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HIERARCHIES OF WHITENESS IN THE
GEOGRAPHIES OF EMPIRE:
THOMAS THISTLEWOOD AND THE BARRETTS
OF JAMAICA

INTRODUCTION

Trevor Burnard, in his recent book on Thomas Thistlewood, the eighteenth-century Jamaican overseer, pen-keeper, and slaveowning diarist, notes the spirit of egalitarianism that existed among Whites in Jamaica and the absence of class conflict among them, despite clear socioeconomic differences.¹ He cites Edward Long who “argued that there were no distinctions among whites besides those between good and bad citizens,” and himself argues that Thistlewood’s attitudes were shaped by “an ideological milieu in which slavery created conditions of relative equality between whites” (Burnard 2004:71, 72-73). He refers to this condition as “ideological egalitarianism within structural inequality” (Burnard 2004:73). But he goes further to assert that the “‘conscious equality’ that distinguished West Indian whites was rooted in a degree of real equality that was not replicated in British North American colonies” (Burnard 2004:76).

Burnard’s (2004:74) argument is that there were so few Whites and so many slaves that Whites inevitably bonded together for security purposes and “out of fear.” Moreover, a high percentage of Whites shared a common expe-

1. I wish to gratefully acknowledge the three following fellowships or grants that have allowed me to work on this and other papers related to a larger project on the interface among moral, disciplinary, and labor regimes in Anglophone Caribbean history: 2000-2001 NEH-Schomburg Scholars-in-Residence Fellowship, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; 2001-2002 Henry Charles Chapman Research Fellowship, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, and a 2002-2003 Faculty Research Grant from the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS), University of Pittsburgh. I would also like to thank the reviewers of this article for their critical and very generous insights.

rience of racialized mastery through slave ownership, however unevenly so. In addition even poor Whites could leverage their scarcity by demanding and receiving high wages. Perhaps most controversially (in light of ample evidence to the contrary), Burnard argues insistently that there are commensurate limits on Thistlewood's authority over these poor Whites, his occupational and social inferiors. Finally, the low numbers meant that there were simply not enough wealthy Whites to fill the entire range of political offices in the colony. So "at the lower levels – positions such as justices of the peace, militia officers, and vestrymen – political participation had to be extended below the ranks of the wellborn and wealthy" (Burnard 2004:77). All of this fostered a spirit of egalitarianism and fraternity among Whites, particularly White men.

The argument is clearly correct on a number of points, and not without significant merit and insight. However, it is somewhat exaggerated and it risks justifying the suppression or deferment of a necessary analysis of quite profound structural inequalities within the White community. The fact that race trumped class in the White creole imagination and that recruitment to political office was of necessity inclusive of "lesser Whites" should not in any way provide an excuse for leaving those inequalities unexamined – especially when they formed a key constitutive element in the production of empire. My concern here is less a rejection of Burnard's thesis than a cautionary corrective to his rich but interpretively selective account. Within the scope of his argument about White egalitarianism (especially Chapter 3), Burnard (2004:81) glosses over important differences among nonelite Whites, exaggerates the lack of conviviality between "free Blacks or Coloreds" and lesser Whites, and, most importantly for this paper, ignores critical evidence of the social-structural factors separating the socioeconomic or class niche of respected, socially mobile lesser-White settlers like Thistlewood and that of the upper plantocracy. This article is primarily taken up with an examination of the latter subject.

However, an additional and longer-term concern here is to demonstrate the need to systematize a framework that captures the complexity of West Indian social structure and looks beyond the most visceral racial divide on the one hand or the merely local on the other. In other words, to capture the complexity of West Indian social structure is to understand that "race" is not enough to explain the nuances of the local, but also that the "local" is not enough to explain the nuances of race. The historian of colonial systems is always faced with the difficult but inescapable task of understanding the colony at once on its own – very complex – terms and on a scale well beyond its embodied limits. This is often counterintuitive to both the tendency to understate the complexity of the local *qua* local and the tendency to "forget" the ongoing operation and effectivity of the local-translocal-metropolitan transmission belt of connected processes.

While this article's primary rationale or *raison d'être* is therefore not a critique of Burnard, his particular emphasis furnishes a convenient concep-

tual foil to a project whose preoccupation has been to insert Thistlewood's story into a very different kind of narrative and analytical problematic. Both Burnard's significant, award-winning book and the research agenda I am proposing (which has its own genealogy) would be trivialized by a representation of the contribution here as some kind of "rejoinder" to him.² I am hoping that the article functions instead as both the introduction of a new research agenda and as a preliminary contribution to such an agenda. In trying to balance both functions, it runs the risk of leaving both the historian and the sociologist dissatisfied. The hope is that it manages to transcend the bounds of narrowly defined disciplinary regimes just enough to capture the imagination and pique the interest of all kinds of Caribbeanists. Based primarily on limited secondary sources, there is no attempt to pass these results off as satisfying all the requirements to merit a claim for "writing history."

Neither can I claim uniqueness for the vision and concerns adumbrated here. Important parallels exist in the work of Ann Stoler as well as others cited by her as defining what she calls "critical colonial studies" or the "new imperial history." As such, it gets even more complicated because while I see parallels, in a very preliminary reading of some of their work, I am unqualified, and in any event unprepared at this early stage, to claim any strict affiliation. Nonetheless, the following comments by Stoler, in the introductory chapter of one of her books, seem to me to be particularly compelling and relevant to the central preoccupations of this article:

No longer fixed on the colonized alone, colonial studies has increasingly been concerned with historical variability in the making of racialized categories. No longer convinced that colonialism was a successful hegemonic project, students of colonial histories now direct their archival energies to the instabilities and vulnerabilities of colonial regimes, to the internal conflicts among those who ruled, and to the divergent and diverse practices among them. As this book suggests, few students of the colonial would claim that colonialism was more an economic venture than a cultural one or that studies of the colonial can be bracketed from the making of the modern, of Europe and its nation-making projects. No one would claim that colonial effects were confined to areas of physical conquest alone. (Stoler 2002:9-10)

In a way Stoler and others are pursuing the cultural counterpart of a project that has long informed the core premises of the scholarship of Caribbeanists, Third-World and postcolonial scholars, nonessentialist Afrocentric revisionists of colonial history, dependency theorists: how did colonialism make and re-make the political economies of both colony and metropole, as part of a contentiously unitary and structurally differentiated imperial trajectory? As

2. Moreover, Burnard has a varied and multifaceted body of work, whose component parts, though in some instances relevant here, are too numerous to mention.

much ink has been used to deny the centrality of colonialism in the unfolding of metropolitan political economy by “internalist” Eurocentric revisionists of various ideological persuasions as has been used to trace the hidden and not-so-hidden threads of the mutually reconstructive connection by those who have taken it for granted. Therefore, this new cultural history is surely, in some ways, a vindication of the latter tradition. However, “critical colonial studies” goes well beyond a necessary or simple understanding of mutual determination to a long overdue destabilization of the easy dichotomies and binaries of such categories as metropole/colony and colonizer/colonized or of the idea of colonialism as a finished, efficient, successful, or transparently executed project. Its perspective claims that the ingredients in the reproduction of colony and empire, colonizer and colonized took unexpected and multiple twists and turns on the ground. The sentries and subversives of empire could be a motley crew, often hidden in the seams of the “main” narrative.

Thus, against the grain of Burnard’s assertion of racialization (and racial solidarity) as a completed, successful, and difference-obliterating project, I am interested in exploring the very contradictions and differences that had to be suppressed (or managed) for the purpose of race-making, and in understanding that process as a set of practices which took some doing and did not just happen. Moreover, it should be emphasized that the discursive and political practices of racial production and the practices of embodied social and economic reproduction – the operation and making of class, class subjects, and class effects – should not be conflated. They are closely related but not coterminous, and they belong to different levels of the social system, linked through a labored process of mediation. Through this process the contradictions between the imperatives of race and the quotidian realities of class are constantly being managed, contained, and smoothed out. In a larger sense, this article is precisely concerned with tracing (“underneath” the racializing categories) the crisscrossing strands of embodied and material practices by which the highly textured and patterned tapestry of empire and colony was woven and a delicate (and shifting) balance of distance and intimacy maintained. By way of locating it within a defined analytical field, I would propose that it most closely engages what Stoler (2002:7) refers to as “the microphysics of colonial rule.” Without committing Stoler or her collaborators in any way to this more risky position, I would also suggest that if ever there was a moment to re-invoke, in new ways, the oft-repudiated Marxist categories of “infrastructure” and “superstructure,” as differentiated dimensions of social practices and social relations (or as relatively autonomous social practices and relations), it is here.

In thinking about race as a unifier of Whites of different classes or strata, I find Stuart Hall’s (1977:158, 162) observation about the way hegemony secures the unity of the whole social formation useful for the group as well. He notes that hegemony “secures the unity, cohesion and stability of [the]

social order in and through (not despite) its ‘differences,’” and that “what matters is not simply the plurality of their internal structures, but the articulated relation between their differences.” In this article I want to talk about class-related differences (“the plurality of their internal structures”) among Whites (particularly male-centered groups), and do so with the background understanding both of “complexity-and-unity” (Hall 1977:158) and of racial unity as a labored process of mediation and as unstable and unpredictable. In addition, I want to consider the implications of those differences for the making of West Indian societies as place-based (and deeply stratified) “communities” or social entities rather than just as functions of empire or as racialized spaces.

Finally, in precisely locating the problematic of this sociohistorical piece, I wish to state that this is not some kind of “return” to class, since it does not assume that class was ever abandoned. In the first place, class-based differences among Whites were secondary or even tertiary ones, the primary and focal class relation being that between the slave-owning planter class and the enslaved plantation workers. Secondly, I would like to place considerable distance between myself and those analysts who make all the right conciliatory or deferential gestures toward the particular strengths of postcolonial theory (of which I certainly endorse the need to be rigorously critical) and then subtly manoeuvre a return to the reductive position that “it’s not race, it’s class; it’s not colonialism, it is the capitalist mode of production.”³ As if race, colonialism, and Eurocentrism did not also constitute devastating material relations of their own (let alone as defining moments of historical capitalism). I try instead to anchor my analysis within those traditions of Black and postcolonial materialist feminism that reject “either/or” conceptual apparatuses in favor of complex “both/and” dialectical ones. Before venturing into the historical narrative, therefore, I briefly consider neglected aspects of the various dimensions whose “intersectionality” positions Whites differently among themselves and the importance of such differences in the making of empire and colony. In the interest of space, most of which will be devoted to the details of the historical narrative or “proof,” I limit my elaboration of the sociological concepts proffered and applied in this article to this section.

First, race. Since race, or more especially racial solidarity, is already “given” in this analysis I want to begin with the reminder that it is an achieved, constructed, and somewhat unstable category, not a spontaneous and fixed one. While Barbados provides the clearest example of visceral and enduring class divisions among Whites, Jamaica was not exempt from this condition, despite the relative absence of a self-sustaining poor White class.

