillings.

A more perfunctory account of the trial is given in the *Dominican*, in an issue in which Righton declares a policy of refusing to inflame "the present situation of bad blood with its hatreds and rancour. We have just now quite enough of that sort of thing and it is our duty not to assist in any way to add thereto, but rather to the contrary" (1898c). According to the *Dominican* (Righton 1898a),

[a]fter the election was over at St. Joseph on the 23rd ult., Rev. O'Brien invited a few of his friends to the Presbytery there, when Romeo entered uninvited. Rev. O'Brien, not knowing him at all, simply asked who he was, when Romeo took offence and left. Being, no doubt, angry with the priest for not welcoming him to his house, he rode to Roseau at the same time with the Reverend gentleman and was very rude to him on the way up, and on reaching town, he was very noisy and went so far as to threaten the priest with personal violence, following him to the gate of Rev. Fogarty's residence. This becoming known to the Roman Catholics of Roseau, *Grandby Street*, the scene of the disturbance, was soon filled with an excited crowd of several hundred persons, who were determined to give Romeo his desert, but he fortunately made his escape. At two o'clock next morning the police found him asleep in the yard of the Wesleyan Mission premises and took him to the Fort, where he had to be kept for some days till the excitement had abated.

There is no mention in this or any other report in the *Dominican* of the stoning of the Wesleyan Mission House, the assault of Royer, or the stoning of the Royer home. There is also, significantly, no denial, even implicitly, that the latter two incidents took place. In Davies's account Romeo had visited O'Brien's house because he had pre-arranged to return to Roseau with Mr. Sharpe, and had found him at the presbytery.

The incidents and Davies' pursuit of justice for Romeo and the Royers heightened already exacerbated tensions between Catholics and the colored élite. The H.M.S. *Intrepid*, which had been anchored in Roseau harbour from 9 to 16 July, was recalled on 17 July, where it stayed until 25 July. It was clearly on hand for naval personnel to maintain or restore public order, if necessary, in a highly volatile political situation. On 11 July, a resolution in favour of Crown Colony rule was passed by 8 to 6 in the Legislative Assembly. Within two hours of the result Davies, A.R.C. Lockhart, Henry Hamilton, Hamilton Rolle and Jabez Bellot, all colored or black, resigned in protest their honorary appointments, as, for example, Commissioners of the Peace, or members of the Board of Valuation, the Board of Health, the Road Board, and the Poor Law Board. On 12 July, "a bill passed providing for a Legislative Council of six official and six nominated members, with an administrator having a casting vote" (Boromé 1969, 49). Righton (1898b) comments on 14 July that

the late Electives and their supporters ... have taken their loss *very seriously* indeed, this is a fact of not any doubt, and to-day there is much unrest, especially from the social standpoint, and which produces a painful vista to the distinguished onlooker. Let us hope the present state of things, like all that is violent and acute and which generally is not of long duration, may soon blow over, and affairs may again assume their normal position, and that Dominica may yet come out of the fire purified, strengthened, and ready to move on the path of progress.

He represents the loss of limited representative government as a political defeat of a political party.

After the initial departure of the navy warship, a rumour was spread on 16 July that the “mulattoes intended to set fire to the Roman Catholic Presbytery and Cathedral and cut the telegraph cable” (Boromé 1969, 49). “During the night there was great unrest, ferment and excitement,” reported Davies (1898k). According to Boromé, “a considerable crowd, ‘some carrying bludgeons and missiles,’ had collected around the Presbytery” (1969, 49), presumably to protect it. “In the Colonial Office, Olivier thought the public demonstration would give pause to Davies and his clique if they were inclined ‘to make mischief’” (1969, 49-50). In Righton’s *Dominican* the events of the night are not reported. The editorial in the relevant issue concerns public sanitation, and the return of the *Intrepid* is reported blandly under “Local Items.”