3. In a volume that makes an otherwise laudable attempt to bring about a rapprochement between (versions of) Marxist and postcolonial theory, Lazarus’s contribution (2002:43-64) seems to me to be particularly guilty of this either/or and economic reductionism.

In the case of Barbados, Hilary McD Beckles (1985, 1986) has written at length about early White servitude or “proto-slavery” and about the contempt in which poor Whites were held by White elites, before emancipation and the subsequent strategic closing of ranks on the basis of race.⁴ Richard Dunn (1972:9) points to the routine expectation that English servants in the early settlements of Barbados and the Leewards “would desert to the Spaniards at the first opportunity rather than defend their masters.” But even at the height of Jamaica’s golden age of sugar, scattered among the daily compendia of Thomas Thistlewood’s thirty-six-year record of plantation life during that period are occasional references to White servants running away and even to White servants staging uprisings alongside enslaved Blacks.⁵ Closer to the point of this article, we see below that Thistlewood’s entry into the lower ranks of the White elite is a proactively and purposively sponsored one.

Class and patriarchy. Admittedly, it is easier to make a case for the salience of divisions among Whites based on the juridical status/class distinctions of freedom/mastery vs. unfreedom/indentured servitude. Indeed, it is puzzling why Burnard should seek to downplay even those. It is perhaps less easy to make a case for the salience of divisions between local sub-elites and dominant translocal elites. However, I want to argue that those distinctions are critical (a) in mapping the differentiated structures of “local-translocal-metropolitan” imperial economic networks, (b) in understanding the specificities of place-making in the colonial restructuring of localities,⁶ and (c) in dispelling any illusions about the true specifications (“specs”) and scope of the dominant sugar-planter bourgeoisie (and its delineation of a self-defining *cordon sanitaire*). In other words, these differences matter.

If one brings together a robust concept of class and a historically specific understanding of colonial-capitalist modes of production, one can precisely map the differentiated structure of spatial-circuits⁷ circumscribing the reproduction of groups, economic sectors, and places.⁸ Within this general

4. See also Beckles’s other defining contributions to an emerging repertoire of what might be tentatively labeled “critical” British West Indian colonial studies, especially his path-breaking *Centering Woman* (1999).

5. For example, on Sunday, September 29, 1752, Thistlewood recorded news of an apparently unsuccessful local uprising: “Heard of a white man and the Negroes rising upon Capt. Leister. He afterwards told me the story himself” (Hall 1999:31).

6. And, one might add, the dynamics of creolization in the colonial restructuring of cultures. See Brathwaite 1974.

7. See Green (1995:86-89) for a slightly differently focused, but related, discussion of “spatial-circuits” or “enclaves.”

8. In sociospatial terms one might refer to the space of bodies-in-motion (defined of course by class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.), space of flows (circuits of economic transactions), and space of places (place-defined societies, communities, or niches).

approach, I see classes as comprehending mutually constitutive dominant and subordinate spatial-circuits of re/production (see Green 1992-93). Re/production is an elliptical reference to the joint processes of economic production and the physiosocial reproduction of human beings as constituents of social groups, hence my reference above to “embodied social and economic reproduction.” This precision represents a concern to understand classes both as mutually antagonistic agents of “public” production relations and as social groups separately constituted and marked through institutionally mediated processes and relations of familial, domestic, sexual, generational, and private-human reproduction. By tracing the variously converging and diverging “spatial-circuits of re/production” we can more fully grasp the operation and making of class, class subjects, and class effects, and the implications of diverging modes of extended, intergenerational, group reproduction. The different groups are bounded by diverging/converging modes of reproduction as well as by differential antagonistic roles in dominant and subordinate goods-producing and exchanging economies.

Relations of reproduction in the vast majority of known human societies have been organized on the basis of varieties of patriarchal or male-dominant systems and institutions of heterosexual marriage, sex, and kinship. “Patriarchy” as a ruling system encompasses both in-class organization of ruling-class male power, providing a variably adapted and enforced hegemonic model for the rest of society (other classes), and class/patriarchal domination over subordinate groups. To see class only from the public “productive” angle and not from the private “reproductive” angle (mediated by marriage and/or concubinage) limits our vision. Indeed, the latter angle reveals not just the social, cultural, and genealogical circuits of class but also key aspects of the financial circuits, since profits and property flow through families, through marriages, wills, bequests, trusts, and so on. Class, and therefore racial endogamy if necessary, is maintained through mating and marriage within the perceived bloodlines, no matter what the role played by relations of concubinage. The special case of the “dual marriage system,” which reproduces two class and racial lines from the single male progenitor, will be discussed below (see Green, forthcoming 2007,⁹ for implications for the enslaved).

Space and place. According to Charles W. Mills (1997:41), the “Racial Contract [of which the “slavery contract” is one permutation] norms (and races) space, demarcating civil and wild spaces.” Catherine Hall (2002:72) gives this concept a particular twist when she notes that, from the point of view of the colonists, “England was for families, Jamaica was for sex.” To paraphrase a famous quotation, the West Indies was for them a convenient facility where enslaved Africans labored to produce tropical commodities for their

9. Pre-print version available online at <http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/lhr/toc.hhp>.

profit and for the palates and developing biophysical mass needs of metropolitan consumers. It was, indeed, also a facility where the enslaved were forced to render domestic and sexual service for their resident White masters. One might think of Jamaica and the other West Indian islands in terms of both space – functionally and discursively assigned social spaces as constituent elements of whole systems – and place, geographically fixed and relatively autonomous, locally determined whole societies-in-the-making. Relatedly, one might consider classes/social groups as having different relationships and forms of agency with regard to both dimensions. These differences were important for the constitutive reproduction of both transatlantic empire and local colony, the case of the neoteric societies of the Caribbean islands lending new meaning to the term, “place-making.” In this article, I want to argue that Thistlewood, as representative of one class, or, at the very least, class fraction, and the Barretts, as representative of another, were situated differently in the local-translocal-metropolitan¹⁰ matrices and processes of empire, and I want to understand how these differences mattered.

As such, I am interested in distinguishing the precise historical roles of these “greater” and “lesser” Whites in the mutual constitution of metropole and colony, notwithstanding the fact that they shared an imagined “home” as “freeborn Britons.” The Barretts enjoyed uneven membership in a transatlantic ruling class whose genealogical and economic modes of reproduction routinely traversed a geographically dislocated spatial-circuit and called for a certain distance from the rooted, osmotic process of place-making. My main point is that there should be no illusions that Thistlewood is a representative of this class (his own re/productive niche diverging substantially from theirs), but I also want to suggest some specificities about his own class-related role. Thistlewood, without such border-crossing options, an intimate and routine brutalizer of the enslaved, on-the-spot policeman of the frontier moral economy, but also dependent upon and a participant in the Black reproductive niche and a patron of the subaltern protopeasant economy, is a key vector in the “embedding” and “domiciling” of colonialism and in the making of a potentially independent, unique place-based society. He is more appropriately understood as part of a colonial petty bourgeoisie. In some ways, the practices of his class or stratum were more insinuating with regard

10. I specifically intend and deploy the term “translocal” rather than “transnational.” “Transnational,” though sometimes commonsensically used below, does not quite capture the intended meaning, since the relationship of imperial metropole to colonial hinterland or province is not a relation of inter-nation but one of intra-empire, a relationship of different functional and social spaces in one elaborate hierarchical transatlantic complex. At the same time, “translocal” captures the integrity of each space, as being its own “local” and variously experienced as such by those who cross borders and reside at different times in each, as necessary conditions of their social existence.

to the colonized lifeworlds of the enslaved than was the more removed hegemony of the upper elite, notwithstanding the acknowledged heterogeneity within dynastic practices.¹¹ I have suggested elsewhere (Green, forthcoming 2006) that Thistlewood might be more central to the question of how intimacy localizes empire and helps reproduce historically unique West Indian creole societies.

Within the context of my specific and primary concern with differences within the White community, I focus on two social groups or class “types” in particular, using two individual/family biographical profiles culled from unevenly documented histories: locally bound intermediate strata clustered overwhelmingly around individual White male immigrants, and translocal upper-class family dynasties with significant generational depth and breadth. In the following sections, I present an overview of Jamaican socio-demographic structure pertinent to the questions raised by the discussion, before considering the “variously converging and diverging spatial-circuits of reproduction” of, first, Thomas Thistlewood and his “lesser White” race/class/gender stratum and, second, the upper-class family dynasty of the Barretts of Jamaica and of Elizabeth Barrett Browning literary fame. It might be objected that Thistlewood’s single biographical trajectory is clearly no match for a dynasty that completed the multi-era, multigenerational cycle from adventurer to creole planter class, to absentee owners, to merger with the industrial bourgeoisie “at home.” However, while Thistlewood shared only about three generations with the centuries-spanning Barrett clan, the deep differences between their respective class experiences and class effects had already become a structural feature of the society during that time.

I conclude the article by briefly reviewing the implications of the difference.

WEST INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND LOCAL/TRANSLOCAL CIRCUITS OF REPRODUCTION

New World plantation slave societies can be generally divided into those that had a “residential” ruling class and high levels of European settlement (usually constituting majorities) and those with a high propensity toward owner absenteeism and low levels of European settlement. The latter group of colo-

11. In other words, while it is important to acknowledge some convergences in sexual and reproductive practices between individual family members of the upper elite and the sub-elite “overseer” class, the dominant principles defining the class as a whole clearly diverge. See the discussion on the dual marriage system below.

nies tended to be treated like overseas investments and the biggest owner-planters tended to merge with the metropolitan ruling class ("at home"), developing no fundamental or sustainable interest in nurturing independent capitalist states in the tropics or subtropics. The demographic structure of Britain's West Indian colonies, and more particularly Jamaica, can primarily be explained by their historical status as nonresidential colonies of exploitation (colonies of export production driven by imported slave labor) and their economic administration through surrogacy.

The White population was skewed toward immigrant single male subalterns as a result of absenteeism among the upper ranks of the plantocracy, the tendency to recruit, prefer, or require unmarried men as overseers and other lesser plantation surrogates, and the persistent, semi-mythical lure of overnight privileged status and quick fortunes that Jamaica held for displaced and *déclassé* casualties of Britain's rapidly changing economy. In an earlier piece, Burnard (1991:97) noted that in 1730, 76.2 percent of the White population, which itself constituted only 6.6 percent of the entire population of the island, were servants, "usually working as bookkeepers or overseers on plantations." During Thistlewood's time (1750-86), Whites accounted for between 6 and 8 percent of the total population, and adult men outnumbered adult women by more than 2 to 1 (Burnard 2004:17-18). Burnard has gone so far as to conclude, with some exaggeration and a disinclination to see beyond the immediate physical confines of the provincial space, that "the evolution of plantation society in Jamaica ... allowed little space for white women" (Burnard 1998:164). Broadly speaking, Whites in eighteenth-century Jamaica indeed tended to be male, young, migrant, and subaltern. Their general character was marked by their location between a preponderant population of enslaved Blacks on the one hand and a "nonresidential," translocal or metropolitan-based White upper class on the other. As Sydney Haldane Olivier (1971:68) observed, even early nineteenth-century attempts to encourage the development of a White yeoman or small-settler class failed because "such a class could not hold its own in the local economy of that period."

During the second half of the eighteenth century the problem of absenteeism intensified. According to one source, absentees owned 30 percent of Jamaica's sugar estates in 1775 and 84 percent in 1832, as both absenteeism and the concentration of land increased (Sheridan 1974:287). While the great majority of Jamaican planters and pen-keepers were not absentee, the very largest sugar planters – between one-fifth and one-sixth of the total – were, and they owned the majority of slaves and acres in the colony. In 1754, the nine largest landholders, a little over one-half a percent of the total, each owned between 10,000 and 23,000 acres of land (Sheridan 1974:219, Table 10.1). The sugar export economy of Jamaica thus showed a structural propensity toward absenteeism and its demographic consequences. The complications of this phenomenon multiplied as more fortunes were made and

younger generations, schooled and coming of age in England, were less and less inclined to go back to the colonies to manage their inherited plantations in person. Exclusively female heirs – daughters, widows, sisters – made the prospect of return, even as visiting absentee owners in the robust tradition of Matthew “Monk” Lewis (1999), that much more unlikely. This did not mean, however, that female absentee ownership eroded the integrity of White patriarchal planter-class hegemony any more than did male absentee ownership, since there was usually in place a formidable support system of male players, including attorneys and overseers locally and British commission houses and agents in the metropole, to ensure the smooth reproduction of the enterprise.

The subjective social space of the upper West Indian plantocracy was therefore transnationally split. The divided social character of this class was represented precisely by the physical and social separation of certain fundamental conditions of their reproduction – slave-worked sugar plantations and metropolitan financial, cultural and what I call genealogical capital – into different worlds. In one recurring version, the transnational split was accommodated entirely by proxy, with the proprietors remaining in the metropole and their second-class surrogates presiding over their plantations and replicating the dualism of the system on their behalf. In the sagas of the great West Indian Creole family dynasties, biographies that were ultimately or wholly played out in Jamaica, those that zigzagged back and forth across the Atlantic, and those entirely nurtured and sustained in the motherland on the financial sweetness of Jamaican sugar profits, often marked different generational points in the genealogy of a transatlantic colonial family dynastic cycle that started and ended in Britain. The reproductive spatial-circuit of the upper plantocracy could not be comprehended by a look at its “provincial” manifestations only. Their transatlantic mode of reproduction, as indicated earlier, depended upon spatially dislocated means of reproduction coordinated through the converging and centralizing circuits of empire: the slave trade and slave-worked sugar plantations at the provincial sites of production (of the labor force and the export staple), and metropolitan finance capital, White wives properly incorporated through the endogamous institution of elite marriage, and impeccable genealogical and cultural credentials and networks at the central site of capital distribution and subjective class reproduction. These enabled unquestioned and smooth integration into the home-based bourgeoisie and the identity repertoires of upper-class Englishness or Britishness.

In British West Indian society, marriage was considered to be an exclusive upper-class privilege, completely bound up with considerations of race, lineage, and property, from which the “lesser White” bachelor estate personnel and the slaves were effectively barred. The elite institution came to have a special association with absenteeism, as the richest planters looked to England as a source

of marriageable partners and sent their sons and daughters there to be educated, and inevitably to marry and to settle. England became the home site (and place of residence) for the social reproduction of the wealthiest group among the West Indian planters, their transnational niche being materially sustained on the basis of profits from their sugar plantations and the financial backing of British merchant houses. The small West Indian and related mercantile circles in England (and in the colonies) married into each other's families and effected political alliances that advanced their colonial interests, further securing the transnational niche. Richard Pares (1950:249) points out that the plantations were "loaded ... with legacies and annuities, with widows and old maids quartered upon them from every county in England," in an extravagant and inefficient system which ultimately redounded to the benefit of the planters' British creditors. Certain established sugar traders ("factors") and creditors of the big planters refused to deal with small planters because "they often had coloured families, who might inherit their land and desire a loan from a merchant." They also "declined to lend money to white planters who were likely to leave their properties to coloured heirs" (Pares 1950:240). Obviously, the ultimate concern was economic rather than "moral," since the big planters were no less likely to have "colored families," just either more able to sustain them outside and without encroaching upon their main capital enterprises or less willing to acknowledge them (except perhaps as their property).

Access to upper-class White wives, metropolitan finance capital, and extended reproduction of genealogy across the Atlantic were available to only a small number of elite White West Indian men. For those planters who were resident in the colony, their reproductive and sexual niches might be consummated and sustained not just in relations of marriage with White women, co-resident or headquartered abroad, but also in relations of concubinage with Black women, enslaved or free. White planters often became the mediating biological and social link between two (or more) sets of families, helping to reproduce two different classes either simultaneously (usually, but not always, involving multiple residences) or sequentially (perhaps beginning – or resuming – their legal marital careers after going "home" to England). Raymond T. Smith (1987:167) refers to this as the "dual marriage system," noting that "from the beginning of the development of the slave regime, a marriage system was in place that included both legal marriage and concubinage, a system in which the elements were mutually and reciprocally defining and which articulated with the racial hierarchy."

I want to insert here a note about White Wives, not just as genealogical capital or reproducers of patrilineage, but also as widowed owners ensuring the continued reproduction of productive property and economic capital. Women, though in a distinct demographic and structural minority, were also independent planters locally and not just as widows. However I am paying particular attention here to absentee widowed upper-class female legatees of

large plantation property. One remarkable example (and there are others¹²) should caution us against assuming too readily the historical passivity of the overseas White wife/widow. On January 17, 1776, Anna Eliza Elletson, “left Devisee and sole Executrix” of Hope Estate in Liguanea, Jamaica (and “all his Estates Real & Personal in England”), by the death of her husband, Roger Hope Elletson,¹³ writes to her Jamaican attorneys, pleading the peculiar disadvantages of her sex:

Mr. Elletson was a very good understanding Planter, but I am a mere novice, Indeed few people can have a just idea of cultivating any Country with which they are unacquainted, and I believe, it seldom happens to be the subject of Contemplation with Women – our mode of Education does not qualify us for such employments, if I wish in any Degree to render myself Mistress of this subject, tis only, that I may comprehend, what you may have occasion to write me, but not to presume to direct you, the least in your management.¹⁴

Mrs. Elletson, having thus charmingly disarmed her local representatives, proceeds with systematic and steely resolve, in this and her other letters, to establish an astonishing command over the direction of her properties from across the Atlantic. She is scrupulous in setting up the contractual instruments and terms of her new management regime. She familiarizes herself with and strictly monitors the market for sugar in relation to grade, color, price, fluctuations of supply and demand, shipping, timing, and location of sale. She suggests and orders elaborate schemes for scientific and technical improvements of the property and methods of cultivation, including irrigation systems and procurement of the latest technology and technical expertise. She is as rigorous in her attention to the care and upkeep of the slave labor force as she is to the details of the estate accounts, especially in regard to various testamentary claims upon and debts owed the estate. She keeps close tabs on the staff conditions and regularly submits recommendations for changes. With the help of her Jamaican and British lawyers, she vigorously pursues a number of new and pending prosecutorial and defensive legal actions on behalf of the estate. Most boldly, she successfully sues the Town of Kingston over a prior concession to supply water to the town from the estate that had

12. See, for example, letters from Anne Fyffe of Dundee, Scotland, after the death of her husband, David, regarding the family’s Jamaican properties, in the Fyffe Family Collection, MS 1655, National Library of Jamaica. The Fyffe family fortunes were, admittedly, considerably less auspicious.

13. He had served as lieutenant-governor of Jamaica.

14. Anna Eliza Elletson, Curzon Street, London, to Messrs. Pool and East, Kingston, January 17, 1776, Ms 29a, Elletson Family Letters, National Library of Jamaica.

been granted by her late husband. Her successful suit cites the estate's need of the water for its own sugar manufacturing operations.

Mrs. Anna Eliza Elletson's role as remote trustee of a large West Indian property, preserved through endogamous marriage for British upper-class posterity, is exemplary but by no means unique. Her legal victories were facilitated by her substantial support and surrogate system, complete with political and financial reinforcements subsequently brought in by her titled new husband, the Duke of Chandos. Later, after their only child married the Duke of Buckingham, the estate would become the property of the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos (Brown 2004:22).

The critical roles of absentee wives, returned widows, and mothers relocating in the motherland with their school-age sons and daughters are also in evidence in the account of the Barrett family presented below.

The so-called "dual marriage system" potentially or actually generated two race/class lines – one legitimate, the other illegitimate – with the White master as common genitor, reproducing White paterfamilial propriety and racial superiority on the one hand, Afro-creole matrifocality and hybridized subalternity on the other. Just as marriage came to be an exclusive property of the very wealthy and a mechanism for the transnational reproduction of the Euro-creole upper class, concubinage came to be the means by which a "bastard" intermediate class was bequeathed to the societies of the West Indies by the planters and their surrogates as the social superiors of the slaves and, later, of the Black peasantry and working class. Legitimacy and illegitimacy defined the relation of center to periphery and the genteel drawing-room world of White wives to the profane underworld of Black concubines. But "dual marriage," involving simultaneous access to White wives and Black concubines, was not typically an option for subaltern White men, and, indeed, not all the liaisons that produced these "bastard scions" had the same social standing. The range crossed the hierarchies of male-gender White and female-gender non-White society, moving from the regular form of predatory rape experienced by any number of female plantation slaves in the casual, irregular, or random sexual encounters forced upon them by masters and their associates in the course of their everyday lives, through the semi-regular, sometimes long-lasting or permanent – and more *or* less consensual – "housekeeping" arrangements which brought a "favorite" slave into the household of an overseer or proprietor or continued to involve dual residences on the plantation (slave women sometimes being specially purchased or hired for such "housekeeping" purposes), to the semi-respectable or at least openly "alternative" liaisons between planter-class men and relatively high-status "free Colored" women, who might be either independently situated or "kept" in their own establishments, residential and/or commercial. Late eighteenth-century observer, Bryan Edwards (1793:22), allowed of the latter that the "terms and manner of their compliance ... are commonly as

decent, though perhaps not as solemn, as those of marriage; ... giving themselves up to the husband (for so he is called) with faith plighted, with sentiment, and with affection.” Others were more contemptuously cynical and given over to racial and sexual stereotyping in their observations: “Though the daughters of rich men, and though possessed of slaves and estates, they never think of marriage; their delicacy is such, for they are extremely proud, vain and ignorant, that they despise men of their own colour; and though they have their amorous desires abundantly gratified by them and black men secretly, they will not avow these connections” (Moreton 1790:124-5).