Davies claimed in the *Dominica Guardian* on 20 July that “[t]he mob is in the pay or under the influence of the priests and the Government. A word spoken from the R.C. pulpit would calm the mob. A few arrests and prosecutions instituted by ‘the authorities,’ with the law left to take its course, would act as a deterrent” (1898k). A week later, he wrote that “the Dominica mob believes that Crown Colony means that the land and houses of ‘the mulattos’ will be handed over to them for division, and they are encouraged in this belief, and are allowed to stone houses in Roseau with impunity as a means to coerce the opinion of anti-Crown [sic] Colonists” (1898m). He compared the manipulation of mob feeling for political ends with that practised in Barbados during government moves for Confederation of the island with the Leeward Islands. On 19 July, William Rees Williams wrote to Davies cancelling his subscription to the *Dominica Guardian*, stating that “the paper is a disgrace to the Island, and every one connected with it” (qtd. in Davies 1898l). In the next day’s editorial Davies accused him of sustained racism against the colored population. He also attacked William Stedman, one of Rhys’s father’s close political allies, insisting that he was “swayed on political questions” by Rees Williams against a group the latter typically demeaned as “*beastly* mulattos” (1898l). As a nominated member of the Legislative Assembly Stedman voted in favour of Crown Colony rule in June and July 1898, and would later be appointed to the inaugural Legislative Council (Boromé 1969, 48-49). He was white. “We could run as far as Mr Steadman’s [sic] house on the bay but long before we got there they’d kill us,” Rhys remembers (1981, 47). On 3 August, Davies was able to report that the Government had halved Romeo’s fine (1898n). Boromé notes that Crown Colony rule and the process through which it was effected “thoroughly disheartened” Davies, who “bowed out of political life, threw up the editorship of the *Guardian*, and retired to his 1,500 acre Melville Hall estate, far from Roseau on the northeastern windward coast. Here he gave himself up to agriculture” (1969, 50).

Righton did publish material in the *Dominican* relating to allegations and campaigns against the clergy over their political interference in the election. On 20 July, he reprinted under the title “A Word for the Hour” a piece from that month’s *Church Record*, a sermon preached by Reverend A.E. Jones. His text was “‘*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*’—Ephesians 4, 31 and 32.” The Wesleyan parson urged, “more harm has already been done in the souls of those who have yielded to passion and prejudice than they can ever inflict upon their ministers.”

Crown Colony rule, supported by the Wesleyan and Catholic Church hierarchies, effected the loss of limited representative government in colonial Dominica. The campaign for the restoration of representative government and extension of the franchise would be protracted. A measure of representative government would first be restored in 1924, with the installation of a Legislative Council “consisting of the governor (when present), the

Administrator, six officials, and six unofficials of whom two were nominated and four elected" (Boromé 1969, 54). Adult suffrage was introduced in 1951.

Rhys was nearly eight, not "about twelve," at the time of the stonings of the Wesleyan Mission House and the Royer home and the assaults of Romeo, Father O'Brien and O'Reilly Royer. This dating is more consistent with her memory of sharing a bedroom with a "baby sister" (1981, 47). Brenda was born in 1895. Her mother Minna's anxiety for her family appears to have been grounded in the general tension of an election campaign in which so much was at stake, and her husband's and brother's prominent roles as campaigners for Crown Colony rule, as much as the topoi of plantocratic culture. The account of the violence Rhys scripts as a riot is structured by modernist primitivist dichotomies. In the vignette "Black/White", African Dominican people

are more "in tune with nature, part of its harmonies ... free ... live life whole, without fear of the body" by comparison with sexually repressed and physically inhibited European people. As such they are "implicated in forms of Western self-loathing." But like other groups "processed" through primitivist tropes they are also shadowed as "a threatening horde, a faceless mass, promiscuous, breeding" ... (Thomas 1999, 100-101)⁷

The modernist primitivism might encourage a reading of the violence as a manifestation of plantocratic fantasy. Rhys attended a convent, though her family was Anglican. In "Black/White", Rhys describes herself as having been "much attracted by what" she "saw of Catholicism" (1981, 50) and describes the ritualized spectacle and orderly sounds of a Corpus Christi procession through the streets of Roseau. The congregation members in the procession are black. It is the "howling sound" of the Catholic "faithful" attacking the editor's home that "shook" her, that she "could not forget" (1981, 48-49).

Rhys represents her father, William Rees Williams, in *Smile Please* as a kindly and charitable doctor so absorbingly "holding forth about English politics," "engaged in either abuse or praise of various English politicians" that he "never seemed to notice" his children at the dinner table. It was her mother who "watched" the children "the whole time" (1981, 72). The newspaper she remembers him reading is "the latest *Times* weekly edition, a fortnight old" (1981, 69). In *Smile Please*, Rees Williams's political career and influence, including a long stint as Chairman of the Town Board, are occluded. Rhys acknowledges that she "probably romanticised" her father, "perhaps because she saw so little of him" (1981, 71). As Savory points out of Rhys, she "did not deny that memory is selective and often self-protective" (1998, 8). Rhys's memory of her father's comments to her mother on the riot and rioters—"Why do you want to wake the children up at this time of night? It's ridiculous. ... They're perfectly harmless" (1981, 47)—resonates, though, with Davies's report that he described the stoning of the Royer home as locals "amusing themselves," "the mob was enjoying itself." Nicolas Abraham's account of the transgenerational reach of secrecy or mystery may be pertinent here, given Rhys's sense that she was not told "the whole story" of her family's history (1981, 35) and efforts in Dominica in 1898 to cover over the fact of incidents of violence and intimidation. Abraham argues, "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others," "the concealment of some part of a love object's life" (1994, 171).