Indeed, one other consequence of the skewed racial-gender demographics of colonial West Indian populations was the emergence into numerical and intermediate caste/class conspicuousness of a free Colored population and a politically anomalous free Colored elite. This is another group whose importance and complicating presence are understated in Burnard’s discussion of White egalitarianism. In keeping with this observation, Thistlewood’s diaries show us that even the account of racially endogamous and racially exogamous mating by Whites defining the boundary between legitimacy and illegitimacy, while broadly true, should not be exaggerated. Thistlewood’s longest engagement as an overseer in the first half of his residency in Jamaica places him in a subordinate class position vis-à-vis the respectably married “not quite” White heir of the late White plantation owner, William Dorrell, under whom Thistlewood also served. While this type of situation may have been rare, Thistlewood’s Jamaican biography – played out in an unsettled space “in-between” sharply defined racial and class worlds – should, on a whole, caution us against composing too simplistic an account of relations and status hierarchies among Whites as well as between Whites and free Blacks and Coloreds. Details of this biography presented below allow us to more vividly and sensitively mark the complexities of those relations and status hierarchies.¹⁵

15. My main source for the details of Thistlewood’s diaries, in addition to Burnard’s book itself, is the much earlier one by Douglas Hall (1999). Hall’s book is an edited presentation of the excerpted diaries that has a somewhat different focus from Burnard’s and has both great independent and great complementary value. I also got a chance to do a cursory preview of the diaries themselves, while I was in Jamaica doing archival research. The University of the West Indies Mona library has a complete copy of the original Monson manuscripts in its West Indies Collection section. Having broached the formidable task of sampling the 32 folios, which contain 10,000 sometimes illegible pages of handwritten text, it was not difficult to come away in some considerable awe of both Burnard and Hall and their remarkable accomplishments in reading, editing, synthesizing, and interpreting. I also read enough to get a sense that there is probably no substitute for an original reading. Even in my preliminary sampling I was able to glean a number of details that show patterns not highlighted by either Hall or Burnard. Depending on particular scholarly interests, there is no doubt that everyone will have his or her own Thistlewood.

Among the complexities and nuances that might confound a too-strict correlation between race and class or race and political interests, there are two on which I wish to focus in the following section: first, the reproductive niches of those White men who did not have access (or at least easy access) to White wives and the “dual marriage system” or to actively and transnationally deployable metropolitan finance, cultural, and genealogical capital; second, the enforceable and regularly enforced authority that overseers like Thistlewood, as resident masters, had over the White plantation underlings, whose reproductive niches tended to be even more constrained than their own. There is a third subject which cannot be fully addressed here but should be borne in mind: that of proximal relations between Whites and free Blacks or Coloreds (usually the latter) mediated through ties of friendship, commonly experienced ownership of slaves and land, “illegitimate” but more or less acknowledged kinship, and even – as in the case of John Cope, Thistlewood’s boss during most of his overseership, and his wife, Mary Cope (née Dorrill) – marriage. I would argue that Burnard understates the evidence of these complexities and nuances as furnished by Thistlewood’s diaries and therefore the ways in which they rendered British West Indian social structure far more opaque than the easy representations offered by various commonsensical accounts would have us believe.

THOMAS THISTLEWOOD: IN BETWEEN RACIAL AND CLASS WORLDS

Thistlewood is the younger of two sons of a middling yeoman farmer in Lincolnshire County in England. He is apparently displaced from a livelihood in farming as a casualty of the law of primogeniture, although he does receive a small legacy of £200 from his father. Lacking in both the moral and resource prerequisites for a proper/tied match with a respectable woman of his class, he casts his lot with colonial adventures overseas and decides to seek his fortune in Jamaica. Despite a deep-seated ambition, a decent basic education that included a smattering of the classics and the sciences, and miscellaneous entrepreneurial proclivities and experiences, Thistlewood cannot aspire to a position above that of overseer. Modest as it might seem, it was not the worst he could do. According to Edward Kamau Brathwaite (1971:142), overseers on absentee-owned plantations were “master[s] of the place,” whereas bookkeepers, in spite of the authority of immediate, everyday tyranny they sometimes held over Blacks, were typically among the poorest and most powerless White men. For one, Thistlewood goes to Jamaica on his own account; he is a free man, not shackled by a pre-contracted formal indenture. On the contrary, he is fortunate enough to be armed with letters of introduction from local notables with West Indian connections. He finds work immediately and remains a well-regarded and much sought-after over-

seer for the first seventeen years of his life in Jamaica. At the end of this period, he moves, together with a small, gradually acquired slave workforce, to property he has purchased jointly with Samuel Say, a fellow member of the overseer class. He converts his portion to a pen, a type of operation that is ancillary to the great sugar estates, and he eventually develops it into a much-admired horticultural showpiece. He is a small proprietor by most standards (thirty or more slaves and 160 acres, of which more than half is swampland), but his agronomic skills and relative commercial success, combined with his appointments to a number of lower-level political offices and military commissions confirm him as a respected member of the White community.

Thistlewood's diaries speak to us of two worlds: the predominantly homosocial world of dominant (both "greater" and "lesser") White men and the overwhelmingly African world over which he presides with routine and unremitting brutality, but which he also shares, however unevenly, in an intimate and sometimes startlingly mundane domestic arrangement with Phibbah, an Afro-creole house slave. He acts as a kind of mediator and link between, and traverser of, these two worlds, the homosocial world of White men without, or unaccompanied by, White wives and the world of brutalized, infantilized, and sexualized Black men and women. His role in each world is contradictory and complex. He is a near ("not quite") equal participant in the exclusive White male political commons, in which he is appointed to lower-level but not insignificant offices. He engages actively in both intra-class and inter-class social networks of White homosocial conviviality in which women make an occasional appearance, and he is a member of the fraternity of White plantation masters whose domination of the bodies of the enslaved includes compulsive and unrelenting sexual predation upon those of enslaved women. Like the overwhelming majority of the other White men in his world, he routinely and regularly exercises his at-large *droit du seigneur* on the female labor force of the estates under his management.

Yet there are limits. He can never aspire to being an elected member of the Assembly, that jealously guarded instrument of planter-class self-government and of the sovereignty of claims to "freeborn English" identity and subjecthood. He is never invited to dinner at the Governor's House or to the great balls of elite planter-class society – complete with bona fide hostess wives and the small circle of society ladies – though he often supplies the livestock, game, vegetables, and flowers that ensure their grand success. He does not become a sugar planter and exporter, instead remaining primarily a less-valued broker of domestic economy and a patron of the protopeasant economy of the slaves, particularly the coterie of "elite" domestic and skilled slaves networked around his "wife," Phibbah. Perhaps most importantly, he does not have a White wife, but lives "according to the custom of the country," and more especially according to the custom of his class.

Even here there are important qualifications. Thistlewood is not a candidate for the dual marriage system who decides to forego the benefits of a White wife in part because of the assurance of other conditions of reproduction that guarantee full maintenance of class status. This is true, for example, of George Goodin Barrett, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's great-uncle, discussed below, who mates exclusively (at least, in self-acknowledged terms) with a mulatto slave, Elissa Peters. Their children suffer a fate not untypical of the offspring of such couplings: they are not given the Barrett name, but they are sent to England to be schooled and domiciled according to the terms of their father's will, and they receive secondary (and inevitably contestable) bequests. Thistlewood, in contrast, gives his son John his name. He does not have the economic wherewithal or the genealogical amplitude and latitude to school him in England, and evinces no aspirations or plans to that effect. John is schooled locally and is later apprenticed to a master carpenter, William Hornby.

It should be pointed out here that not all large planter names were so closely guarded (outside of the widespread process of giving estate slaves the surnames of their owners). Another strategy, pursued by Martin or Martyn Williams, the dually married husband of George's properly pedigreed first cousin (who later becomes the widowed mistress of George's brother), was to both pass on the name and petition the courts to declare his illegitimate mixed-race children, whose mother was a free Black woman, legally White.¹⁶ To complicate matters, there is a third option that both Williams's "dual marriage" obligations and the changed inheritance laws of his and George's time¹⁷ preclude him from pursuing (whatever his personal inclinations): bequeathing his main properties to Colored heirs. His properties are passed on to his legitimate White heirs. The case of Molly or Mary Cope (née Dorill), the fully endowed illegitimate quadroon daughter of Thistlewood's late employer (now his employer, under coverture of her White husband) is different, but in part only because of the absence of competing claims from a "legitimate" White family. She appears to us, through the admittedly limited medium of Thistlewood's cryptic daily log, as the tragic dupe of a strategy

16. This is a reference to a special statute in Jamaica by which free Colored individuals were allowed to petition the Assembly (or to have someone petition the Assembly on their behalf) for "special privileges" that would render them legally White, thereby conferring upon them an approximation of the whole bundle of rights and obligations that came with free White status. This "special privileges" statute was peculiar to Jamaica among the British islands. See Heuman 1981:6.

17. William Dorill's last will and testament was dated March 5, 1754, seven years before legislation was passed in 1761 prohibiting Whites from leaving real or personal property worth more than £1,200 sterling (or around 2,000 Jamaican pounds) "to any Colored or Black." See Heuman 1981:6.

to re-inscribe and recover a proper plantocratic and racial destiny for the at-risk property and lineage of her paternal ancestry. Once she has fulfilled all the right conditions she becomes practically dispensable. She confides to Thistlewood that her husband “wants her to cut the entail off and settle upon him for life” (Hall 1999:70). She is being pressed to transfer title to the estate to her abusive and incompetent White husband.¹⁸

Not only is Thistlewood not a candidate for the dual marriage system but his sexual rights over his slave mistress are limited by the preeminent rights of her owner (through his heiress wife), John Cope. Thistlewood is forced to defer to Cope, the younger man, in a variety of ways, not the least of which is his own powerlessness to stop him from exercising paramount rights of ownership, and (therefore) patriarchal precedence over Thistlewood, by summoning Phibbah into sexual service on more than one occasion. Thistlewood’s exclusive rights to Phibbah are only secured when he is settled on his own property and he is finally allowed to hire her on a permanent basis from the Copes. At that point, Thistlewood is able to keep his intense dislike for Cope in sufficient check to astutely accommodate the latter man’s increasingly significant role as sponsor and patron of his own vertical mobility and growing respectability in the White community.

Overseers and others of their class often hired and sometimes purchased favored slave lovers and brought them into their homes in “housekeeping” arrangements, which involved providing sexual and domestic services, sometimes for life. Sometimes the housekeeper was a free Black woman. Mrs. Carmichael, a five-year sojourner in the West Indies as a planter’s wife, and a tenacious apologist for the plantocracy, describes the “Colored housekeeper” as a necessary evil for the poorly paid¹⁹ and poorly equipped resident manager or overseer who cannot afford a White wife or offer her an acceptable way of life:

Managers so situated, too often keep a coloured housekeeper, who generally manages well for herself, though she almost always does something for her own subsistence, either by huckstering or making preserves. She

18. Ultimately the transgressive racial composition of the family appears to take its toll. The main properties, totaling thousands of acres, are mismanaged by Cope and eventually have to be sold off. Moreover, tragedy seems to haunt the Dorrill-Cope women, i.e. Mary and her two daughters. All three women, non-White but near-White, have been able to secure a relatively elusive level of respectability through appropriate marriages to White men, but have obviously done so at great psychic cost. One of the daughters later hangs herself in an apparently laudanum-induced episode (Hall 1999:291). As for her brothers, they are sent to school in England and return to ambiguous statuses and constant conflict with their abusive father.

19. Olivier (1971:67), too, noted that overseers and bookkeepers were “stingily paid in cash.”

can live, and be very comfortable, in circumstances that no European woman could possibly be happy in; for she is never at a loss for society, as she can always find some coloured people not far distant, of her own habits and manners; but an European female in such circumstances, would be desolate and miserable, even if her husband could afford to give her the common comforts of life; for no woman of decent moral habits, can make a friend of any of the coloured population who move in that sphere of life. (Carmichael 1969:61-62)

According to Mrs. Carmichael, the combined circumstances of conditions that are both materially and morally unfit for a European woman “operate powerfully upon the middling and lower classes of white people, in preventing marriage, and opening a door to much immorality” (Carmichael 1969:61-62).

The slave mistress was typically the object of lease or purchase but not of manumission. While offspring were often manumitted at a young age, it was not unusual for their slave mothers to be freed by their owner/keepers only in death, as a fulfillment of the last will and testament. This safe system of postmortem release protected and preserved the sanctity of the slaveowning order and, presumably, assuaged the consciences of dying White men. For the belatedly enfranchised, “freedom” was usually too short-lived and too deeply compromised to be properly enjoyed.

Despite the difficulties Thistlewood encountered in hiring Phibbah, ostensibly because of ties of devotion between the latter and her owner, Mary Dorrill/Cope, the practice of procuring “housekeeper” services through either the hire or purchase of female slaves did not as a rule meet with major objection from owners. On January 17, 1776, Anna Eliza Elletson wrote her attorneys in Jamaica to carry out the intention of her late husband to transact the sale of his slave mistress and mulatto daughter to one Mr. Coe, the estate distiller. She hopes, however, that this will not prove a distraction from his duties:

among Mr. Elletson’s papers I found one which by the subject, I believe was intended, to convey all right & title to a negro slave, named Maria, and her mullato Daughter, to the said Mr. Coe, for the consideration of one hundred & thirty pounds current money of Jamaica – I presume Mr. Elletson meant to execute that Title, therefore, as soon as you are pleased to give me instructions concerning it, I will certainly execute it, at the same time, I hope that Black Lady will not engross too much of his attention from his business.²⁰

A little over four years later she has occasion to arrange for the title to his mulatto child to be transferred to the current overseer. As usual, she wants

20. Anna Eliza Elletson, Curzon Street, London, to Messrs. Pool and East, Kingston, January 17, 1776, Ms 29a, Elletson Family Letters, National Library of Jamaica.

to make sure the estate is duly compensated: "I am very ready to comply with Mr. Concannon's request by making him a title to his mulatto child, on condition of his replacing it with an able Negroe, & wish to have yr. opinion adopted relative to the other mulatto children on the estate."²¹

During his early years in Jamaica, Thistlewood shares, or aspires to share, similar domestic arrangements with fellow-overseer Mordiner (or "Mordenner") and the two socialize with each other. Thistlewood notes that his friend "has been purchasing Quasheba ... He gives for her, two new Negroes cost him 48 pounds each, beside duty. He paid 14 pounds per annum for her: he paid in ready cash for her and his two children about 166 pounds – besides what they have cost him in victuals, clothes, etc." (Hall 1999:52). Thistlewood is clearly impressed with Mordiner's commanding ability to secure, with unmitigated proprietary rights, one of the basic requirements of secondary White manhood in the West Indian colonies – the in-house provision of exclusive sexual and domestic services by a selected Black woman, legally enslaved or nominally free. He has cause to be envious. In 1757, when he temporarily leaves the employ of the Copes, he "begged hard of Mrs Cope [Mary Dorrill] to sell or hire Phibbah to me, but she would not; he [Mr. Cope] was willing" (Hall 1999:79). After a visit from Phibbah, he yearns achingly, "I wish they would sell her to me" (Hall 1999:80). It is not until he is settled in his own property ten years later that the Copes finally agree to hire Phibbah out to him at an annual rate of £18; but selling is still out of the question.

Sometimes expressions of affection for a slave mistress breached the boundaries of inviolate and robust White manhood, and exposed the vulnerability of those whose circuit of reproduction depended exclusively on the emotional, sexual, and other household and bodily care services provided by Black women within domestic (back)space. William Crookshanks, Thistlewood's immediate subordinate on Egypt Plantation, proves to be an embarrassment to his race, gender, and class in that regard, as he violates both the spatial and the expressive limits of this kind of relationship. Mirtilla, his slave mistress, whom he has leased at a yearly rate of £20 and re-hires out to earn her expenses, completely manipulates him (according to Thistlewood), refusing to work, feigning illness, "only resolved to put William through a needless charge through spite" (Hall 1999:70). "William cries sadly, the more fool he, as it is probably for Salt River Long Quaw [another slave]," (Hall 1999:68) Thistlewood comments, regarding a miscarriage Mirtilla suffers early on in the ill-fated relationship. The love-crazed William curses her owners when they punish her for some misdeed. Later, he attends her in

21. Anna Eliza Chandos, Bath, to Messrs. Pool and East, Kingston, March 12, 1780, Ms 29a, Elletson Family Letters, National Library of Jamaica.

the labor of giving birth to their child. "W.C. came home and cried," overwhelmed by the experience. Thistlewood clearly regards W.C.'s softness for Mirtilla as excessive and foolish, and a dangerous embarrassment to the standards of potent and inscrutable White manhood.

Crookshanks's behavior is obviously related to his marginality within the White plantation-based community. He cannot really afford a full-time "housekeeper" in the manner of Thistlewood and other supervisory staff, and he is "forced" to subcontract out Mirtilla's services so that she can earn her keep. His precarious financial and psycho-emotional status quickly causes him to lose control of the situation. The procurement of stable, full-time, and exclusive domestic and sexual services, or "housekeeper" arrangements, was typically beyond the reach of the lowest and most transient of the White male plantation staff. Moreover, they were subject to the patriarchal precedence of the resident master, overseer, or owner in the matter of access to the sexual services of the enslaved female labor force.

Not only does Burnard exaggerate Thistlewood's enjoyment of a shared political egalitarian space with the White elite, but he also suppresses the compelling evidence of his supervisory authority over the White subordinates beneath him. As resident master, Thistlewood has the power to hire and fire lower-level White staff and to police both their employment-related and their personal and sexual conduct, especially in relation to that most precious of plantation property, the slave labor force. He wields the ultimate power of patriarchal arbitration over both the White subordinates and the slaves. He controls access to enslaved women, approves, makes, and breaks matches (both White/Black and Black/Black couplings), referees sexual rivalries and domestic conflicts, punishes both male and female transgressions against the patriarchy, and of course reserves to himself the absolute right of access to any female slave, unmitigated by prior claims, including those most recently adjudicated by him in favor of a successful claimant against interlopers.

Over the course of his tenure at Egypt, he has cause to either approve or thwart the designs of members of his White staff regarding both transient sexual opportunities and more lasting "housekeeper" relationships with enslaved women. Sometimes his authority derives more clearly from direct ownership of the slave in question. In late 1762, he gives his assent to the partnering of the new driver, Robert Gibbs, a Barbadian, with his slave Nanny (Hall 1999:127). Nanny's next "keeper," another White man, Patrick May, stayed only six days. He came home drunk on the evening of May 23, 1763, "quarreled with Nanny whom he kept, and shot her with small shot, one of which struck her head near the top, and the other her ankle, both these shots seem to be lodged" (Hall 1999:128). Thistlewood dismisses him. A previous employee, James Rogers, leaves after being reprimanded for assaulting the slaves in the field while drunk (Hall 1999:124).

Thistlewood is particularly averse to the risk posed by White drunkenness, an endemic feature of plantation life, to slave property and to his own authority. He denies the right of certain White underlings to prey upon the female slaves at will. For example, he “reprimanded Henry MacCormick for frequenting the Negro houses in the night” (Hall 1999:140). On other occasions he steps in to prevent what he sees as inappropriate or injurious couplings, even to the point of preferring the claims of elite male slaves over those of certain White contenders. He takes care to protect longer-term supervisory alliances over more transient ones, regardless of race. The peripatetic and elusive character of White labor made such a course wise. Moreover, poorer White servants, many of whom were Irish and Scottish, were the object of open ethnic prejudice, suspicion, and contempt from self-aware Englishmen like Thistlewood.²² During the entire period he is executing this kind of dominion, Thistlewood is still an overseer.

One other important distinction palpably present in Thistlewood’s account is that between free status and indentured status among Whites. I have noted elsewhere that indentured servants to some degree shared with enslaved Africans the condition of “deracinated isolates” (Green, forthcoming 2007). Both slave and indentured servant were seen as detached embodiments of labor power at the complete disposal of the master. Their legal personalities were thereby suspended or canceled out, the one permanently and by force, the other temporarily and by contractual self-submission. For both groups, marriage was prohibited as an interference with the master’s proper enjoyment of his property rights in their persons and labor services. Even outside the bonded contract, single status was often stipulated as a condition of employment of the White overseers and bookkeepers, for whom these positions were expected to act as stepping stones to bigger and better things. As noted above, Thistlewood himself records instances of White servants absconding or making common cause with enslaved Blacks against their masters.

Thistlewood came to Jamaica as a free – and English – man, with the pride of the yeoman class and a burning personal ambition coursing through his veins. He becomes a master of White servants and Black slaves, a slave-owner, small planter, and, through a process of sponsored mobility, a respected junior member of the White plantocratic political commons. His social niche, however, lay outside the “dual marriage system” or the border-crossing transatlantic circuits of the upper elite. His accommodation to the “custom of the country,” embedding him within a cross-racial spatial circuit of personal and generational reproduction, was not simply his “choice” or “preference” (i.e. as an option that willfully excluded a White wife). To a very great extent, these were the means of reproduction available to him, for

22. Thistlewood appears to hold a particular aversion for Scotsmen.

his use and abuse. And indeed, he remains a lifelong sexual opportunist and predator, exploiting generations of enslaved women owned and managed by him, including mothers and their daughters or other lineal descendants. By a contrast that may seem startling today but was normative in its time, he also shares a lifelong co-residential, intimate, complex, and dense conjugal partnership with his chosen slave “wife,” Phibbah.