Rhys does not identify the ethnicity of the editor targeted by the "crowd," and his fate is not of sufficient narrative interest to be recorded. The story is told to illustrate the birth in

⁷ I am quoting Marianna Torgovnick (1990) *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 8 and 18, on the topoi of modernist primitivism.

her of a “certain wariness . . . about the black people who surrounded” her (1981, 48). Picking up a thread of “Black/White” in a later vignette “Facts of Life,” Rhys writes: “The older I grew the more things there were to worry about. Religion was then as important as politics are now. . . . There was this business of black, white, not to say coloured. Had I ever really thought about it? Was my wariness justified? Or was my feeling ‘This is not fair, not fair’ nearer the truth?” She acknowledges that, defensively, “as soon as I could I lost myself in the immense world of books, and tried to blot out the real world which was so puzzling to me” (1981, 62). This immersion helped the early development of the racialized cultural capital (literacy, breadth of reading, understanding of genre, knowledge of literary history, and capacity for literary and historical allusion) that would ground Rhys’s literary career.

In “Black/White”, the lesson Rhys represents herself as learning from her efforts to befriend a colored girl at school, whose height, prettiness and “confident” speech “quite awed” her, is that colored people feel “hatred—impersonal, implacable hatred”—towards white people, producing an us/them dichotomy: “They hate us. We are hated.” This painful knowledge produced not by sound, but rather the gaze of the girl, was “[t]he next thing” after the riot that “shook” her (1981, 49). In “Again the Antilles” a “firebrand” editor called Papa Dom (historically, and this is part of Rhys’s toying with readers, the nickname of Righton), whom the narrator “thought . . . a very awe-inspiring person,” “hated the white people, not being quite white, and he despised the black ones, not being quite black. . . . ‘Coloured’ we West Indians call the intermediate shades, and I used to think that being coloured embittered him” (1987, 39).

The narrator remembers Papa Dom, editor of the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette*, being

against the Government, against the English, against the Island’s being a Crown Colony and the Town Board’s new system of drainage. He was also against the Mob, against the gay and easy morality of the negroes and the “hordes of priests and nuns that overrun our unhappy Island”, against the existence of the Anglican bishop and the Catholic bishop’s new palace.

The list highlights a dual English and French colonial heritage in Dominica. The word “overrun” sets English political sovereignty against the assertion of less formal Catholic sovereignty, emblemized in the “palace” and fealty to the church in the form of donation of “labour” towards its construction. “[S]eething articles” about the palace “being built, partly by voluntary labour” provoke the intimidation Papa Dom scripts as a “‘riot’” (Rhys 1987, 39). Davies noted the presence of “the loose women of the town” in the crowd (1898i); “according” to Papa Dom in “Again the Antilles” the intimidation of him was “led by several well-known Magdalenes, then, as always, the most ardent supporters of Christianity” (1987, 39-40). The topics “being a Crown Colony and the Town Board’s new system of drainage” would match more closely the career of Joseph Hilton Steber, than that of Davies. After Davies’s retirement from politics, Steber reassumed the editorship of the *Dominica Guardian*.

In the story, Rhys produces a composite colored editor, a figure of the non-white, male Antillean writer represented by the white Antillean narrator, whose gender is unmarked in the text. The editor is so intimidated by the crowd that “he let the [Catholic] Church severely alone, acknowledging that it was too strong for him” (1987, 40). The narrator remembers having seen him “on his veranda, frightened to death” during the attack on his home (1987, 39). The story then describes a dispute between Papa Dom and a local Englishman Hugh Musgrave. As I have demonstrated in *The Worlding of Jean Rhys*, the “humor of ‘Again the Antilles’ turns on exposure of the relative lacks of highbrow English

cultural capital” of these characters and Rhys develops a “textual strategy of calling on the knowingness of an audience to pick the errors in the allusions of the two characters” to English literature and history (Thomas 1999, 59-60). Ultimately, Rhys as author and readers familiar with the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* in Middle English and the lifespan of the Marquis of Montrose get the better of both characters.

Rhys wrote the Dominican vignettes in *Smile Please* with the assistance at first of Michael Schwab and then David Plante. Both acted as amanuenses; as Erica L. Johnson elaborates, Plante’s drive to edit and shape her memories as autobiography produced a gendered struggle between Rhys and him “fraught with anxiety and mistrust” (2006, 565), a struggle ruthlessly and one-sidedly dramatized in his memoir *Difficult Women: A Portrait of Three* (1983). Johnson suggests that Rhys’s anxiety may have led her to adopt a narrative strategy of “suspend[ing] herself just out of reach of her positivist ghostwriter, and rout[ing] her readers around his text and back to her own, as we see in the way that the deferred emotional register of the autobiography can be located in Rhys’s novels” (578). Some of the deferred emotional register of Rhys’s attitude to Davies, and colored Dominican journalists more generally, may be locatable in “Again the Antilles.”