The processes of Thistlewood’s daily and generational reproduction, in bodily and affective terms, take place within a Black/African female-mediated emotional and cultural domestic space. Thistlewood has no insider knowledge of any other kind of private domestic world. In this space, even as ultimate patriarch and master, he is humanized (as far as possible) by and dependent upon the intercessory care services and emotional solicitude of Phibbah, agent and mediator of multiple worlds in her own right. He is genitor of a hybrid, intermediate, “Colored” race/class line, which in his case abruptly ends with the premature death of his only acknowledged son, Mulatto John. After an initial period of referring to this son anonymously as “Phibbah’s child,” he eventually does step into the role of social father-disciplinarian to him, however contentiously so. This second-generation (and self-obliterating) merger of the White overseer and small settler class into the increasingly significant intermediate class of free Coloreds became a routine structural feature of Jamaican society, in ways that, while not peculiar to Jamaica, did not occur everywhere. Olivier (1971:69) is careful to point this out:

The small white settler class was absorbed as overseers and book-keepers, married or cohabited unmarried with coloured women, and in a generation or two became merged in the class described as the “free coloured people.” They did not, as white immigrants of their position did, for example, in Barbados or in South Africa at a later period, give rise to a permanent “poor white” class; and it was very fortunate for Jamaica that they did not.

Nonetheless, considerable doubt remains as to whether Mulatto John would have been duly vested as Thistlewood’s main heir, had he lived. Thistlewood’s nephew, John Thistlewood, his elder brother’s son, joins him from England in early February 1764, a few years after the birth of Mulatto John (and, it should be said, the passage of the law restricting bequests to Colored heirs). Was this a move on Thistlewood’s part to secure a collateral extension of the White Thistlewood family on Jamaican soil? If so, it was not to be, because the young John Thistlewood meets with an untimely death soon after his arrival in Jamaica. However, we have the evidence of Thistlewood’s last will and testament. After making conditional provision, within strictly mandated price limits, for the purchase and manumission of Phibbah and the settlement

upon her of Bess, a female slave (already informally “owned” by Phibbah),²³ with the latter’s son and “future issue,” and a small plot of land to be purchased and upon which a house was to be erected “suitable to her station,” Thistlewood apportioned the balance from the expected proceeds of the sale of his estate to his brother’s surviving children in England – three-fifths to “William Thistlewood son of my brother John Thistlewood of the County of Lincoln” and two-fifths to “my niece Mary Annet daughter of my said brother John Thistlewood” (cited in Hall 1999:313-14). If Phibbah’s manumission cannot be secured upon his terms, the alternative arrangement of settling upon her a small annuity for life (fifteen pounds per annum) must be followed. Thistlewood also bequeaths £50 sterling to his agent in London, and an equivalent amount to a planter friend, “lately of this parish.”

Thus even though Thistlewood’s direct line ends in miscegenated anonymity in Jamaica, where he leaves behind the only conjugal family he has known and that has physically and emotionally sustained and serviced him for the past thirty-five or so years, the bulk of his modest fortune, built partly on their blood and sweat, ends up in England, with his White collateral heirs.

CONTRASTING THISTLEWOOD: THE BARRETTS, A WEST INDIAN CREOLE DYNASTY

The genealogy of the famous English poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB) illustrates both the fabulous wealth of the Creole upper class and their somewhat heterogeneous family/kinship patterns and strategies, despite the central role played by the White wife as reproducer of the race and the lineage. The entire Jamaican trajectory of the (self-professed White) Barrett family spanned nearly 340 years, beginning with the expeditionary forces in 1655 that handily won Jamaica for the burgeoning British Empire, and ending with the death in 1992 of Edward Richard Moulton Barrett, the “last

23. Phibbah had been made a “gift” of Bess by Mrs. Bennett, the free Colored woman who owns the pen that Thistlewood and Say later jointly buy. Her friendship extends to other areas as well: she boards “Little Mulatto John” during the week while he attends Mr. Hugh’s school in the Savanna (Hall 1999:134). Bess has to be registered as Thistlewood’s because, as a slave, Phibbah cannot own another slave. The ties of friendship and business with free Colored women like Mrs. Bennett and Elizabeth Anderson (later Mrs. Mould), Molly Cope’s mother and the widowed mistress of her father William Dorrill, belie Burnard’s pronouncement about the lack of social contact between Whites and free Blacks or Coloreds. Thistlewood writes many letters to both women, as well as to Molly Cope, while in her employ as well as after, communicating details of both a business and a private nature, including asking personal favors and making personal inquiries. In addition, Thistlewood and the women often exchange gifts.

of the Barrett landowners in Jamaica” (Barrett 2000:ix).²⁴ In 1838, the year slavery was finally abolished, the vast and multiple Jamaican estates of the extended Barrett clan covered 31,000 acres, according to one source (Markus 1995:99).

The saga of this famous family, still shrouded in the compulsively amnesic mystery of British colonial and literary history, has all the makings of a sensational best-selling novel: multigenerational inbreeding; unmarried cousin mating; interracial liaisons and childbearing with enslaved and free Black women; unresolved questions about the racial “purity,” or escape from racial “contamination,” of the self-proclaimed White bloodlines; uneasy social relations with “Colored” cousins sent to England for schooling and in some cases permanent relocation; bitter, drawn-out legal battles between White and Colored heirs of some of the Jamaican properties, involving the poet’s father as a claimant on the “legitimate” White side; rumors of incest, madness, sociopathy, and drug addiction. For a very long time in Elizabeth Barrett Browning historiography, the historical and political memory loss ran so deep that there seemed to be a general complicity in the project of re-inventing a solidly authentic, if colorful, English past, while strategically deploying fragments of the Jamaican connection as titillating and evocative devices in the romantic and exotic figuration of the poet-legend. In various biographical entries, her father, Edward, is often described as a member of the British landed gentry who sent his sons to Jamaica “on business.” It is hardly ever mentioned, for example, that EBB’s estranged grandfather and two of her beloved brothers all lived out the final portions of their lives in consensual and procreative – and in one case legal – relationships with Black or Colored Jamaican women on Jamaican soil. EBB’s father had both White and non-White illegitimate half-siblings and, although he probably did not live long enough to know this or to fully absorb the knowledge of it, non-White Jamaican grandchildren (the first one being born four months before his death in 1857, according to one source).²⁵ These details – especially the unexpected trope of return and re-creolization or “going [back] native” – interfere with

24. For my account of the Barretts I have relied upon two main sources and a number of supplementary ones. The main sources are, first and foremost, the remarkable 1938 family history by Marks, and the more recent work by Barrett (2000), a descendant of the family, who himself relies somewhat on Marks. Marks’s work is highly idiosyncratic, but to the shame of subsequent chroniclers of the Barrett family, unmatched in historical detail, based on original research, and historical candor (especially for its time and place). An exception to this rule is the 1995 work of Markus, who draws appropriately on both the details and the candor. Marks is not without her own prejudices, but she gives one room to read her work and her evidence as an exposé of White West Indian society.

25. Markus 1995:303. The supreme irony of his life was that two of his sons who were not disinherited by him because of known – or unknown – marriages against his will produced only Colored “illegitimate” grandchildren. His White grandchildren (those that

the smooth and sanitized induction of the Barrett Browning legacy into the annals of the British literary canon. All Colored offspring (especially those that were self-evidently so) have been kept scrupulously expunged from or marginalized within “official” constructions of the Barrett family tree, while out-of-wedlock White scions, most certainly those with the correct maternal pedigrees, have all been allotted their “rightful” and prominent places upon its branches (see both Marks 1938 and Barrett 2000). Who is included as part of the historical Barrett family is first and foremost a matter of race.

I want to reinforce the point that this kind of semi-mythical genealogical reconstruction was both required and made possible by the socioeconomic status of the transatlantic Creole dynastic upper class – moreover, in ways that dramatically distinguished them from bachelor settlers of modest self-made fortunes like Thistlewood, despite the fact that the two types often found common ground in Jamaica. Thistlewood simply did not have the financial and genealogical capital to reproduce such a dynasty. But neither did his status as a respected junior member of the White planter community and participant in White homosocial convivial networks and political commons require such dynastic connections. At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that Thistlewood did not keenly feel his place in the White Jamaican and imperial social order.

Thistlewood’s life was contemporaneous with about three or more generations of the Barrett family. They also lived in the same region of western Jamaica, and there are cross-references in Thistlewood’s journals and the Barrett biographies to some of the same personalities, places, and major local events. His business partner, Samuel Say, is overseer at Old Hope Estate, the property of Martin Williams, future husband of Elizabeth Barrett Waite, mother of the famous Richard Barrett (not Williams’s child), speaker of the Assembly during the tumultuous pre-emancipation years. After Say’s death, Williams offers Thistlewood the job, but he turns it down. By then he is the owner of his own property. Another connection is George Robert Goodin who owns land abutting Sarah Bennett’s property, the very one which Thistlewood and Samuel Say later buy. He is the brother of Judith Goodin, wife of Edward Barrett of Cinnamon Hill, EBB’s great-grandfather and Richard Barrett’s grandfather. After Thistlewood’s death, Goodin purchases his precious “Bread Nut Island Penn” for 600 pounds currency. And so on. The upper-class dynastic status of the Barretts, and the depth of their West Indian genealogy offer a working contrast to the modest social position and hard-won individual status of Thistlewood. It helps us to place him and them, and to properly distinguish the constituent strands of the social tapestry.

were ostensibly White) from legalized marriages, in a strange pathological twist, were cut off by him. But that is a detail of individual or individually manifested pathology, only obliquely traceable to structural factors.

EBB's great-great-grandfather, Samuel Barrett, Jr., a direct descendant of Hersey Barrett, pioneer, who arrived in Jamaica in 1655 with his wife and children among the expeditionary forces of Admiral Penn and General Venables, married Elizabeth Wisdom in 1722. They had fifteen children, of whom six died young, three married and moved to London, five married and remained in Jamaica, and one contented himself with a "housekeeper arrangement" with an enslaved woman. Six years before his death in 1760, Samuel Barrett was in possession of some 2,605 acres of land, 2,285 of which were in St. James and the remainder distributed among the parishes of St. Ann, St. Elizabeth, Clarendon, and Vere. In 1754, only 13 percent of Jamaican landholders had 2,000 acres or more. Among Samuel Barrett's children who remained in Jamaica was the fabulously wealthy Edward Barrett of Cinnamon Hill, who married Judith Goodin (George Robert Goodin's sister) in 1760.²⁶ These were EBB's great-grandparents. In 1798, the year of Edward's death, it was reported: "his moderate income this Year is full £50,000 Stg – and is likely to be more the Next. Enough – we moderate People will admit – for fifty Families" (quoted in Barrett 2000:45). He and his wife had five children, including Elizabeth, EBB's grandmother, who married Charles Moulton, her grandfather, a sometime wine merchant, slave trader, and planter of disputed origins, in 1781. It is this generation that displays for us the full range of the Jamaican elite's mating, marriage, and family patterns. Elizabeth's own marriage does not appear to have had much substance or to have endured very long. The record shows Charles Moulton later having children by a number of lovers, White and Black, in England and finally back in Jamaica, and becoming largely irrelevant to the Barrett family, who considered him a sponger (Marks 1938:310-14; Barrett 2000:52). In one of his last testaments he is most concerned with securing the patrimony of his illegitimate children and the goodwill of his legitimate ones towards them. His long-estranged wife is never mentioned (Barrett 2000:52).