Plante represents Rhys as a senile alcoholic, offering the opinion that her “relationship to blacks is ... more complex than her relationship with her family” (1983, 155), and recording her ranting in relation to her Dominican heritage comments like, “We didn’t treat them badly, we didn’t” (1983, 21), “No roses in Dominica” and “*No one* understands” (1983, 42). He suggests that she is not a reader of literature. Helen Carr notes of Plante,

he writes as if old age were a tasteless, grotesque vice that she had succumbed to through moral rather than mortal frailty—and it is hard to know what credence to give to the statements he records. She was so old, and he mainly quotes what she said when drunk, and when drunk, she wrote elsewhere, she generally tried to scandalize interviewers rather than inform them. In any case, Plante says he was drunk, too, so perhaps his memories may not be reliable: they certainly are suspiciously apt for his misogynist message. (1996, 8)

Plante does not have the cultural capital to even begin to unpack the “emotional register” (Johnson 2006, 578) of Rhys’s sense of the meanings of race in Dominican history. He is not sufficiently familiar, for instance, with the textual work to which Rhys puts roses in her fiction to draw out themes of competing cultural affiliation to unpack the meanings of “No roses in Dominica” (Thomas 1999, 20-21). He does record her baiting him about his “stupid” inability as an American to recognize her allusion to William Wordsworth’s poem “To Toussaint L’Overture” when she speaks about a memory of her father’s charity to indigent “black men” (Plante 1983, 19-20), an anecdote about the formation of her attitudes to racial difference. The play between her and would-be editor Plante about highbrow English cultural capital may reroute readers familiar with Rhys’s oeuvre to “Again the Antilles.” As I have suggested elsewhere, “[i]n her autobiographical writing Rhys describes two childhood trajectories of racial identity-formation: a trajectory of abjection at and disidentification with the historical sedimentation of the ‘English’ Creole; and a trajectory of assimilative desire for Englishness formed through reading English books” (Thomas 2002, 60). In Plante’s account of Rhys’s treatment of him over his inability to recognize an allusion to Wordsworth, an American education and the comparative quality of American literature, she veers between display of English highbrow cultural affiliation and abjection at Englishness. The veering is registered in the move from allusion to Wordsworth to allusion to William Ernest Henley’s jingoistic “England, My England” at which “[h]er face tensed. She spat. ‘It’s shit. It’s shit, England’” (Plante 1983, 20). Later in the scene (Plante 1983, 26) she alludes to *Macbeth*

(I.vii.6-7) to dramatize her desire for death. The response to “England, My England,” a poem synonymous with fin-de-siècle English patriotism, draws out a strand of her mortified disidentification with facile historical manifestations of Englishness.

Rhys’s representation of a “riot” in *Smile Please* over the shape of which she tussled with Plante takes us back to material in local newspaper coverage of historical events and to “Again the Antilles.” In *Smile Please* and “Again the Antilles” questions of Catholic sovereignty and loyalty to the Church occlude the racialized political dimensions of the imposition of Crown Colony rule in Dominica highlighted by Davies in the *Dominica Guardian*. Given the interference of churches on the political issue, Rhys is arguably working through fragmented memory in “Black/White” and “Again the Antilles.” In *Smile Please*, Rhys writes about not having been “told ... anything that mattered” (1981, 162), not knowing, becoming “very good at blotting things out, refusing to think about them.” Those “things” from which she retreated into a world of books are identified as the intricacies of racial, class, religious and sexual politics in the colonial Dominica of her childhood (1981, 62). “We never heard the whole story” (1981, 35) becomes emblematic of her sense of her family’s history on the island. As I have indicated, too, sectional interests in Dominica worked to suppress awareness of the violence and intimidation integral to the process of bringing about Crown Colony rule. They were, for instance, subsumed in Righton’s newspaper’s record among “painful” signs of a “violent and acute” rite of passage “on the path of progress” (1898b). Davies was adamant about the meanings of the violence he witnessed and intimidation he experienced and its place in the history of the imposition of Crown Colony rule in 1898. “[The] Dominica episodes will remain on record to show to what means the government of ‘law and order’ will resort to carry out its policy,” he writes, with reference to political intimidation (1898m). I have worked to restore that record to identify some of the sociotexts which had a formative, even if partial, influence on Rhys’s understandings of racialized difference in fin-de-siècle Dominica.

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