Elizabeth's eldest brother, George Goodin Barrett, goes on to have a distinguished public career as a leading member of the Jamaican plantocracy. Home from Oxford University in 1784, he was appointed justice of the peace for St. James the next year, and was subsequently elected three times to the House of Assembly, in 1787, 1790, and 1795. In 1793, he was appointed attorney for the estates of William Beckford of Fonthill Abbey,

26. Judith Goodin Barrett re-married in 1803 after the death of her husband, Edward. Her new husband was thirty-three-year-old Captain Michael White Lee, who was stationed in Jamaica at the time. She was "in her sixtieth year." The truly interesting reason this is worth mentioning, however, is the fact that Captain Lee subsequently retains his Barrett connection by marrying Barrett Williams, the daughter of Elizabeth Barrett Waite Williams and Martin Williams, and Judith's own grand-niece by law (through her first husband). See Marks 1938:271, 370 and Barrett 2000:48-49.

whose London house stood near that of his Jamaican-born aunt, Margaret Barrett Lawrence, in Portman Square. In 1795 he became assistant judge of the Supreme Court and comptroller of public accounts. He was promoted to captain of the Trelawney Militia in 1793, and fought as a colonel of the Horse Militia in the Maroon War of 1795, in which he was wounded. He died two months later of apparently unrelated causes.

George Goodin Barrett was also a factor in the slave trade, “in partnership with Leonard Parkinson of Jamaica, the purchaser in England of Kinnersley Castle near the Ledbury ‘Hope End’ which Edward Moulton Barrett [his nephew and EBB’s father] was to own” (Marks 1938:215). The records show that as a slave trader he bought small batches of slaves from Charles Moulton, EBB’s grandfather and his sister’s husband. George, for all his impeccable upper-class credentials, never had a White wife, but, in the period 1785–1794, fathered six children by Elissa (or Eliza) Peters, a mulatto slave who was settled at Oxford Pen, one of the many Barrett properties. Ownership of Elissa was transmitted to George by his father, and the children were serially manumitted through purchase by him, but Elissa remained a slave. She (as well as “her Issue and Offspring”) was finally manumitted in his last testament, recorded the day before he died. Marks (1938:220) notes that “it is an interesting fact that no Barrett in any known will, until George Goodin Barrett drew his will, left property to such connections. They purchased manumissions and stopped there.”

Another brother, Henry, took the more conventional path of marrying Barbara, the daughter of Richard Samuels, with whom he had one daughter. Marks also reports him having “two mulatto boys with a negro slave.” Closely associated with George in his illustrious public career was Samuel Goodin Barrett, the youngest brother, whose mating career took a different, unconventional twist, though one which, without question, preserved the family genealogy and family wealth. He lived in a common-law union with his older and widowed first cousin, Elizabeth Barrett Waite Williams, which was never converted to legal marriage. She continued to be known as Mrs. Williams, and Jeannette Marks (1938:210) observes that “Sam’s passion for his cousin Elizabeth Barrett Waite Williams had its inception in their unmarried love and life together.” Marks is careful, however, to give their doubly pedigreed Barrett children a prominent place in the family tree, while scrupulously omitting all issue of color. Indeed, this branch of the Barrett family produced some of the central figures of Jamaica’s turbulent nineteenth-century political history. The union of the cousins produced four sons, one of whom, Richard Barrett (mentioned above), was to play a leading role on behalf of the planter class in the fiercely fought battles over nonconformist missionary rights, the 1831 slave rebellion, and abolitionism. Richard Barrett was variously editor of the *Jamaica Journal*, several times member of the Assembly, Custos for St. James, and Speaker of the House. His mother,

Elizabeth Williams had been married to Martin Williams, owner of Old Hope Estate in Westmoreland, who was thirty years her senior and by whom she had had five or more children (Barrett 2000:30). Her late husband, for his part, had fathered eight mulatto children by Eleanor Williams, a free Black woman. In 1783, Williams petitioned the House of Assembly for the rights and privileges of his mulatto children.²⁷ However, when he died in 1786, he left everything to the children of his otherwise faithless marriage, and most of the executors he named were members of his wife's (the Barrett) family. It is, therefore, with a fitting sense of irony that Marks (1938:211) notes the names of Eleanor Williams's less privileged children: "One was named after the negro mother and one after Martyn Williams, a third bore the name, Elizabeth, of Martyn Williams's wife."

By the family's own account, it was fear of losing her dower and guardianship of her children which made Elizabeth balk at re-marriage, or at publicly acknowledging one that was alleged (in an obscure family letter) to have taken place in a Roman Catholic Church in York (Barrett 2000:30). This strategic decision, like so many others, appeared designed to ensure that the wealth of the legal marriage did not diverge too greatly from the pathways of the great House of Barrett patrimony. A ban on re-marriage was probably a condition of Elizabeth Williams's endowment by her husband's will. Such a condition was routine in the wills of the propertied during the feudal and proto-industrial periods in England as well as in the colonies. It had also been more unconventionally deployed by William Dorrell in relation to his mulatto mistress and mother of his children, Elizabeth Anderson. She, however, chose the respectability of a first-time marriage to a subaltern White, her late keeper's bookkeeper, over entitlement to a fragment of the property the whole of which (in any event) had been left to her children. As a non-wife, she could not be made trustee of the entire estate; nor could she be the bearer of proper dower rights.

We know that the decision by Elizabeth Williams and Sam Barrett not to marry had nothing to do with their being cousins. For, indeed, cousin marriage was a common strategy of the elite, although the Barretts seemed particularly incestuous in this regard. Richard, the eldest son of first-cousin lovers Elizabeth and Samuel, deepened the process of inbreeding by marrying and mating with his first cousin. This – and exact name replication – happened with bewildering frequency among the Barretts and other elite families. The imperatives of class endogamy made the resort to cousin marriage even more compelling for "nonresidential" colonies than elsewhere, given the peculiar demographic constraints. On the other hand, compared to the situation of a Thistlewood, the availability of White female cousins as marriage candidates represented a genealogical depth and breadth that was relatively uncommon

27. See note 16.

in a place like Jamaica. Even where such marriages were loveless and barely fruitful, as was the case with Richard Barrett's marriage, the scene was set for the transmission of property through the "proper" lines. Richard Barrett made generous provisions in his will for his mistress, Emily Gaynor, and his unrelated mixed-race children, to whom modest houses were bequeathed with the proviso that the possession of the houses not become "injurious" to Barrett Hall Estate. Most of his immense properties were safely passed on to White collaterals (Barrett 2000:112-13).

In keeping her positions as widow and as cousin-mistress separate and intact, and with two fortunes at stake, Elizabeth Barrett Waite Williams, matriarch extraordinaire, had calculated smartly. From her new location in England, she was able to play an active, and by all accounts, aggressive, role in ensuring that all legal disputes arising from counterclaims on her children's various inheritances would be resolved in their favor. As we will see below, both the Colored offspring and legitimate nephews of legator George lose out, in the case of some disputed property, to Sam's and Elizabeth's powerful sons in Jamaica. Here, the twice-widowed matriarch has the remarkable advantage of being able to enlist the support and intervention of the older sons of her marriage, all of them powerful in their own right, in the cause of the Goodin-Barrett property interests. However, she is careful to maintain the unity of the larger Barrett clan (that is, its White members). She died in 1834 at the age of seventy-seven, "leaving her nephew Edward Moulton-Barrett and her son George Goodin Barrett co-executors of her ample Jamaican and English estates" (Marks 1938:425). According to Marks, "she had defied that convention most important in a woman's life and had nevertheless remained a dominant and respected figure in her family group." The bulk of her estate, moreover, went to one of her Barrett sons, George, and his children.

As pointed out previously, George Goodin Barrett (the uncle) made arrangements for his slave mistress and quadroon sons that were highly unusual by Barrett family tradition. Elissa Peters was bequeathed an annuity of "Fifty Pounds Current money," a house to live in within five miles of the sea, and "three negro girls." To each of his quadroon children Goodin Barrett left "two thousand pounds Current money of Jamaica," the maximum allowed to colored offspring by law (Marks 1938:223). In addition he ordered that each of them upon attaining "the age of Seven years Be sent to England and to be there decently clothed maintained and Educated in a moral manner at the charge of his Estate and at the Discretion of their Guardians hereinafter named" (quoted in Marks 1938:223). Moreover, he earnestly desired that they should "not fix their abode in Jamaica but do settle and reside in such countries where those distinctions respecting color (which the policy of the West Indies renders necessary) are not maintained" (Marks 1938:224). Among the non-Barrett trustees appointed by George for the disposition of his estate and guardianship of his children were Leonard

Parkinson, his friend and business partner in the slave trade, Bryan Edwards, the planter-historian, and John Graham-Clarke, the fabulously wealthy slave trader of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who later “came to own flour mills, collieries and glass works, ships, and land in Jamaica, as well as two large houses, one on Pilgrim Street and the other in Gosforth” (Barrett 2000:50-51). The latter’s daughter later marries Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett.²⁸ Their first-born is EBB.

One of George’s quadroon sons, Thomas Peters “then residing in or near ‘New Castle’ in the care of John Graham-Clarke, was on coming of age to be made an Executor and trustee of his will” (Marks 1938:223). This was in a final codicil to George’s will, obviously significant as a last-minute determination to pass on a piece of the Barrett birthright to his racially disadvantaged first son. In 1795, Thomas Peters was only eleven years old. The partial investiture of his non-White children who quickly fade from the biographical accounts, however, should not be confused with George’s single-minded expansionist commitment to the powerful White Barrett dynasty. He stipulated as a condition for receipt of their legacies that his sister’s children, Edward (EBB’s father) and Samuel Barrett Moulton, “should by law and at the age of twenty-one take the surname of Barrett” (hence EBB’s baptismal name of “Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett”). As noted above, his own children were forced to keep the name of their mother, Peters. Moreover, his last will and testament vested the “reputed” (illegitimate) White children of his brother Sam (who were additionally endowed in other Barrett wills) as his main heirs (Marks 1938:224). His own children, of course, were limited in their legal capacity to inherit property, and, while they were schooled and accommodated in England, it is questionable whether they ever received the full extent of their modest inheritance (Barrett 2000:60). Repeated obstacles were placed in the way of Thomas Peters’s attempts to redeem his authorized role as trustee and executor of his father’s estate. Predictably, he became embroiled in a number of lawsuits, pitting him against the other trustees, as well as the lawyers for his White cousins. A dispute over claims on the estate of their grandfather, Edward Barrett of Cinnamon Hill – which was being held in trust by his legitimate grandson and EBB’s father – arising from a debt of slave and livestock property allegedly owed the heirs of George Goodin Barrett, the original owner of this property, was finally settled in favor of the sons of Elizabeth Waite Williams and Samuel Goodin Barrett, the illicitly matched cousins. As White male collateral descendants, they had been their Uncle George’s main heirs. Thomas Peters disappears from the record.

28. The slave-owning families acted as trustees for each other’s fortunes, guardians to each other’s children, and married into each other’s families. In 1812, John Graham-Clarke’s eldest son, John Altham Graham-Clarke, marries Leonard Parkinson’s daughter, Mary Elizabeth (Barrett 2000:60).

While the obligations to fulfill the wishes of George Goodin Barrett regarding his children's education were tolerated, any continuing intrusion of Elissa Peters into their lives was not. Elizabeth Moulton, EBB's grandmother and George's sister, wrote to John Graham-Clarke on March 20, 1799:

I was greatly asstonished [*sic*] to hear of Eliza Peters being in England, as I never heard of her having the least desire to come, I only hope her being with Tom & William will not injure them, in their Education; I beg you will not let her have any thing to do with them, *that* is not keeping them from their learning, the three Younger ones I should think, the sooner they are put to School, the better, the Mother I shall say nothing about. (Quoted in Barrett 2000:50)

Another condition of elite West Indian families was fulfilled when George's sister's children, the Moulton-Barretts, were sent to England for their education (as indeed were his), joining other branches and generations of Barretts who had made the journey back and stayed, or become long-term or chronically peripatetic sojourners. EBB was the first of the children of Edward, his nephew, born in England, and although her father (after perhaps one visit) never returned, some of his sons would, to become re-creolized, pick up the threads of local Jamaican and family-dynastic history, and fall conveniently, perhaps after an initial culture shock, into the "custom of the country." Indeed, of the three sons who went to Jamaica to look after the family affairs, the two who survived had children with Black women only and spent the rest of their lives in Jamaica. By then, too, the racially "unsullied" genealogical capital is shrinking. Charles John, the third son, and one of the survivors, married his illegitimate mulatto children's Colored governess, "a well educated brown woman of good class," who, according to Marks (1938:613), tricked him into marriage by feigning pregnancy, while Septimus, his younger brother, "following the custom of the country, ... had the usual 'housekeeper' arrangements by which there was at least one daughter" (Marks 1938:616).

Charles John, who lived to the age of ninety, essentially oversaw the gradual and final dissipation of the Moulton-Barrett family's Jamaican patrimony. But, as Pares might remind us,²⁹ this did not happen before much of the wealth had been safely transferred to the original "home," England, where various branches of the family lived on to enjoy, display, and deploy it. In their heyday, the various extended Barrett family plantations included, but were not limited to, Cinnamon Hill, Cornwall, Retreat Pen, Oxford,

29. Pares (1960:50) noted in his classic rejoinder to Adam Smith, "after some initial loans in the earliest period which merely primed the pump, the wealth of the West Indies was created out of the profits of the West Indies themselves, and, with some assistance from the British tax-payer, much of it found a permanent home in Great Britain." Jamaica constituted the largest source of this transfer of wealth.

Cambridge, Spring, Thatchfield, Schawfield, Content, Tyrall, Anchovy Bottom, Barrett Hall, Spring Gut, Harding Hall, Greenwood, Spot Valley, Blue Hole, Moor Park, Albion, The Ramble, Dixon, Paradise, and Rio Hoja. The total acreage of these estates amounted to the tens of thousands. Their English estates were vast as well. Hope End, for example, the estate Edward Moulton-Barrett bought to raise his growing family in, covered some 475 acres of land and had an asking price of £27,000 (Forster 1989:10; Barrett 2000:53). After suffering financial losses as a result of the successfully disputed Jamaican property,³⁰ the Barretts were forced to give up Hope End, and they relocated twice before moving to the lodgings on Wimpole Street made famous by the Browning-Barrett love story. According to one source, “the Moulton-Barretts remained wealthy, but not as extraordinarily wealthy as they had been” (Garrett 2002:14). Upon his death in 1857, Edward Moulton-Barrett’s diminished estate amounted to £63,695.12s.1d, exclusive of the remaining Jamaican properties,³¹ in which he had had only a life’s interest and which passed on directly to his oldest surviving son, Charles John, under the terms of the latter’s great-grandfather’s will. Five of his other children received £10,950 each and three of them, including EBB, had been disinherited, although they were ultimately beneficiaries of their siblings’ generosity (Barrett 2000:137). The three disinherited children had all married against their father’s wishes. Two of the matches, EBB’s and that of her sister, Henrietta, proved particularly galling because the chosen mates were, among other things,³² “penniless.” Both Henrietta and her brother Alfred, the other disinherited sibling, followed family tradition at least in part by marrying their second cousins. Lizzie, Alfred’s wife, was the granddaughter of the consensually mated first cousins, Samuel Goodin Barrett and Elizabeth Barrett Waite Williams. The relationship between Lizzie and Alfred, thirteen years her senior, had developed after Lizzie had been sent from Jamaica

30. According to Marks (1938:347-48), the disputed property, “two parcels of slaves and some fifty steer,” represented a loss of approximately £20,000, plus the expense of hiring them back for use at an annual rental.

31. But presumably this figure included the compensation Moulton Barrett would have received under the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation for slaves that he owned in 1833.

32. It is not surprising that, having himself escaped and rescued most of his children – certainly his daughters – from the looming prospect of a White Jamaican dynastic decline, EBB’s father cannot reconcile himself to her choice, in Robert Browning, of a fellow West Indian Creole (or direct descendant of Creoles) of questionable racial and class geniture (given the presumption of racial and class genealogical “authenticity” on his own part). It – her choice of mate – disrupts the process of amnesia that is so critical to a satisfactory resumption of a proper English identity upon returning “home,” critical too to a smooth and untroubled rewriting, with all the proper metropolitan flourishes, of the story of empire and Britain the Great.

by her father, George Goodin Barrett (junior), to live with Edward and his family in London, apparently because her mother had become mentally unbalanced (Barrett 2000:135-37). Despite being disinherited and having “no steady occupation,” Alfred was still able to survive on the proceeds of Jamaican property:

The couple lived by borrowing on Lizzie’s inheritance, which was in trust subject to her mother’s life interest, under her parent’s marriage settlement and her great aunt Sarah Feltham’s will, but her mother lived to an advanced age. Finally, her brother Edward George gave her an annual income from his Jamaican estates instead and, on August 11, 1895, Alfred’s brother George died, leaving Alfred the residue of his property after some legacies (Barrett 2000:137).

EBB herself was the independent recipient of legacies based on Jamaican sugar profits: £4000 from her father’s brother, Samuel, who died in Jamaica, and £4000 from her grandmother and namesake, whose money was derived from the enormous holdings of her father, Edward of Cinnamon Hill (Markus 1995:93-4). Every single member of the family lived, directly or indirectly, from Jamaican property. The other branches of the House of Barrett, in Jamaica and outside, continued to thrive from active Jamaican operations well into the twentieth century.

The Barretts are an excellent example of a dynasty that actively maintained its exclusively White (or presumed so) economic and social enterprise for, ultimately, hundreds of years on both sides of the Atlantic. Education and marriage drew sections of individual families “home” to England where they settled and provided a secure and anchored referent of imperial-national belongingness on behalf of the transatlantically split dynasty. The translocal nature of their power was evident: Jamaican-born Sam Moulton-Barrett, EBB’s uncle, gets elected to parliament in England, just as one of his brother’s English-born sons eventually becomes an elected member of the Assembly after “returning” to Jamaica. EBB’s direct ancestral line did not become absentee owners until the death of her great-grandfather Edward in 1798, after which there was a twenty-nine-year hiatus that ended with the return of EBB’s uncle, followed by her brothers, to manage the family’s absenteeism-impaired Jamaican patrimony. However, House of Barrett property in western Jamaica was so extensive and ubiquitous that Hope Masterton Waddell’s account (1970) of contemporaneous Presbyterian and other missionary struggles to gain access to various estates in that region, for the purpose of proselytizing among the slaves, reveals Barrett connections at every turn. The wide diversity of responses among those connections to the rising tide of humanitarianism and abolitionism was reflected in the different fates suffered by their various estates in the 1831 slave rebellion.

CONCLUSION

I have provided evidence in this article to show the ultimate depth of class divisions among Whites in Jamaica, despite the spirit of egalitarianism which ensured overall White solidarity and Black social exclusion. As such, I chose to focus particularly on the “diverging modes or spatial-circuits of reproduction” of the different strata. The skewed demographic character of the White population and the conditions of surrogate estate management restricted the availability of White wives and access to the “dual marriage system” for White subaltern men. Easy access to coerced and more, or less, consensual “housekeeping” sexual services of enslaved Black women further strengthened the likelihood that the reproductive niche of the overseer (and associated) class would be entirely dependent on sexual and domestic relationships across race and statutory group. Whether or not they exercised choice in their interracial unions they were structurally restricted in their social means of human bodily, affective, and generational reproduction. Ultimately, most of these subalterns were locally bound single-generation Whites. As Olivier (1971:69) pointed out, “in a generation or two [they] became merged in the class described as the ‘free coloured people.’” On the other hand, the upper plantocracy was scrupulous in preventing such a merger – they had the means to do so – and in maintaining a strict separation between the two different race-class lines generated by the “dual marriage system,” which they enjoyed with impunity. Their means to such enjoyment included access to genealogical, financial, and cultural capital on a transatlantic basis. Part of the translocal dynastic power of these families was the ability to tap into both local and metropolitan sources of elite White wives, among the families of their business partners and associates as well as their own broad kin networks. Because women typically outlived their husbands, the absentee widow was often more critical to the maintenance of large family plantation property than has ordinarily been thought. Moreover, cousin marriage was common and highly approved as a strategy for keeping property within the extended family and for ensuring the racial “purity” of the lineage. In conjunction with an imposed restriction on testamentary transmission of property to Colored offspring, White genitors typically chose to keep their main properties strictly within the confines of their legitimate White families (sometimes, of necessity, through collaterals), often endowing their “outside” Colored children in marginal ways (if at all), or at least in ways that did not encroach upon the main family enterprise. When encroachment did take place, disputes were usually settled in favor of White co-heirs. Despite this, it is important for us to recognize that fabulous wealth often enabled “marginal” endowment to be sufficient to create a free Colored group of elite proportions in its own right. Some of the strategies pursued involved early manumission (if applicable), schooling in England, bequeathing of houses

or smaller properties or both, often in conjunction with a variable number of slaves, and petitioning the courts for “special privileges” for their mixed-race children. For most classes of White men, postmortem manumission of long-term slave mistresses, sometimes bolstered by small annuities and modest houses and house plots, was a fairly frequent practice.

Of course, locally anchored interracial marriages and full investiture of Colored heirs were not unknown, but for the most part the wealth of the Jamaican plantocracy ended up in Britain, as part of an imperially appropriated White British patrimony, transmitted through the channels of financial and genealogical capital, but based overwhelmingly on the forced labor of enslaved Africans.

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